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WAITING

It is striking that at almost every important turning point
in the narrative of God's redemptive action in Acts
we find a mention of prayer.

DAVID G. PETERSON

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The spiritual history of a mission or church  
is written in its prayer life.

ARTHUR MATTHEWS

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The church does not perform anything
by means of angelic intervention, or by invocations,
or by any other wicked or curious art;
but by calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
she has been accustomed to work miracles
for the advantage of mankind.

IRENÆUS

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*<sup>12</sup>Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. <sup>13</sup>When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

*<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup>and said, 'Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup>He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.'*



<sup>18</sup>(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. <sup>19</sup>Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup>‘For,’ said Peter, ‘it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;  
let there be no one to dwell in it,”

and,

“May another take his place of leadership.”

<sup>21</sup>Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.’

<sup>23</sup>So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed, ‘Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.’ <sup>26</sup>Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

(Acts 1:12-26)

## Hoist the Sails

I have never been very good at waiting, at least not that I can remember. I *will* wait ... if I am *forced* to wait. But waiting is at cross-purposes with everything natural to me. It can make me difficult to live with, and difficult to work with—because, for all of the wrong reasons, I am just not very good at it.

*Waiting.*

Sometimes God makes us wait. Sometimes He is the author of our waiting. Why? It is a provocative question—and one for which the Bible supplies distinct answers, if not comprehensive ones. Nevertheless, it is the extraneous question given the specific passage before us—Acts 1:12-26—where the essential question with relationship to waiting is not ‘Why?’ but ‘How?’

As we have discovered, the resurrected Lord has defined the mission of His church: *'... you will be my witnesses.'* Furthermore, He has unambiguously articulated the extent of this mission: *'... in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'* But clarity notwithstanding, are the capacities to achieve this work restricted to the energies, abilities, and potencies of those called to it? Thankfully not, in that Jesus additionally promises an ample resource of supernatural proportions: *'But you will receive power ...'* An access of power, however, which is specifically dependent upon a historical event prophetically anticipated: *'... when the Holy Spirit comes on you.'* It is a *time-based* pledge, a fact established more emphatically in Jesus' earlier command: *'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.'* It is an echo of His exhortation in Luke's Gospel: *'I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high'* (Luke 24:49). Jesus is unequivocal: the apostles are not to commence the mission until they are resourced for it. Though the inauguration of God's kingdom is on the verge of realization—the restoration of Israel that will spread to the ends of the earth—such will remain unrealized until the Holy Spirit descends to indwell and empower the followers of Jesus. So what do they do during the intervening time, the period between the ascent of Jesus *'into heaven'* (1:11) and the descent of a sound like the blowing of a violent wind *'from heaven'* (2:1)? They wait.

*But for how long do they wait?* Consider the chronological markers. It was during the *Passover* season that Jesus was crucified and subsequently resurrected on the third day. It is on Pentecost, fifty days later, that the Spirit will descend upon these Christians. Meanwhile, Luke's narrative indicates that Jesus has already engaged in a post-resurrection teaching ministry that has spanned forty days, concluding with His ascension. Therefore, the period of time the apostles are required to wait for the advent of the Spirit is *ten days*. You say, 'But this isn't

a too terribly long time to wait. Even *you* could manage this.' You may be right ... especially if I was aware of the waiting boundary. But what of the apostles? Are they cognizant of this time frame? Is there anything in the text to suggest an awareness of the limitations to their waiting; that the inauguration of the long-awaited last days will burst upon them in just a week and a half? All they have, apparently, is the promise of Jesus: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' This raises a question of practicality that is worthy of consideration:

*How do they wait, as they wait, for the fulfillment of God's promise?*

And what about you? How do you wait for the yet-to-be-fulfilled promises God has made on the pages of His word? What about the promise of complete freedom from sin and its effects? What about the promise of perfect intimacy with other human beings? What about the promise of joy at being in the unshielded presence of the glory of God? What about the promise of reunion with our family members who have died and preceded us to heaven? What about the promise of never-ending life in the new creation? These, along with so many others, are promises God has made to all Christians. Are you waiting well? How do you wait for the fulfillment of God's great redemptive promises?

A young boy, who for weeks had been eager with anticipation, went on a sailboat outing with his grandfather. To his disappointment, however, there was very little breeze, which resulted in the boat not moving through the water as quickly as he would have liked. So he asked: 'Grandpa, will the wind come?' 'Yes,' the old man warmly replied, 'the wind will come, though I can't say when. In the meantime, let's hoist the sails.'<sup>1</sup>

It is an image that wonderfully captures the essence of the ten-day waiting period here in Acts 1:12-26. The

1. This is a fictional story developed from an idea found in R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), p. 24.

apostles ‘hoist the sails’—that is, they ready themselves until the wind of the promised Holy Spirit blows upon them in fulfillment.

## An Active Waiting

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. (v. 12)

This is not to infer that the ascension occurred on a Sabbath day (highly unlikely if this takes place precisely forty days from resurrection Sunday). It is a reference to a traditional Jewish means of measuring the distance traveled by the apostles in their return to Jerusalem: approximately two-thirds of a mile. Mention of it here underscores their immediate faithfulness to Jesus’ instructions (1:4).

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. (v. 13a)

The use of the definite article in the original text adds an emphasis not conveyed by our English translations: ‘they went up to *the* upper room’—that is, a room apparently well known to the early Christian community. It may be a reference to the location where Jesus gathered with these same apostles prior to His crucifixion; and, perhaps, the room where He appeared to them on the evening of His resurrection—both occasions distinguished by His promise of the coming Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> At this gathering, however, it is not only the apostles who are present. Others are among them:

Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew;

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2. Admittedly, it is not possible be certain about which room Luke is referring. He does use a different word here (*hyperoon*) than that used of the last supper location (*anagaion*). Other suggestions have included: their gathering place on the day of Pentecost (2:1), and the home of Mary the mother of John Mark (12:12). In any case, it must be a room of significant size given the number of people it accommodates, though it appears only the apostles were residing there.

James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (vv. 13b-14)

Notice that specific mention is made of the family of Jesus (cf. Mark 6:3); in particular, that *'his brothers'* are among this gathering—a fact that is nothing short of astounding, given their open antagonism to Jesus in the earlier Gospel accounts. 'He is out of his mind,' they once said of Him (Mark 3:21). At another point they taunted Him openly, a contemptuous display interpreted by the Gospel writer as follows: 'For even his own brothers did not believe in him' (John 7:5). The incarnate Lord was no stranger to a divided family. Living as man in a fallen world necessarily included the experience of a home-life marked by profound sibling hostility.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, to now read that His brothers are among this gathering of His followers is nothing short of astounding. It reveals something *transformational*. What accounts for it? Jesus' resurrection from the dead; more particularly, His personal resurrection appearance to James, His brother (1 Cor. 15:7)—who not only appears with this initial group of believers, but will eventually become the leader of the Jerusalem church and the author of an inspired New Testament letter. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also among these disciples. This will prove to be her final appearance on the pages of the New Testament; and fittingly so, in that she who was formerly overshadowed by the Spirit in the conception of her Savior-son will be present at the advent of the Spirit who will give birth to the church.

In addition to the family of Jesus, Luke calls attention to *'the women'* who are assembled in this upper room. It is unlikely that these are the wives of the apostles (who played no role in Luke's first volume), but rather the women to whom he Has previously called attention: those who traveled with

3. This is a fact that qualifies him as a sympathetic high priest able to resonate with the domestic heartbreak experienced by nearly all people.

Jesus and supported Him financially out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3), who were at Calvary when He was crucified (Luke 23:49, 55-56), and who were the first witnesses of the resurrection (Luke 24:1-10, 22-24). This is a prominent feature of Luke's writing—the unique attention he gives to women.<sup>4</sup> In many ways it foreshadows the theological declaration that will explicitly be made in the not-too-distant future: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). As with ethnic and economic barriers, gender barriers are being abolished by the gospel, here made evident by the indication that women are gathered with the men for prayer.<sup>5</sup> Throughout Acts, female followers of Jesus continue to factor prominently in the mission of the church (e.g., Acts 2:17-18; 12:12; 18:18-26; 21:8-9).

This gathering, then, includes the family of Jesus and His prominent female disciples. His chosen apostles are now among them as well, having obediently returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. But not *all* are present and accounted for. The apostolic band, frequently identified throughout the New Testament as '*the Twelve*,' is minus one. *Eleven* names appear on this list, rendering it conspicuously *unfinished*. As David Peterson pithily states: 'The circle of the

4. In Luke's infancy narrative, five persons speak by the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim Jesus' place in salvation history, supplying theological understanding and perspective to the event of his birth. Of these five, three are women (Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna). Luke indicates that Jesus heals a woman subject to bleeding for twelve years and whom He addresses affectionately as 'Daughter' (Luke 8:43-48). He heals the woman crippled for eighteen-years to whom Jesus refers as 'a daughter of Abraham,' a significant status marker for a woman (Luke 13:11-17). Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Luke cites Jesus as referring to women as positive examples of faith: the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) and the woman (perhaps a prostitute?) who anointed His feet (Luke 7:36-50). He commends Mary for sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching (Luke 10:38-42).

5. 'Given the culture's usual downplaying of women's public roles, the equal participation of women is noteworthy, especially their apparent mixing with the men.' Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 325.

Twelve has been broken.<sup>6</sup> Missing from it is the one name that, for obvious reasons, always appears last in every other listing of the apostles: Judas Iscariot. Is this of any significance for the apostolic Christians who 'hoist the sails' and wait for the sacred wind?

Having identified all parties present, Luke then writes:

They all joined together constantly in prayer ... (v. 14a)

Waiting for God was not indolence or passive inactivity on the part of these Christians. Nor was it the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God was an aggressive activity under His command. Moreover, it proves to be a *community project* as these disparate Christians 'joined together' with one mind and passion.<sup>7</sup> It is the first of several occasions in Acts when the followers of Jesus pray as a display of their active waiting upon God. For example, at the appointment of an apostolic replacement:

*Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.'* (1:24-25)

After their first experience of persecution:

... Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, *they raised their voices together in prayer to God ... After they prayed*, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:23-31)

When it became necessary to appoint official servants to serve the needs of the congregation:

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon,

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6. Peterson, *The Acts*, p. 119.

7. One of Luke's favorite words, *homothymadon*, means more than sharing a location. It conveys the notion of common consent, mutual agreement, unanimity. Louw and Nida, *Greek English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 368.

Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch ... They presented these men to the apostles, *who prayed and laid their hands on them.* (6:5-6)

When the full inclusion of the Samaritans needed to be confirmed:

... *they prayed* for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (8:15)

When Peter had been delivered from imprisonment and execution:

... he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where *many people had gathered and were praying.* (12:12)

As church leaders were seeking insight for the first missionary journey:

... they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after *they had fasted and prayed,* they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (13:2-3)

When newly planted congregations were in need of pastoral leadership:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, *with prayer and fasting,* committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. (14:23)

At the conclusion of Paul's sermon to the Ephesian elders:

... he *knelt down with all of them and prayed.* (20:36)

'Every great decision in the apostolic period, and in the whole life of early Christianity, is sustained by persistent prayer.'<sup>8</sup> Certainly the narrative of Acts sustains this assertion. And here, at the very outset of the Christian movement in Acts 1:14, Luke indicates that these pre-Pentecost believers were in

8. Walter Grundmann, 'καρτερεω, προσκαρτερεω, προσκαρτερησις,' *TDNT*, vol. III, p. 618.

prayer ‘*constantly*,’ a verbal idea that means to be resolute and persistent, if not obstinate.<sup>9</sup> It is the exact description used by Luke to describe the post-Pentecost Christians: ‘They *devoted themselves* to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to *prayer*’ (2:42). It was this kind of praying that was not only modeled by Jesus (Luke 6:12), it was urged strongly upon the apostles by Him—that they should ‘always pray and never give up’ (Luke 18:1).<sup>10</sup>

Of course, one might legitimately respond: ‘But there is nothing in the immediate text to indicate that Jesus commanded the apostles to pray; they were merely to wait.’ This is true. So the obvious question follows: ‘Why *are* they so tenacious in prayer?’ Once again, they do have the example of Jesus’ life—that *He* prayed at His baptism in anticipation of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him (Luke 3:21-22). And they also have His definitive instruction: ‘If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’ (Luke 11:13). The apostles, then, are ‘hoisting the sails’ and preparing for the wind. But given the uniqueness of this situation, someone could reply: ‘What is the purpose of fervently praying for something that God has already promised to give? Doesn’t this make prayer gratuitous and irrelevant?’ But this logical appeal must be answered by a clearer logic: ‘How may a person pray expectantly for anything that has not been promised?’ The promises of God provide His people with the *warrant* to pray, along with the assurance that He will listen. William Willimon captures this perfectly:

It is up to the risen Christ to make good on his promise to bestow the Spirit and to restore the kingdom to Israel. In a sense this is what prayer is—the bold, even

9. The periphrastic participle *proskarterountes* used with the imperfect *esan* stresses the continuous nature of their prayers. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 881.

10. Prayer is a pervasive theme in both of Luke’s volumes (Luke 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1-4; 18:1; 22:41-44, 46; Acts 1:24-25; 2:42; 4:24-30; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:2, 9, 30; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8).

arrogant effort on the part of the community to hold God to his promises. In praying, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,' we pray that God will be true to himself and give us what has been promised. Prayer is thus boldness born out of confidence in the faithfulness of God to the promises he makes, confidence that God will be true to himself. What may appear as prayerful insolence by the church in praying that we shall receive the Spirit, the kingdom, the power, and restoration is in fact the deepest humility, the church's humble realization that only God can give what the church most desperately needs.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the call to wait is not an invitation to dormancy. It is a divinely ordained opportunity to 'hoist the sails.' Hence, the apostolic Christians pray constantly. *It is how they wait, as they wait, for the fulfillment of God's promise.* Is this of true of you as you wait for the fulfillment of God's promises? Are you waiting actively and aggressively ... by praying persistently?

## The Apostasy of the Apostle

In those days Peter stood up among the believers<sup>12</sup> (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, 'Brothers and sisters, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.' (vv. 15-17)

As mentioned earlier, the name of Judas Iscariot consistently appears at the last position in every recorded list of the apostles. Also true is the repeated appearance of a name at the

11. William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 27.

12. The NIV appropriately translates *adelphos* as 'believers' so as to contrast the Christian application of the term with its familial use at the conclusion of v. 14. *Adelphos* is regularly used to include females when a group of believers is in view (1:15, 16; 6:3; 9:30; 10: 23; 11:1, 12, 29; 12:17; 14:2; 15:3, 22, 32, 33, 40; 17:6, 10, 14; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17, 20; 28:14, 15). In 1:16 *andres* might be regarded as more explicitly masculine, but the context suggests otherwise. The phrase *andres adelphoi* refers to males and females together.

first position in such lists: Peter. This, too, is not coincidental, but indicative of Jesus' appointment of Peter to a position of first among equals, an idea conveyed openly by Jesus even as He anticipates Peter's scandalous fall:

'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.' (Luke 22:31-32)

It is the very thing Peter now begins to do in this upper room: strengthen his brothers and sisters. How? By functioning as an interpreter of the Scripture (here defined as the words of the Holy Spirit spoken through human instrumentality, *i.e.*, David). For what reason? That these Christians might do whatever is necessary to prepare themselves for Pentecost. Not only, then, are they relentlessly engaged in prayer. Their waiting has also included a fresh examination of the Old Testament Scriptures, now seen through the interpretive lens that has been recently supplied for them by Jesus (Luke 24:25-27, 32, 44-47). But what has Peter discovered in the process of appropriating this 'Christian' hermeneutic? Two 'necessities' from the Psalms that are immediately relevant to the challenge presently facing them.

Despite the feverish schemes and manipulations of Jesus' enemies, they could never effectively silence Him until Judas approached them with insider access—he who '*served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus.*' Luke's Gospel states it chillingly:

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (Luke 22:3-6, *ESV*)

That Luke is conspicuous about the treacherous nature of this act is made evident by his reference to Judas as '*of the number of*

the *Twelve*'—a label he later reiterates when identifying the Gethsemane betrayer, 'one of the *Twelve*' (Luke 22:47). Yet might this repeated designation expose something more, a sense of humiliation unique to the apostolic band? Sin has insidiously reached into the innermost circle of Jesus' followers and left them with an open wound. The resonance of this is overheard again in the similar language Peter uses here as he recollects of Judas:

He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.  
(v. 17)

Peter has been deeply grieved by this betrayal; perhaps, even ashamed by it. No doubt, such is the case for all in this small band of Christ-followers. But Peter is now convinced that Judas' deception must not become a cause for disheartenment or despair. The budding Christian community is to set this betrayal within the context of the revealed purpose of God. This 'apparent tragedy' is to be understood by the means of its typological antecedent—namely, that the ancient psalmist's laments over the treachery of his own close associates reach their climax in the Messiah by one intimate to Him. Before doing this, Luke adds a brief parenthetical digression for those who (like Theophilus?) are unacquainted with the circumstances of Judas' demise.<sup>13</sup>

(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language *Akeldama*, that is, Field of Blood.)  
(vv. 18-19)

Though Christians throughout the years have made various attempts to rehabilitate Judas, the New Testament describes or

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13. There is no need to explain this to those present in the upper room. Luke indicates in v. 19 that everyone in Jerusalem was well acquainted with these details. Moreover, he translates *Akeldama* as 'Field of Blood' for the benefit of those unfamiliar with Aramaic, an unnecessary step for the Aramaic speakers gathered with Peter.

portrays him as a traitor (Luke 6:16), a hypocrite (Luke 22:47), a betrayer (Luke 22:48; Matt. 26:25), a person in whom Satan entered (Luke 22:3; John 13:2), and the treasurer of the apostolic company who would frequently pilfer from their accumulated resources (John 12:6; 13:29). Ultimately, as a rank lover of money, he initiated the process of handing over Jesus to the religious leaders, perhaps hoping that the wages earned for his treachery would secure a more comfortable economic position and higher social status.<sup>14</sup> But the end result is a gory suicide for the apostle who becomes an apostate,<sup>15</sup> a fate not entirely dissimilar to that of a later couple who, like Judas, seek financial profit through the exploitation of things spiritual (Acts 5:1-10).<sup>16</sup>

The betrayal of Jesus Christ was the foulest crime ever committed. Nevertheless, the thoughtful critic of Christianity (and even a Christian insider) might be inclined to raise the obvious and poignant questions:

You say Jesus is the Son of God, Israel's Messiah, Saviour and Restorer, come to right our wrongs and to expose the priests' corrupt abuse of their sacred office for money? How then did He not know any better than to choose a man like Judas to be one of His chief companions, representatives and, if you please,

14. The word *chorion* may be better understood as a parcel of land, a property, or even possibly 'a term for a small estate.' Bock, *Acts*, p. 83.

15. Matthew's account of the events leading up to and culminating in the death of Judas includes details that are different from those in Acts. These are not contradictory narratives however, but complementary, each reflecting their respective author's unique perspective of the same events. Several commentators have tackled this challenge (See Peterson, *The Acts*, pp. 124-125 and Longenecker, 'Acts,' pp. 263-264). Marshall's summary is among the most succinct: '1) Judas hanged himself (Matt.), but the rope broke and his body was ruptured by the fall (possibly after he was already dead and beginning to decompose) (Acts); 2) What the priests bought with Judas's money (Matt.) could be regarded as his purchase by their agency (Acts); 3) The field bought by the priests (Matt.) was the one where Judas died (Acts).' I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), p. 65.

16. 'Luke shapes his story after familiar Jewish death stories of the wicked in which the more wicked the deed the more graphic and inopportune the death (Acts 12:20-23; Josh. 7; 2 Sam. 20:4-13).' Wall, 'Acts,' p. 50.

treasurer of His group? He paid dearly for it in the end by his betrayal and death. But if He really was the Son of God, He ought to have known what Judas was like and not have chosen him. After all, if He didn't know how to choose better officials than that, what hope would He have of restoring Israel and of bringing in the kingdom of God?<sup>17</sup>

Peter's agenda is to correct this misperception, to make clear that Judas' betrayal and apostasy were neither unexpected nor unfortunate. To the contrary, they were foretold on the prophetic pages of Scripture and, therefore, could not have not happened. The forcefulness of his language is emphatic as he introduces Judas' treachery: *'Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled ...'* It is Peter's first use of an imperfect verb that means, 'it was necessary, it had to be so.' Appearing twenty-eight times cumulatively in Luke's two volumes, it is a word that expresses the predetermined sovereignty of the divine will (Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:7; Acts 3:21; 9:16; 14:22), particularly in passages that speak of the fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 22:37; 24:26, 44; Acts 1:21; 17:3). It is a theme to which the apostles repeatedly appeal when heralding the suffering and death of the Messiah—a suffering and death, they would have their hearers understand, that are not solely consequences of a meticulous providence, but actualizations of the inexorable purpose of God set forth in Scripture. For example:

This man was handed over to you by *God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge.* (2:23)

But this is how *God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets,* saying that his Messiah would suffer. (3:18)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what *your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.* (4:27-28)

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17. David Gooding, *True to the Faith* (Coleraine: Myrtlefield House, 2013), p. 54.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: 'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.* (8:32-35)

The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him *they fulfilled the words of the prophets* that are read every Sabbath. (13:27)

When they carried out *all that was written about him*, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. (13:29)

Each of these makes clear that the sufferings of Jesus are not symptomatic of a plan tragically derailed, but in keeping with a predetermined purpose perfectly fulfilled. In the present case, they are paradigmatic of the point Peter is seeking to establish in Acts 1—that the betrayal of the Messiah by a close friend who would subsequently forfeit his leadership has been foreordained by God and announced in the Scripture. This is not a shameful embarrassment from which Christians should hide, but a foreordained intention that Christians should proclaim.<sup>18</sup>

### Reading the Old Testament As Christian Scripture

At the conclusion of Luke's digression, Peter resumes his address by seeking to substantiate his claim—'*the Scriptures had to be fulfilled*'—in connection to the defection of Judas.

18. This in no way exonerates Judas from his culpability. His actions are defined as '*his wickedness*.' It is an illustration of the mystery of divine sovereignty: what God immovably decrees in eternity, man of his own volition will demand in time. 'The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!' (Luke 22:22).

Peter does this by citing two specific texts from the Psalms. Yet it is essential to bear in mind that the Christocentric hermeneutic Peter applies to the Psalms—a *Davidic typology*—does not originate with the apostles, but with Jesus, who subsequently taught it to them, beginning on the evening of the resurrection: ‘... everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the *Psalms*. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures’ (Luke 24:44-45). It is in the light of this interpretive watershed, that Peter proceeds,

‘For ... it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;  
let there be no one to dwell in it,”

and,

“May another take his place of leadership.”’ (v. 20)

Peter’s first citation is taken from Psalm 69, a psalm associated with Jesus six times in the New Testament, five of which are directly preceded by an appeal to their inscripturated tradition:

His disciples remembered that *it is written*: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ (John 2:17; cf. Ps. 69:9)

But this is to fulfill *what is written in their Law*: ‘They hated me without reason.’ (John 15:25; cf. Ps. 69:4)

There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall. (Matt. 27:34; cf. Ps. 69:21)

*And David says*: ‘May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.’ (Rom. 11:9-10; cf. Ps. 69:22-23)

For even Christ did not please himself but, *as it is written*: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’ (Rom. 15:3; cf. Ps. 69:9)

Hence, Peter’s present reference, ‘... *it is written in the Book of Psalms*: “May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it”’ (cf. Ps. 69:25), is not a display of irresponsible eisegesis, but

part of a New Testament interpretive tradition: a messianic typology. As originally composed, this psalm refers to actual events in the life of David, God's anointed king. It expresses his deep suffering, his prayers for deliverance, and his call for God to exercise judgment against his enemies. Peter's second citation is taken from Psalm 109, 'May another take his place of leadership' (cf. Ps. 109:8). Here, too, David describes adversaries who hate and slander him—then calls attention to one foe in particular, ostensibly the ringleader, upon whom he seeks God's severe judgment. As Peter appeals to these texts, he does so not in a manner that proves indifferent to their original contexts. His implication is that their respective contexts serve a typological function; that they find their consummate expression in the one David prophetically anticipates: the eschatological Son of David, *the Anointed One*: Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the enemies of David can now be seen as those who foreshadow the enemies of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> As such, Judas purchases a parcel of land with the wages he receives for his disloyalty. Because his guilty blood was spilt upon it—'there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out'—the parcel became known as the 'Field of Blood.' Perhaps contributing to this appellation is the fact that Jesus' innocent blood was sacrificed to buy this property—that it was acquired by 'blood money' (Matt. 27:6). Finally, Matthew's Gospel indicates that the land was allocated to be a cemetery

19. 'This method of using the OT is not so culturally bound that it is invalid for Christians today. If the apostolic principles of interpretation are carefully noted, and proper regard is paid to OT texts in their original context before a Christian application is attempted, the inspired preachers and authors of the NT will not lead us astray by their example.' Peterson, *Acts*, pp. 125-126. A fitting word indeed!

20. Some suggest that Peter uses the Jewish exegetical principle *qal wahomer* ('the light to the heavy'), 'allowing Peter to assert that what has been said of false companions and wicked men generally applies, *a minore ad majorem*, specifically to Judas, the one who proved himself uniquely false and evil.' R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 97.

for the ceremonially unclean, thereby fulfilling the psalmist's imprecation: 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it' (cf. Ps. 69:25).

But not only is the demise of Judas a necessary piece of God's plan of salvation, so, too, is the election of one to assume his position: 'May another take his place of leadership' (Ps. 109:8). David has prayed that his arch-betrayer would die before his time, with the result that someone else would replace his leadership position within the community. How much more should this be so for someone who has betrayed God's Messiah? Consequently, for the *second* time, Peter draws upon a word that embraces God's predetermined plan:

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. (vv. 21-22)

This is no mere suggestion on the part of Peter: 'Given the nature and extent of the assigned task, my calculations would suggest that we seriously consider adding another man to the team.' This is a prophetically warranted obligation: 'It is *God's purpose* that we have a twelfth man'—an action shown to be compulsory by virtue of the conjunction '*therefore*' that links the present paragraph (vv. 22-23) to the preceding paragraph (vv. 15-17). In other words, it is the death of Judas that creates the need for a replacement. But why is this so seemingly important—enough to be regarded as a divine mandate? And why is it necessary to choose just '*one*'? Is there something inherently significant about the number *twelve*? Why not thirteen apostles? In fact, why not jettison the notion of any number at all and simply appoint as many who meet the compulsory requirements?

Before answering, consider the distinct requirements for this '*twelfth*' apostle. Firstly, this replacement must be a man.<sup>21</sup>

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21. This is the 'default understanding' of the noun *aner*. Carson argues: '... one

While it is true that *gender barriers* are being obliterated by the gospel, *gender distinctions* related to divisions of labor within God's kingdom is another matter. Secondly, this 'twelfth man' must be an individual qualified to bear witness<sup>22</sup> to the entire gospel tradition, the boundaries of which are defined by the ministry of John the Baptist (the inception point for the kingdom work of Jesus) and the ascension of Jesus.<sup>23</sup> The 'twelfth man' needs to be able to say: 'I *saw* the Spirit descend upon Jesus at the Jordan River and *heard* God's audible voice speak of Him. I *observed* as Jesus transformed water into wine and fed thousands. I *witnessed* His healings of diseased people, His exorcisms of the demonically tormented, the displays of His power in resurrecting the dead. I *looked on* as Jesus was arrested in the garden, scourged by the soldiers, mocked by the hostile crowds. I *witnessed* His crucifixion, the surrender of His life, the piercing of His side, His lifeless corpse detached from the cross. I *observed* the tomb in which Jesus was buried, the giant millstone rolled across its opening, Pilate's seal placed upon it, the Roman guard positioned in front of it, and Jesus' people devastated by it. But then, on the third day, I *saw* the stone rolled away and the tomb emptied. I *watched* as the women rejoiced, the disciples pondered, and the priests schemed. And then, finally, I *saw Him*. Not a ghost or a phantom, but Him; a resurrected man, *the man*, who talked with us, ate with us, and breathed upon us. I am an *eyewitness* of the life, burial, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ—which means that I can now *attest* that this Jesus whose ascension into heaven I have also *observed* is no fraudulent replacement, but the same person subsequent to His resurrection as He who existed prior to His crucifixion.'

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should assume the reference is to male human beings unless there is convincing counter-evidence.' Carson, *Inclusive Language*, p. 153, 158. Such is the case in v. 16.

22. A witness is not merely one who observes, but who proceeds to bear witness about what is seen. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 619-620.

23. It is for this reason that James (the brother of Jesus) and Saul of Tarsus (even subsequent to his conversion) could not qualify to be one of the Twelve.

Of course, *all* Christians, by definition, believe this body of truth about Jesus. Moreover, it is their stated mission to openly and unashamedly proclaim it; even to the point of being willing, when necessary, to sacrifice greatly for the sake of its advancement. Equally true, however, is the uniqueness of the apostles' witness. They are to bear a singular and foundational role in the establishment of Christianity that transcends the testimony of all other Christians. It can be said that all followers of Jesus must witness *to* Him; but the apostles *witnessed Him*. Consequently, the testimony of every other Christian is altogether dependent upon theirs. But at present, how many apostles are enlisted for the mission that will commence when the promised Holy Spirit is given? Eleven. Divine necessity will not allow this, Peter asserts. There must be *twelve*.

After the definition of the credentials necessary to fill the office left vacant by Judas, the field of potential candidates is narrowed to two men. How do the eleven move forward to identify the *twelfth*?

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.' Then they cast lots ... (vv. 23-26a)

At first glance this looks to be an unusual decision-making technique, but a fuller appreciation of all that contributes to it may cause it to become more comprehensible. First of all, it is essential to remember who had '*chosen*' the other eleven apostles, a fact about which Luke has been explicit at the opening of this chapter: 'I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles *he had chosen*' (1:1-2). Now, at the closing of this chapter, the identical language is used. This, along with the

prior reference to 'the Lord Jesus' (v. 21), contributes to the conclusion that the 'Lord' who has 'chosen' is indeed Jesus—the great knower of human hearts, a fact Luke repeatedly makes clear in his Gospel (cf. Luke 5:22; 6:8; 9:46-47; 22:21-22).<sup>24</sup> The implications are astounding: not only is Jesus to be regarded as one to whom prayers can be offered (cf. 7:59-60; 9:10-16), He is the one who continues to direct the affairs of His community though ascended into heaven. This is a point more emphatically implied by the verb tense used to speak of Jesus' choosing—a perfective aorist, which indicates that this choice of a twelfth apostle *has already been made*. Properly speaking, then, the apostles do not cast lots to make the decision, but to reveal the decision that has already been made by the ascended Lord.

Secondly, this casting of lots does not occur haphazardly or in a vacuum, but is set in the context of a disciplined piety: a) the entire Christian community has been engaged in incessant prayer (v. 14), as well the specific prayer mentioned here on the part of the apostles (v. 24); b) they have submitted themselves to the diligent study of Scripture which has exposed the need for an apostolic replacement (vv. 16, 20); and, c) they have thoughtfully determined the necessary qualifications appropriate to this unique office (vv. 21-22).

Finally, then, 'they cast lots'—a practice clearly sanctioned in the Old Testament (e.g., Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; 1 Chron. 26:13-14), but summarized most succinctly by the wisdom writer: 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD' (Prov. 16:33). It was a process used, in particular, 'to reveal God's selection of someone or something out of several possibilities where he kept people in the dark and desired their impartiality in the selection.'<sup>25</sup> In all likelihood,

24. This implies Jesus' deity, given that this is a commonly attested attribute of God (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 7:9; 44:21; 139:2, 23; Acts 15:8).

25. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004/2005), vol. 2, p. 37.

stones were marked in a way that distinguished each from the other. They were placed in a container that was shaken until one of the stones came out. Interestingly, this proves to be the Bible's final mention of casting lots. It may be that this practice, heretofore referred to with some frequency in the Old Testament, was intended to belong uniquely to the old epoch. Given its placement in Acts—just prior to the event that will signal a new age and a new kind of relationship between God and His people—it is quite possible that Luke is highlighting the casting of lots as ‘a symbol of the end—the signing off, as it were—of the old era.’<sup>26</sup>

### And Then There Were Twelve

‘But I am still perplexed by all of this—all of the *drama* associated with this scene. It's not quite over-the-top. But its apparent emphasis certainly seems exaggerated. Luke's reason for including it escapes me.’ Is this your sentiment? The resolution to your dilemma may be found in the clue that appears in the final phrase of this chapter:

... and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (v. 26b)

The Lord's choice for the apostleship had been revealed: Matthias is to fill the post abandoned by Judas. Interestingly, no reference to Matthias is ever again made in the New Testament. Yet this, in itself, may be revealing. Luke is not preoccupied with the man himself (other than making reference to his qualifications for this ministry), nor is he concerned with his particular accomplishments as an apostle. What is important to Luke? The specific number inferred in his arithmetical calculation: *Matthias makes twelve*. But again you say: ‘This emphasis to which you keep referring—this business of “*twelve*”—it's precisely what I seem to be missing.’

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26. Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), p. 79.

One of my principal intentions in the prior chapter was to demonstrate that God's kingdom on earth is to be inaugurated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of God, thereby fulfilling God's promise of a restored Israel in a now/not yet sense; moreover, that this restored Israel would expand inexorably to the ends of the earth. But this begs a question: as originally conceived, how was the nation of Israel constituted? It was a composite of tribes that originated with the sons of Jacob ... *twelve* tribes to be exact. If the coming kingdom of God is to be inaugurated by the new covenant gift of the Spirit that subsequently gives birth to a restored Israel—not merely Israel as a remnant, but Israel in its ideal—what does this *necessitate* for the apostolic community awaiting Pentecost? Can there truly be a witness to the 'ends of the earth' *before* the Messiah's claim on the whole house of Israel has been reiterated?

It is no mere coincidence that Jesus chose *twelve* apostles from very nearly the inception of His ministry (Luke 6:12-13). Doing so served to represent a renewed and reunited people of God by means of the ideal number—all of which means that in the betrayal Judas represented something more significant than the mere failure of an individual. It fractured the typological integrity of the group that was to constitute the inception of the restored people of God. *This is why there must be a twelfth man.* And also why no effort is made to supplement the *Twelve* as each one meets their respective deaths (e.g., Acts 12:2). Acts 1:15-26 is not a precedent for how to replace church leaders who have resigned, died, or disqualified themselves. It is a one-time event bearing a unique historical-redemptive significance. Once the *Twelve* has been reconstituted at the heart of the community and the Spirit subsequently poured out, faithful Israel will have come into existence and the promise of God inaugurated.

Of course, the biblical and theological consequences of this now seem impossible to miss: the locus of true Israel

is the apostolic community.<sup>27</sup> For this reason, designations formerly unique to ethnic Israel are now applied to Christians (either individually or collectively). We are the ‘children of Abraham’ (Gal. 3:7), the ‘[true] circumcision’ (Phil. 3:3, NASB), ‘a holy temple’ (Eph. 2:21), the ‘chosen people’ (Col. 3:12), ‘a kingdom and priests’ (Rev. 1:6), the ‘holy nation’ (1 Peter 2:9), and God’s ‘very own’ (Titus 2:14). Each of these is laden with its own redemptive meaning. Yet they all seemingly converge at their zenith when, in an inspired preview of the consummation, the church of Jesus Christ (comprised of the total company of God’s redeemed people from every epoch) is referred to as the ‘New Jerusalem’ (Rev. 21:2, 9-10).

The entire storyline of the Scriptures has brought us to this strategic moment in the book of Acts—the very moment in salvation history when the beginning of the new creation explodes into existence. But such will not take place until Pentecost. Why? Though Matthias has filled the place left vacant by Judas, the Spirit has not yet filled the place left vacant by Jesus. In the meantime, what is preoccupation of the apostolic Christians?

How do they wait, as they wait, for the fulfillment of God’s promise?

They hoist the sails. How? 1) By praying constantly; and, 2) By responding obediently—preparing themselves by the means of the Christ-centered Scriptures for the moment when the sacred wind will begin to blow.

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27. Should the title ‘Israel’ always be identified with the entire Jewish people? Two observations can be made from this text: 1) There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the Twelve are physically related to the twelve different tribes. This, by itself, should give pause to someone who is quick to deny a certain symbolic value to the designation ‘Israel’; and, 2) The qualifications required of potential candidates who may complete the circle of the Twelve reveals that true Israel is now to be defined in terms of a certain kind of relationship to Jesus. Therefore, a Jewish person who rejects Jesus as Messiah is not a member of Israel, but an apostate from Israel (e.g., Rev. 2:9).

Do *you* wait well—particularly as you wait for the fulfillment of God’s promised blessings? As I admitted earlier, it is certainly not a skill I have mastered. But a significant reason for this has been my slowness to recognize that waiting, for a Christian, is not synonymous with passive inactivity or fatalistic surrender. It is an act that is made effectual by holy busyness: praying constantly and responding obediently. And as you do this, dear friend, keep in mind God’s wonderful promise to those who wait:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
 The LORD is the everlasting God,  
 the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
 He does not faint or grow weary;  
 his understanding is unsearchable.  
 He gives power to the faint,  
 and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
 and young men shall fall exhausted;  
 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their  
 strength;  
 they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
 they shall run and not be weary;  
 they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:28-31, ESV)

The *twelve* apostles of the ascended Lord Jesus experience this sacred invigoration after only ten days of waiting. Who knows? Perhaps it will only be ten days for you. In the meantime ...  
*hoist the sails.*