

## The Early Christians Gather; The Selection of Matthias

### Acts 1:12-26

Acts 1:12-14: *“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”*

### Background Notes

According to verse 12, our Lord ascended to Heaven from the Mount of Olives. However, when Luke wrote this about the ascension: *“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50-51).* Is this a contradiction? No. The town of Bethany is on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, and the phrase *“as far as Bethany”* can also be translated *“toward Bethany.”* So our Lord ascended the Heaven from the Mount of Olives, and He will return to the Mount of Olives in a future day, according Zechariah 14.

The disciples returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem: a *“Sabbath day’s journey.”* The Old Testament Law restricted the distance that could be traveled on the Sabbath. From the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem is less than a mile.

For the next ten days until Pentecost, the disciples and other early Christians met together for prayer while they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, as the Lord had directed them. They met in a large upper room, because there were many early believers along with the apostles. Verse 13 names the apostles, and notably missing is Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord. Mary, the mother of Jesus, His brothers, and some unnamed women were part of the group. The earthly brothers of the Lord had become believers by this time. John 7:5 says, *“For even His brothers did not believe in Him”* - but since then they had become believers. What had happened to change their minds? Undoubtedly it was the Lord’s resurrection!

Notice that the believers did not pray **to** Mary. Rather, Mary prayed **with** the disciples and other believers (v14). And Mary was not called “the mother of God,” but the “mother of Jesus.” Jesus is certainly God, but the name “Jesus” was His name as a Man. At the incarnation, the eternal Son of God became Man. He was born as a baby in Bethlehem, He was given the name Jesus, and Mary was His mother. But Mary is **never** called “Mary, the mother of God” and “Mary, the

mother of the Son of God” in Scripture. She is called, “Mary the mother of Jesus.” As Man, our Lord was born bodily as a human, to a human mother. As God, our Lord was not born - He existed for all eternity.

About 120 believers were gathered together in that upper room, but there were many other believers in Israel at that time. 1 Corinthians 15:6 says that the Lord appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time after His resurrection.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The betrayal of Judas was according to Scripture.

Verses 15-26: *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup>“Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; <sup>17</sup>for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.” <sup>18</sup>(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup>“For it is written in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it’; and, ‘Let another take his office.’*

<sup>21</sup>*“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” <sup>23</sup>And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup>And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”*

The account of the death of Judas in Acts 1 does not contradict what we read in Matthew 27:5, which says that Judas went out and hanged himself. Most likely, Judas hanged himself over a rocky area, and either when the rope broke or when he was cut down, his decaying body burst open on the rocks below. I don't think there is any problem harmonizing these two Scriptures.

The betrayal of Judas was according to Scripture (v16). When Judas betrayed the Lord, he used a kiss to guide those who arrested Jesus. What Scripture did Peter quote in verse 16, when he said, *“the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas”*? He quoted Psalm 41, a Messianic psalm. Psalm 41:7-9: *“All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt. ‘An evil disease,’ they say, clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.’ Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”*

Verse 9 is a prediction of the betrayal of Jesus, and it's certainly a reminder of the Last Supper. John 13:26-28: *“Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.’ And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly.’ But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him.”*

Although it was predetermined and predicted that the Son of God would be betrayed, Judas was still responsible for his evil deed. The Lord Jesus said, *“And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he has betrayed”* (Luke 22:22). Here we see the sovereignty of God on the one hand, and the responsibility of man on the other. Both doctrines are true, even though it is beyond our finite comprehension to fully understand how they fit together. So here in Acts 1 we see that the Judas' betrayal of the Lord was done according to Scripture.

## 2. The selection of Matthias was according to Scripture.

Peter quoted the predictions from Psalms 69 and 109, that someone must take the place of Judas in the apostolic ranks (v20). From Psalm 69: *“Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in it,”* and from Psalm 109: *“Let another take his office.”* With insight from the Holy Spirit, Peter understood these predictions meant that someone was to take the place of Judas in the apostolic ranks.

The requirements of the man who was selected were very important. It was critical that he be an **accurate eyewitness** of the details of Lord's life. He had to have been with the Lord throughout Jesus' public ministry, from the time of His baptism by John all the way through to His ascension. It was very important that the man who was chosen could be a witness, with the other disciples, to the truth of the Lord's resurrection.

Two men qualified and were put forward: *“Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.”* Both men seemed to be equally qualified. So after praying, the disciples cast lots to select the man. The lot fell on Matthias and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. From now on, they would be known as “the Twelve.”

What about this “casting of lots”? Was this OK? In this case, yes. Keep three things in mind:

- a. This was an accepted method in the Old Testament. Proverbs 16:33 says, *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”*
- b. This was a non-moral decision. They were not casting lots to decide if they should rob a bank!
- c. They prayed that the Lord would use this method to show them the man He had chosen.

Here's an illustration of a contemporary use of “casting lots.” Some years ago I led a group of teens on a lengthy canoe hike - six guys, and six girls, and six canoes. We would be paddling and portaging the canoes for several days together. I determined that it would be best to put a guy and a girl in each canoe, but what was the best way to decide which girl and

which guy would be paired in a canoe? My answer came from Acts 1! After prayer, we drew names, and the Lord answered. We could not have arranged a better pairing - and no one was disgruntled or felt the assignments were unfair! Normally we don't make decisions this way, but sometimes it's appropriate. Certainly here it was!

In Acts 1, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas, as the twelfth apostle. Some Christians feel that the disciples were wrong to have chosen Matthias – they feel that the disciples should have waited, because the twelfth place was reserved for the apostle Paul. However, there is *no* indication here (or anywhere else in Scripture) that the disciples were wrong in choosing Matthias. Not only that, the apostle Paul placed himself in a unique category as apostle, by referring to himself several times as the “apostle to the Gentiles” – differentiating himself from “the Twelve.” In Romans 11:13 Paul wrote, *“For I speak to Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles.”*

So here in Acts 1 the Lord guided in the selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle. The selection of Matthias was according to Scripture.

## **Practical Application**

### **You can't go wrong if you continue in unity and prayer!**

Psalm 133:1 says, *“Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”*

The early Christians were unified, and they prayed together. *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (v14).* Unity and prayer!

No wonder the Lord blessed the early Church. Unity and prayer were the prelude to Pentecost. You can't go wrong if you continue in unity and prayer!

Unity and prayer are not automatic. It takes work and humility and self-sacrifice for unity to be achieved and maintained. And it takes sacrifice of time for prayer together. But it's worth it!

God will guide and bless the fellowship of His people when there is unity and prayer. You can't go wrong if you continue in unity and prayer!