

LOGOS

Logos Online Bible Study

First Wednesdays, 7.00–8.30 pm, on Zoom

Christian Beginnings

According to the Acts of the Apostles

Session 3 – Acts 1.6 – 26

Acts – Chapter One

Overview

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A Community in Waiting (vv 1–5)

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Farewells, Departure & Prayerful Expectation (vv 6–14)

Jesus' Ascension & Mary's Inclusion

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The Twelve Restored (vv 15–26)

Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias

Acts 1.6 – 14

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ⁷ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1.6 – 8

What & When of the 'Kingdom'

‘So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel? (*apokathistaneis* [$>$ *apokathistêmi*] *tên basileian tô Israël*)” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (vv 6–8)

A Theocratic 'Political' Kingdom?

‘But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel (*lutrousthai ton Israël*).’ (Luke 24.21)

‘A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest ... “You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ (Luke 22.24–30)

Acts 1.6 – 8

A Theocratic 'Political' Kingdom?

‘Have compassion, O Lord, in Your abundant mercies, upon Israel, Your people, upon Jerusalem, Your city, upon Zion, Your glorious dwelling-place, upon Your temple and upon Your abode, and upon the kingdom of the house of David, Your righteous anointed. You are praised, O Lord, God of David, Builder of Jerusalem.’ (Eighteen Benedictions 14, 1st cent CE)

‘See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners ... And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.’ (Psalms of Solomon 17.21–22, 32, 1st cent BCE)

Acts 1.6 – 8

A Theocratic 'Political' Kingdom?

‘... it seems likely that in Luke's mind the coming of the kingdom or dominion of God is synonymous with, or at least closely associated with, the coming of the Holy Spirit in power ... while Luke does believe that the coming of the Spirit inaugurates the kingdom, he does not believe that that is all there is to be said about the kingdom. This verse suggests that God will one day fulfil his promises to Israel, in fact that God has already set that time and determined the interval before it by his own authority, but that human speculation about the timing of such an event is unfruitful, since only God knows that timing and he is not revealing it to mortals. What this also shows is that Luke believes, not surprisingly, that many early followers of Jesus believed in the restoration of the control of the land to Israel (cf Luke 24.21).

Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109-110.

Acts 1.6 – 8

Universalism, Israel and the Nations

The universal reach of God's loving purposes can be traced back to Israel's election (Genesis 12.1–3) and is explored further in some of the prophetic literature, especially Isaiah.

'In days to come the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" ... Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other ... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth ... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples ... Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you ... Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.' (Isaiah 2.2–3; 45.22; 49.6; 56.7; 60.1, 3)

Acts 1.8

‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” (v 8)

A Programmatic Verse for Acts (cf Hans Conzelmann)

[Jesus as God’s gift of salvation]

Holy Spirit as communicator/mediator of that gift

Apostles as guarantors of this conviction

Divine-human collaboration

God’s salvific universalism

Acts 1.9 – 11

Jesus' Ascension

‘When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up (*epêrthê* > *epairô*) and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ (vv 9–11)

Jesus' ‘Ascension’ according to the Gospel of Luke

‘Then [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up (*anephereto* > *anepherô*) into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24.50–53)

‘When the days drew near for him to be taken up (*analêmpseôs* > *analêmpsis*), he set his face to go to Jerusalem.’ (Luke 9.51).

Acts 1.9 – 11

Jesus' 'Ascension' in Early Christian Witness

‘So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up (*analambanô*) into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mark 16.19)

‘So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up (*hypsoô*) the Son of Man ... And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” ... Jesus said to [Mary Magdalene], “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended (*anabebêka* > *anabainô*) to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending (*anabainô*) to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 8.28; 12.32; 20.17)

‘God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places ... He who descended is the same one who ascended (*ho anabas*) far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.’ (Ephesians 1.20; 4.10)

‘Without any doubt, the mystery of godliness is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory (*anelêmphthê* > *analambanô*).’ (1 Timothy 3.16)

Acts 1.9 – 11

Jesus' 'Ascension' in Early Christian Witness

‘Accordingly, after [Jesus] was crucified, even all his acquaintances forsook him, having denied him; and afterwards, when he had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass, and when they had seen him ascending into heaven (*eis ouranon anerchomenon*), and had believed, and had received power sent thence by him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles.’

(Justin Martyr [d 165 CE], *First Apology* 50)

Jesus' Parousia ('Second Coming') Presupposes his Ascension

‘For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever.’ (1 Thess 4.16–17)

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. So it is to be. Amen ... See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’ (Rev 1.7; 22.7)

Acts 1.9 – 11

Jesus' 'Ascension' – Scriptural Background

Accelerated Promotion

‘And Henoch [Enoch] was well pleasing to God, and he was not found, because God transferred (*metethêken* > *metatithêmi*) him.’ (Genesis 5.24 LXX)

‘And it happened, as they walked, that they were walking and talking, and behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they separated between both, and Eliou [Elijah] was taken up (*anelêmphthê* > *analambanô*) in a whirlwind as into heaven. And Elisaie [Elisha] kept watching and crying out, “Father, Father! Chariot of Israel and its horseman!” And he saw him no longer, and he grasped his clothes and tore them into two tears.’ (2 Kings 2.11-12 LXX)

Coronation/Enthronement Psalms

‘Who shall ascend onto the mountain of the Lord? And who shall stand in the place of his sanctity? ... ‘The Lord said to my lord, “Sit on my right until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (Psalms 23 (24).3; 109 (110).1 LXX)

Acts 1.9 – 11

Jesus' 'Ascension' – Theological Affirmation

Exaltation

God's final verdict and ultimate gift (divine communion)

Canonisation

Jesus reveals definitively how God is eternally (not just temporarily or partially)

Universalisation

Jesus transcends time and place (becoming a spiritual presence)

Did it happen? – Is it true?

Ascension as a symbolic narrative communicating theological truth

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Elevation of Humanity (Apotheosis; cf Incarnation)

Humanity is 'taken up' into divinity

Acts 1.12 – 14

‘Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet (cf Luke 22.39; also 19.29, 37; 21.37), which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away (2000 cubits/.75 mile ; cf Exod 16.26; Num 35.5).

When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs (cf Luke 22.12; ‘Cenacle,’ *coenaculum*) where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and

Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer (*proskarterountes homothumadon tê proseuchê*; cf, Acts 2.43–47; 4,32–35) together with certain women (cf Acts 23.49, 55–56; 24.1, 10), including Mary the mother of Jesus (cf Luke 1.27–56; 2.1–52; 8.19–21), as well as his brothers (*tois adelphois autou*; cf Mark 6.3 ‘brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon).’ (vv 12–14)

Appointment of the Twelve according to the Gospel of Luke

‘Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.’ (Luke 6.14–16; cf Matt 10.2–4 & Mark 3.16–19 list Thaddaeus in place of Judas, son of James)

Rabbula Syriac Gospels

by the eponymous scribe and monk based at the monastery of St John in Beth Zagba, located between Syrian Antioch and Damascus (586 CE).



Mary, Jesus' Mother

The New Eve

Justin, Irenaeus, 2nd cent

Type (*typus*) of the Church

Ambrose of Milan, 4th cent

Mother of God (*Theotokos*)

Synod of Ephesus, 431 CE

Ever-Virgin (*Aeiparthenos*)

Second Council of

Constantinople (553 CE; cf

Protoevangelium of James, 2nd

cent); Epiphanius, 4th cent)

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

‘In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶ ‘Brothers and sisters, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus, ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’ ¹⁸ (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. ¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ‘For it is written in the book of Psalms, “Let his house become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it” (Ps 68 (69).26 LXX); and “Let another take his position of overseer.” (Ps 108 (109).8)

‘So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.’ ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.’

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

(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. ¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Judas' Fate according to Other Sources

‘When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.’ (Matthew 27.3–5)

‘But Judas went about in this world as a great model of impiety. He became so bloated in the flesh that he could not pass through a place that was easily wide enough for a wagon – not even his swollen head could fit ... And they say that after he suffered numerous torments and punishments, he died on his own land ... even to this day no one can pass by the place without holding his nose.’

(Papias [c 60–130 CE], *Fragments* 4.1–3; cf Jehorah in 2 Chronicles 21.18–20)

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

‘The larger issue here is the filling up of the Twelve. What was the point of this action, especially since when James the son of Zebedee died it was apparently not felt necessary to repeat it (see Acts 12.2)? The answer to this question seems to be that Luke anticipates the Twelve having a role, not in relationship to the church or its later mission to Gentiles, but rather in relationship to Israel, in particular Jews who live in the Holy Land ... Nothing is said here about the Twelve being the foundation of the church, nor is the idea of apostolic succession either broached or made plausible since apostles had to be eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, nor is the idea that they are the true Israel made clear ... The role of the Twelve is as eyewitnesses about the risen Jesus to Israel, and at the eschaton as Israel’s judges.’

(Ben Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, p126)

Cf ‘A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest ... “You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ (Luke 22.24–30)

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

‘In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters ... So one of the men (*andrôn* > *anêr*) who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.’ (vv 15, 21–22)

Apostolic Criteria

Male

First-hand experience of Jesus

(Baptism – Ministry – Crucifixion – Ascension)

An existing member of the discipling community

First-hand experience of Jesus’ Resurrection

Readiness to be a witness

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

‘So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.’ v 23)

What do we know about the candidates?

Joseph (Hebrew), Barsabbas (Aramaic, ‘bar Sabba’, ‘son of Sabba [old man]’), Justus (Latin)

‘... another miracle connected with Justus surnamed Barsabas, for he drank poison but by the Lord’s grace suffered no harm.’ (Eusebius [4th cent] *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.9)

Matthias (abbreviated form of Mattathias, a graecised form on the Hebrew, meaning ‘gift of Yahweh’)

‘Tradition also relates that Matthias, who was reckoned with the apostles in the place of Judas, and he who was honoured with him at the same casting of lots had been called among the Seventy [cf Luke 10.1–12].’

(Eusebius [4th cent] *Ecclesiastical History* 1.12.3)

Traditions of Matthias (cited in Clement of Alexandria, 2nd cent)

Same as? *Gospel of Matthias* (cited in Origen, 2nd–3rd cent)

Acts of Andrew and Matthias (2nd cent?)

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.’ (vv 24–26)

Apostolic Election – Prayerfully by Lot

‘Aaron ... shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and offer it as a purification offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.’ (Leviticus 16.6–10; also Num 26.52–55; also 1 Chron 26.13–14; Jonah 1.7–8)

‘In the breastpiece of judgement you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the LORD; thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before the LORD continually ... Then Saul said, “O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant today? If this guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, O LORD God of Israel, give Urim, but if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.” And Jonathan and Saul were indicated by the lot, but the people were cleared.’ (Exodus 28.30 & 1 Samuel 14.41)

Acts 1.15 – 26

The Twelve Restored (Fate of Judas & Election of Matthias)

‘In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters ... So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.’ ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the eleven apostles.’

What about the Apostleship of Paul (and others)?

‘When the apostles (*hoi apostoloi*) Barnabas and Paul heard of it.’ (Acts 14.14)

‘Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a childhood friend of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While 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.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.’ (Acts 13.1–3)

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Christian Beginnings
According to the Acts of the Apostles

Next Time
Wednesday 2nd September 2026

Session 4 – Acts 2.1–36

Please read beforehand