

# CHAPTER 1

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## THE WAITING PERIOD

### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT (1:1, 2)

**<sup>1</sup>The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup>until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.**

A noted Hollywood movie-maker said that a motion picture should begin with an earthquake and build to a climax. Using that criterion, the second chapter would have been a great start to the Book of Acts, as the Holy Spirit came with fiery tongues and the sound of a mighty wind. Instead of beginning with noise and excitement, however, chapter 1 starts quietly. It opens with Jesus talking to His apostles and closes with a business meeting. Business meetings are usually not very exciting.

Why does the Book of Acts begin as it does? The reason is this: A great day like the one pictured in chapter 2 requires *preparation*. God had been preparing for Acts 2 throughout eternity (Eph. 3:10, 11)—but now it was time for the last-minute preparation. Specifically, it was time for the last-minute preparation of the apostles.

**Verse 1.** Luke began Acts by reminding the reader of what he had previously written. **The first account** refers to the Book of Luke. Since he included in Acts a reminder of his first account, Luke must have expected the reader to be familiar with his Gospel, especially the last chapters. (For comments on **Theophilus**, see the *Introduction, The Patron.*)

## TRUTH FOR TODAY COMMENTARY

Luke's Gospel told the story of **Jesus**, culminating in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. In that day "Jesus" was a common Greek name (13:6; Col. 4:11) which is the equivalent of the Hebrew name "Joshua," a shortened form of "Jehoshua" (יְהוֹשׁוּעַ, *yehoshua*), meaning "Jehovah saves" (Mt. 1:21). Luke recorded **all that Jesus began to do and teach**. Jesus first *did* and *then* taught. If our teaching is to be effective, we must first *live* what we teach (1 Tim. 4:16).

**Verse 2.** The final scene in the Book of Luke is Jesus' ascending and the apostles' returning to Jerusalem (Lk. 24:50–53). In Acts 1 we read that the ascension came **after** Jesus **had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen**. In the Book of Luke we see that those orders were for the apostles to be Christ's "witnesses" to proclaim "repentance for forgiveness of sins . . . in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47). In other words, **orders** referred to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18–20; Mk. 16:15, 16).

### ASCENSION (1:3–11)

#### Final Instructions (1:3–8)

<sup>3</sup>To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; <sup>8</sup>but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

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**Verse 3.** Luke noted that Jesus qualified the apostles to be His witnesses by appearing to them after His resurrection: **To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days.** In his Gospel, Luke gave examples of the convincing proof offered by Jesus: He had His disciples touch Him, and He ate food to show that He was not a spirit (Lk. 24:36–43; see Acts 10:40, 41).

Most of Jesus' recorded appearances after the Resurrection took place on the day He arose. Jesus made **many** appearances over a long period (13:31), forty days to be exact. Barclay's translation has, "[Jesus] was seen by them on various occasions throughout a period of forty days."<sup>1</sup> The most complete single list of resurrection appearances is in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8, but appearances are found in the Gospels which are not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. Apparently, many other appearances were not recorded.

Jesus' purpose for remaining on the earth for forty days was not merely to enjoy fellowship with His friends. Rather, He used this period to *prepare* His disciples. Jesus spoke **of the things concerning the kingdom of God.** The kingdom had been Jesus' major theme from the beginning of His personal ministry (Mt. 4:17). Many of His great parables began, "The kingdom of heaven is like. . ." (Mt. 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47). Now Jesus refreshed the minds of His followers concerning His teaching on the kingdom. Among other things, He would have reminded them of His promise that the kingdom would come *with power*, for He had said to them, ". . . there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (Mk. 9:1).

Jesus had a major obstacle to overcome as He taught His disciples about the **kingdom.** When Jesus used the word "kingdom," He had one idea in mind; when the apostles heard the word "kingdom," they had a different idea in mind. Jesus had in mind the establishment of a *spiritual* institution in which God

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<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 9.

would reign in the hearts and lives of His people. Jesus' disciples had in mind an *earthly* kingdom—the idea that the Messiah would defeat Israel's enemies and set up His throne in Jerusalem. This common misconception that the Jews had of the promised kingdom is a major reason that many of them did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The behavior of the disciples in the Gospels indicates that they had accepted this view as accurate. Jesus had stressed that His kingdom was “*not* of this world” (Jn. 18:36; emphasis added), but His apostles had a hard time grasping that concept.

**Verses 4, 5.** The apostles' lack of understanding is the background for 1:4–8. In these verses, Jesus made a marvelous *promise* to them that was an essential part of their preparation. The apostles were looking for a political institution, in which they would hold positions of honor (Mt. 20:20–28). Jesus wanted them to know that God had a better plan for them, better than anything they had anticipated. They looked forward to a *position*; Jesus said they would receive *power*.

Jesus prepared His apostles for the exciting days ahead. He was **gathering** His apostles **together** to give them final instructions before He ascended into heaven. The NIV has “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, . . .” Scholars disagree on the meaning of the verb in this phrase, which stems from the Greek word συναλίζομαι (*sunalizomai*). We know that Jesus ate with His disciples after His resurrection (Lk. 24:41–43)—not because of any need He had, but for their benefit. Perhaps that is the scene Luke had in mind in these verses.

Jesus **commanded** his apostles **not to leave Jerusalem** before receiving **what the Father had promised**. The city of Jerusalem later became the starting point for the kingdom or church (Is. 2:1–4; Lk. 24:46, 47; Acts 2). Jesus proceeded to define the Father's promise: “**Which,**” He said, “**you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**” The Father had earlier promised, through Jesus and others, that the kingdom was “at hand” (Mt. 4:17); the promise to establish the kingdom was now to be fulfilled. Furthermore, the Father had promised through John the Baptist that the Messiah would baptize His

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followers with the Holy Spirit.

“Baptism” (βάπτισμα, *baptisma* or βαπτισμός, *baptismos*) is a transliterated Greek word. *Baptisma* means “immersion,” and *baptismos* means “the act of immersion”—a difference too slight to be of any significance. The verb form is βαπτίζω (*baptizō*), which means “immerse.” The element in which the immersion takes place is determined by the context. When used metaphorically, it refers to being overwhelmed. A good example of this usage is Jesus’ baptism of suffering (Mk. 10:38, 39).

John the Baptist had prophesied: “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk. 3:16). It is significant that John mentioned both the Holy Spirit and fire, while Jesus mentioned only the Holy Spirit. John was speaking to a mixed group, which included the penitent and the impenitent. The references to “fire” in the context refer to the punishment of the impenitent (Lk. 3:9, 17). The “baptism of fire” does not refer to the “tongues as of fire” on the Day of Pentecost, but rather to the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell’s fire (Rev. 20:14, 15).

They had heard Jesus Himself stress that the Spirit would be sent to guide them (Lk. 12:12; Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). Now Jesus said that the promise to send the Spirit would be fulfilled **not many days** from then. The two promises—the establishment of the kingdom and the coming of the Holy Spirit—were inexorably intertwined. The fulfillment of the promise to send the Holy Spirit was essential to the fulfillment of the promise to establish the kingdom.

**Verse 6.** The apostles showed that their minds were elsewhere. Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom revived their political hopes: **They were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”** The words **restoring** and **Israel** are keys to understanding the apostles’ thinking. They were still thinking in terms of Jesus’ restoring the physical glory that was Israel’s in the days of David and Solomon, when Israel was the greatest kingdom in all the world. The phrase **they were asking Him** indicates they asked Jesus again and again. They pressed Him to answer, “When, Lord? When?” Some believe

that the apostles did understand the nature of the kingdom, but were simply asking when it would be established. This is possible, although the terms “restore” and “Israel” seem to indicate that they still were unclear on Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom. F. F. Bruce wrote concerning this: “Their present question appears to have been the last flicker of their former burning expectation of an imminent theocracy with themselves as chief executives.”<sup>2</sup>

**Verses 7, 8.** Jesus probably shook His head as He answered: **“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”** The Greek words translated **times** (χρόνοι, *chronoi*) and **epochs** (καιροί, *kairoi*) are similar in meaning. Jesus probably used both words to emphasize a single thought: It was not their place to know the exact *time* that God would establish the kingdom. The KJV has “the times or the seasons”; the NIV has “the times or dates.”

Jesus did not rebuke them for misunderstanding the nature of the kingdom; the spiritual nature of the kingdom would be clear to them soon enough. The events of Pentecost put Jesus’ teachings in perspective for them. After the Day of Pentecost, the apostles never made the mistake again of referring to the kingdom in physical or political terms. Rather, Jesus addressed the question of God’s timetable. He stressed that *when* was not as important as *how*. In effect, He said, “I am not going to give you God’s calendar, but this is how you can know the kingdom has come: You will receive *power* when *the Holy Spirit* comes upon you.”

Remember that Jesus had said that the kingdom would come with **power** (Mk. 9:1). Now Jesus said that the power would come **when the Holy Spirit** came. Thus when the Holy Spirit came, the power would come, and at that time God’s promise to establish His kingdom would be fulfilled.

The heads of the apostles were probably spinning from all

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<sup>2</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. F. F. Bruce, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 36.

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these thoughts: “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (v. 5); “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (v. 8). They must have wondered what Jesus’ words meant.

Jesus was not finished with surprises. The apostles also had a hard time grasping the *universal* nature of Christ’s kingdom; their dreams of grandeur centered in the tiny country of Palestine. Their difficulty is evidenced by their subsequent actions in the Book of Acts: God had to give them strong nudges to get them out of Jerusalem and to accept the Gentiles. Jesus said, **“You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”** Probably none of the apostles had been farther north than the southern tip of Syria, farther east than the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, farther south than the border of Egypt, or farther west than the shores of the Mediterranean. Now Jesus told them they would travel throughout the world, taking the good news of His resurrection everywhere. Acts mainly tells us of Paul’s journeys to faraway places, but we should not lose sight of the fact that this promise was given to the Twelve. Early church legends tell of the missionary journeys of the apostles. These stories may not be accurate in every detail, but they are surely correct in the fact that the apostles traveled far and wide with the message of Jesus.

The strategy outlined by Jesus remains the challenge to every generation: Start at home (**Jerusalem**), expand to the areas near by (**Judea and Samaria**), and finally reach out to all the world (**the remotest part of the earth**) with the gospel. If any “mission point” is to become what God wants it to be, plans should be laid for carrying out the Great Commission from the beginning of the work there.

Jesus said that as the apostles traveled to the far reaches of the globe, they were to be His **witnesses** (Lk. 24:48). The word “witness” is a key word in the Book of Acts. It is translated from the Greek word *μάρτυς* (*martus*), which is used twenty-nine times in the book, including both noun and verb forms. It is translated “witness,” “testimony,” or “well spoken of.” This is the word from which we get “martyr”—a person who witnesses

for Christ to the point of death.

The primary meaning of the word “witness” is expressed by the word “eyewitness”: one who can testify regarding what he has seen or heard (4:20; 1 Jn. 1:1–3). The apostles were witnesses in a special sense. They could testify regarding the resurrection of Christ because they had *seen* Him after His resurrection (v. 22). Luke normally used the word “witness” with this meaning in Acts. Since we have not seen the resurrected Lord, we cannot be witnesses in the same sense as the apostles.

On the other hand, Luke occasionally used the noun and verb forms of “witness” to refer to a testimony other than that of the apostles concerning Christ’s resurrection (6:13; 13:22; 14:3, 17; 16:2; 22:12; 26:5). For instance, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is called Christ’s “witness” (22:20). We can be witnesses in the same sense as Stephen. We can tell of what God has done, especially what He has done in our lives, and be ready to die, if need be, for our faith. We see Stephen’s example of this in Acts 7.

#### **Ascension into Heaven (1:9–11)**

**<sup>9</sup>And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”**

**Verse 9.** After forty days, Jesus had done what He had stayed to do, and it was time for Him to return to heaven. Luke described the Ascension in these words: **And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** Luke 24:50, 51 notes, “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.” Some are concerned by the fact that Jesus was **lifted up**; they think this leaves the

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impression that heaven is “up” and hell is “down.” However, we must ask this question: How else could God convey to the human mind that Jesus actually *left* this earth? What other direction could He go, but “up”—that is, *away from the earth*?

**Verse 10.** Jesus’ ascension was the culmination of His sojourn on earth. He had completed His work; He was going home to glory (Eph. 4:10; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:22). The disciples, however, were perplexed: **They were gazing intently into the sky while He was going.** This was not the first time they had seen Jesus mysteriously depart since His resurrection (Lk. 24:31). They must have wondered whether He was really gone, or whether He would suddenly reappear as He frequently had during the last forty days (Jn. 20:16, 19).

The apostles did not have long to wonder, for **behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.** These two were angels sent from God. This is one way Luke referred to angels (Lk. 24:4). Perhaps there were *two* angels to serve as two witnesses (Deut. 19:15).

**Verse 11.** The two angels said, “**Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.**” Preachers have often noted that instead of wasting their time **looking into the sky**, the disciples were to return to Jerusalem to get ready to *work*. They make this application: “Some are so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good.”

The words of the angels were an essential part of preparing the apostles mentally and emotionally. The first part of the message contained a *challenge*: **Jesus . . . has been taken up from you into heaven.** Jesus was gone. He would not be reappearing to them as He had for the last forty days. He was in heaven, so His work was now up to them. The second part of the message contained *comfort*: **This Jesus . . . will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.** Jesus may have ascended to heaven, but someday He will return. Regardless of what happens on this earth, in the end the Lord will come again and make all things right. It is not surprising then, that in his Gospel, Luke noted that the disciples “returned to Jerusalem

with great joy" (Lk. 24:52). Victory was assured.

The promise of the Second Coming was a precious source of comfort to early Christians. They constantly prayed, "Maranatha"—"Come, Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). "Maranatha" (μαρανα θα, *marana tha*) combines the Aramaic words for "Lord" and "come." It can either be a statement ("The Lord is coming") or a fervent prayer ("Lord, come!").

If we believed in the Second Coming as first-century Christians did, what a difference it would make in our lives (2 Pet. 3:10, 11). We can be assured, as the angels assured the apostles, that Jesus *is* coming again and that His coming will be "in just the same way" as He went into heaven—unexpectedly, visibly, in the clouds, and with power. In spite of these truths, some have announced the time of the Lord's return—only to be embarrassed when He did not return. They then said that the Lord appeared *invisibly* to a select few and then decided to go back to heaven and try it again later. Acts 1:11 and other passages on the Second Coming expose this self-serving error (Mt. 24:30, 36, 42; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 1:7).

### WAITING IN JERUSALEM (1:12–14)

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup>When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James 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 with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

In the previous section we stressed that chapter 1 tells of the *preparation* needed before the establishment of the church. We noted two important aspects of that preparation: the promise of the Spirit and the promise of Christ's return. In this section, we will see what else was needed to prepare the disciples. This stage of the preparation occurred as the apostles waited in Jerusalem.

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**Verse 12.** Jesus had told the apostles that “repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*” and that they were to “stay in *the city* [that is, Jerusalem]” until they were “clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:47, 49; emphasis added). Furthermore, He told them that they would be His witnesses first in Jerusalem (v. 8). There was no question concerning Jesus’ will: He wanted the apostles in **Jerusalem**.

Jerusalem was probably the last place the apostles would have personally chosen to go. Jerusalem was where Jesus had been crucified. Jerusalem was where their enemies were. The apostles had no ties to Jerusalem; their homes and families were in Galilee. Jesus, however, had said that they were to wait in Jerusalem. In obedient faith, the apostles returned to the city.

The term **Sabbath day’s journey** is used to indicate distance, not to indicate that Jesus ascended on the Sabbath. A “Sabbath day’s journey” was the distance Jewish teachers had decided a Jew could travel on the Sabbath based on Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5: about 2,000 cubits. Since the cubit can vary in length from eighteen to twenty inches, a “Sabbath day’s journey” could vary from three-fourths to seven-eighths of a mile. Apparently, Jesus’ ascension took place near Bethany (Lk. 24:50), which is on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Bethany itself is more than a Sabbath day’s journey from Jerusalem. It is apparent that the **mount called Olivet is near Jerusalem**, a “Sabbath day’s journey away.” Thus the disciples did not have far to travel to get back to Jerusalem.

**Verse 13.** Luke recorded a listing of the apostles staying in Jerusalem: **Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.** This is the fourth and last listing of the apostles in the New Testament (see Mt. 10:2–4; Mk. 3:16–19; Lk. 6:13–16). What makes this list different is that only eleven are listed; the name of the traitor, Judas, is missing. The designation **Simon the Zealot** is also noteworthy. The Zealots were a political group dedicated to overthrowing Roman rule in Palestine. The fact that a former employee of the Roman government (**Matthew**, the tax collector)

and a former Zealot could work together shows the power of the Lord to unite people.

The apostles **were staying** in an **upper room**. “Staying” apparently indicates that this was where they kept their belongings, spent the night, and had some of their meals. Luke 24:53 notes that during the *day*, they “were continually in the temple.” It is generally assumed that those mentioned in verse 14 and the 120 mentioned in verse 15 were also staying in the upper room, but the text does not say this. Rather, verse 14 says that the apostles were praying with certain ones. Since the apostles were continually in the temple, these prayers may have taken place in the temple. The gathering in verse 15 could have been in an apartment of the temple. The upper room where the apostles were staying was perhaps the same place where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus. Others speculate that this was in the home owned by John Mark’s mother (12:12).

The apostles did not huddle fearfully in a darkened room as they had done immediately after the Crucifixion (Jn. 20:19). Rather, they spent their days in the temple where they did not try to stay hidden. They lifted their voices to God. Luke closed his Gospel with these words: “And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God” (Lk. 24:52, 53). What a change was taking place in them—a change brought about because they now had faith in a resurrected Lord.

As the apostles spent their time in the temple and the upper room, they were enduring one of the hardest parts of preparation: *waiting*. They did not know how long their wait would be. Jesus had said that the Holy Spirit would come “not many days from now” (v. 5), but that could be weeks, maybe even months or years. After all, Jesus had said that the kingdom was “at hand” three *years* previously, but it still had not come. If it was the Lord’s will that they wait, they were willing to wait.

**Verse 14.** It helps to wait with others, as is evidenced by the list of those who waited with the apostles: **These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.** The next verse notes that at one meeting, there were

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about 120 individuals. Since Jesus appeared to “more than five hundred brethren at one time” (1 Cor. 15:6), this 120 did not comprise all the followers of Christ that remained. The others were probably in Galilee.

What an interesting group this must have been. There were **the women**. This may have included Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38), the wives of the apostles (1 Cor. 9:5), the women who had ministered to the needs of Jesus and His followers (Mt. 27:55, 56; Lk. 8:2, 3), the women at the cross (Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25), and the women who went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus (Lk. 23:55; 24:10). Obviously, these lists overlap. Since Jesus’ brothers were present, it is possible that His sisters were also among the women (Mt. 13:56). **Mary the mother of Jesus** is specifically mentioned as being present. This is the last mention of her in the Scriptures. According to one church legend, Mary later went to Ephesus with the apostle John and died there.

Next, Jesus’ **brothers** are listed. These men were technically the half-brothers of Jesus. They had the same mother (Mary), but not the same father. Jesus’ father was God; their father was Joseph. During Jesus’ lifetime, His brothers did not believe in Him (Jn. 7:5). After Jesus was raised from the dead, He made a special resurrection appearance to the oldest of His brothers, James (1 Cor. 15:7). This James became “a pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9) and wrote the Epistle of James. No doubt James shared what he learned with the rest of the brothers: Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Mt. 13:55). Now all gathered with the apostles.

Others with whom we are familiar may have been present—Lazarus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Zaccheus. Certainly this was a fascinating group. Wouldn’t you like to know what they talked about as they waited? Don’t you know the excitement built day by day?

We may not know everything that transpired during their wait, but we do know several things this little group did. One activity is specifically mentioned: They devoted themselves to **prayer**. Luke 24:53 tells us they praised God. The disciples had asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Lk. 11:1), so we would suppose they prayed. However, there is no record of their praying

during the personal ministry of Christ. When Jesus asked them to pray in Mark 14:38–40, they fell asleep. This is the first time that we read of the disciples praying, but it will not be the last. Prayer saturates almost every page of the Book of Acts.

Another activity of the apostles is suggested by the phrase **with one mind**, translated from the Greek word ὁμοθυμαδόν (*homothumadon*). This Greek word is found eleven times in Acts. Consider those who had gathered to wait. “One mind,” or unity of heart, was not automatic among them. Some had disputed with others present shortly before Jesus’ death on the cross (Lk. 22:24). Many had forsaken or denied the Lord. Surely it would have been easy to point fingers. The brothers of Jesus, who had ridiculed Him, sat side by side with those who had followed Him. For this group to become of “one mind,” some tears were probably shed; some pride had to be swallowed. These disciples were able to attain unity of heart because they were united by their faith in the resurrected Lord.

## REPLACEMENT OF JUDAS (1:15–26)

### A Review of Judas’ Death (1:15–20)

<sup>15</sup>At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, <sup>16</sup>“Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup>For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.” <sup>18</sup>(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup>“For it is written in the book of Psalms,

‘Let his homestead be made desolate,  
And let no one dwell in it’;

and,

‘Let another man take his office.’”

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**Verse 15.** The apostles and others had one more task to do during the waiting period: They had to secure a replacement for Judas. Thus we read: **And at this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren.** Peter was back in a position of leadership. After his terrible fall, he had been restored by Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Jn. 21:15–17). The term **brethren** (ἀδελφοί, *adelphoi*) is used in this section twice—once in verse 15 and once in verse 16. These are the first uses of the term in the book. The brethren were comprised of a **gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons** at this time. However, this group did not comprise all of the followers of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:6).

**Verse 16.** Peter emphasized that the events which transpired **concerning Judas** had been spoken of by the **Holy Spirit** through the prophet **David**. This is a strong passage on the inspiration of the Scriptures. Judas was a **guide to those who arrested Jesus** in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:47–54).

**Verse 17.** Peter stressed that Judas was really an apostle: **“He was counted among us [he was one of our number, NIV], and received his share in this ministry.”** Like all the apostles, Judas had been selected because of his abilities and potential. He had also received all the rights and privileges the other apostles had received. When the rest were commissioned to cast out unclean spirits and heal every kind of disease, so was he (Mt. 10:1). Some claim that Judas was chosen for the specific purpose of betraying Jesus. Was Peter chosen so that he could deny Christ? Were the rest chosen so they could argue over who would be the greatest? All were chosen not for what they were, but for what they could become. Jesus was aware of their weaknesses, but He also saw their potential. This is as true for Judas as for any of the others. We have every indication that Judas had great potential. If, as some think, he was from Judea, he was probably more educated than the others, who were from Galilee (v. 11). The respect Jesus had for Him is evident by the fact that Judas was given the responsibility of caring for the money of Jesus and His followers (Jn. 12:6; 13:29).

Judas’ problem was not that he “was a devil from the beginning.” This is a phrase used by some who believe that a child of God cannot fall from grace. Jesus called Judas “a devil” (Jn. 6:70,

71), but He also called Peter “Satan” (Mk. 8:33); both expressions just mean that they had allowed the devil to use them. The Bible says that the devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus and that “Satan . . . entered into him” (Jn. 13:27; see Jn. 13:2), but it does not say that Judas “was a devil from the beginning.” He did not start low and stay low. Rather, he started high and then fell. A warning is here for every follower of Jesus (see 1 Cor. 10:12, 13).

**Verses 18, 19.** At this point in the text, Luke interrupted the words of Peter to add an explanation for his Gentile readers concerning what had happened to Judas: **(Now this man acquired a field with the price [“reward,” NIV] of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)** Most modern translations indicate this interruption by putting verses 18 and 19 in parentheses. The KJV does not have the parentheses, but the wording of these two verses makes it clear that Peter was not speaking. Peter would not have had to explain to those present what had happened to Judas. Peter would never have referred to Aramaic as **their own language**. It would have been unnecessary for Peter to explain the meaning of **Hakeldama**, an Aramaic term, to his listeners. (It can be written with or without the “H.”)

This account of Judas’ death varies somewhat from Matthew 27:3–9, but the two accounts are not contradictory. Rather, they are complementary; they supplement each other. Those who do not believe the Bible is from God often use these two accounts to “prove” that the Bible contradicts itself. Each account, however, simply gives details the other account does not give. For instance, Matthew 27:6, 7 says that the priests bought the field, while Acts 1 says Judas **acquired the field**. Putting the two accounts together, we find that the priests bought the field with Judas’ money; thus the field legally belonged to Judas. Again, Matthew 27:8 says the field was called “the Field of Blood” because it was bought with blood money, while Acts 1 says it was called the **Field of Blood** because it soaked up Judas’ blood.

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Putting the two accounts together, we find that there were *two* reasons the field was called “the Field of Blood”; Matthew gives one, while Luke gives the other.

The two complementary accounts tell of the tragic end of a life that had great potential. Judas was given thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus (Mt. 26:15)—**the price of his wickedness**. Filled with remorse, he threw down the money in the sanctuary and went out and hanged himself. His despised body hung, neglected, until at last the rope (or some other material) rotted or his body decomposed. Then his corpse fell, splattering on the rocky soil of a potter’s field.

“A potter’s field” (Mt. 27:7) was a field owned by a maker of clay vessels who removed the clay from the field to make his pots. When a potter was finished with a field, it was basically useless; it is comparable to an area today that has been strip-mined. This, plus the fact that Judas’ remains were scattered over the area, would lower the value of the field, and it could be purchased with thirty pieces of silver. Today, cemeteries where indigents are buried are often called “potter’s fields.”

**Verse 20.** Now we return to the words of Peter. In verse 16 Peter had said that “the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” In verse 20 Peter told of the passages he had in mind: **“For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no one dwell in it’; and, ‘Let another man take his office.’”** Peter quoted David’s words from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8. Both psalms tell about powerful enemies of David, men in positions of leadership. These men had turned on David and tried to overthrow him and remove him from the throne. David prayed that God would remove *them* instead, and replace them with godly, dependable leaders. Peter said, in effect, that since David was a type of the Messiah, these passages foreshadowed Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and the need to replace Judas.

The fulfillment of prophecy is complex. Some prophecies simply told of future events (see 2:16–21). Others foretold the future in types and shadows (see Heb. 8:5; 10:1). It should be stressed that we do not have the right to interpret what is proph-

ecy and what is not, nor what the fulfillment of the prophecy is. On the other hand, “the Holy Spirit can interpret himself however he wishes.”<sup>3</sup>

Since Peter’s statement occurred before the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles (ch. 2), how did Peter know that Judas needed to be replaced, and how did he know that these passages taught regarding Judas’ replacement? Perhaps Peter received a special revelation that is not recorded. Perhaps he had learned these things during the forty days following the Resurrection when Jesus “opened their [the apostles’] minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:45).

For **his** [Judas’] **office**, the NIV has “his place of leadership.” The KJV has “his bishopric,” a transliteration of the original Greek word, which is a form of ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*), or “overseer.” A literal translation would be “his oversight.” The Simple English™ Bible has “his work of overseeing.”

#### Matthias Chosen (1:21–26)

**<sup>21</sup>“Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—<sup>22</sup>beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” <sup>23</sup>So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup>to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup>And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.**

**Verses 21, 22.** However the information had come, Peter had also learned the qualifications for Judas’ replacement. Peter’s

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<sup>3</sup>Anthony Lee Ash, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Part 1, The Living Word Commentary, ed. Everett Ferguson (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), 34.

## ACTS 1

words contained three of these: (1) Judas' replacement had to be one of the **men who** had **accompanied** the apostles; he could not be replaced by a woman. The word used in the original text is not a form of the generic ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*) but the definitive ἄνθρω (anēr)—“a man” as distinct from “a woman.” From the beginning of the church, male leadership was stressed. (2) Judas' replacement was to be one who had traveled extensively with **Jesus** and the apostles during His personal ministry. The Twelve were not the only ones who had traveled with Jesus; once He had sent out seventy on a preaching tour (Lk. 10:1). The purpose of this qualification was probably to give credibility to their witness that it was actually Jesus who was raised from the dead and not some impostor. Those who had known Jesus best would be the most qualified to know if it was Jesus they had seen or someone else. (3) Judas' replacement needed to have witnessed Jesus' **resurrection**. In other words, he had to have seen Jesus after He was raised from the dead. A number had seen the resurrected Lord (1 Cor. 15:6). In many religious groups today, there are those who claim to be successors to the Twelve. They do not, however, meet these qualifications.

Why was this replacement **necessary**? It was not to set a precedent regarding replacing each apostle when he died. When James, the brother of John, was killed (12:2), there is no indication that he was replaced. Rather, Peter said that Judas had to be replaced because he “turned aside” from his “ministry and apostleship” (v. 25). Judas had to be replaced, not because he died, but because he fell away.

They felt an urgency about replacing Judas so that the band of apostles would again be at full strength, numbering twelve, when the Holy Spirit came. We wonder, “Why was it necessary to have *twelve* apostles on the Day of Pentecost?” A better question would be, “Why did Jesus choose twelve apostles *in the first place*—instead of ten, fifteen, or twenty?” Apparently, Jesus chose twelve apostles to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. During His personal ministry, Jesus spoke of His disciples' reward in these words: “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon *twelve* thrones,

judging *the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Mt. 19:28; emphasis added). Again, during the Last Supper, Jesus said to His disciples:

You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging *the twelve tribes of Israel* (Lk. 22:28–30; emphasis added).

As you look at these verses, do not get bogged down in the question of how the apostles judged. Basically, they judged by the Word they preached. Jesus stressed that those who reject Him will be judged by His Word (Jn. 12:48). This is the Word of Truth He revealed to His apostles (see Jn. 16:13). Rather, note the emphasis on *twelve* apostles on *twelve* thrones judging *twelve* tribes. As the time drew near for the establishment of the kingdom, it was imperative to have the number of the apostles back to twelve. Once the kingdom/church was established, as the apostles died, in a sense, they sat down on their thrones and began reigning with Jesus—and started judging the twelve tribes who rejected the Lord. There was no need to replace them.

**Verse 23.** Apparently there were only two who met all of the qualifications: **So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.** It was common for people to have more than one name. The first disciple mentioned went by three different names. **Joseph** (יֵשׁוּעַ, *yosef*) was his Hebrew name, and **Justus** was his Greek name. His other name was **Barsabbas**, which means “son of Saba.” The name possibly means “son of the Sabbath.” Perhaps the man was given this nickname because he was born on the Sabbath. Another man with this surname is mentioned in 15:22. This may have been a common nickname; there is no reason to believe that the two men were related. The second disciple proposed was **Matthias**. Church tradition says that he was one of the Seventy (Lk. 10:1). This is probably true, since the one selected had to have traveled with Jesus for the entirety of Jesus’ ministry.

The Scriptures say nothing more about these men, but both must have been outstanding disciples. Several traditions exist

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concerning Joseph Barsabbas. One says he drank snake venom without being harmed.<sup>4</sup> Another says he was imprisoned by Nero but was later released. The Scriptures, however, say nothing more about him. From Luke's thorough identification of him, we can conclude that he became prominent in the early church, even though he was not selected as one of the Twelve.

**Verses 24, 25.** Since only one man was needed to replace Judas and since both men met the qualifications, it was decided to leave the matter in the hands of God: **And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."** This is the second time prayer is mentioned in the book and the first time we have the words of the prayer. God is addressed as the καρδιογνώστης (*kardiognōstēs*), the heart-knower. "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

Note the delicate way in which the final destiny of Judas is handled: **Judas turned aside to go to his own place.** "To go to one's own place" means "to go to the place one deserves to go as a result of one's actions." The NIV has "to go where he belongs." Since Judas "turned aside" from his apostolic ministry, there can be no reasonable doubt as to what Judas' "own place" was. There are a number of people who prefer to think that Judas was probably saved. One individual has insisted that since his betrayal was foretold, Judas could not be held accountable. In chapter 2, however, Peter told the Jews that the death of Jesus was foretold, yet they were still accountable. Jesus' statements about Judas leave little doubt as to his fate (see Mt. 26:24; Jn. 17:12). What a sad ending for a life that held so much promise.

**Verse 26.** Which of the two men should replace the fallen Judas? Since the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on the apostles, how were they to know God's choice? The method used is puzzling: **And they drew lots for them.** The original Greek text has

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<sup>4</sup>C. M. Kerr, "Joseph Barsabbas," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 1740.

#### TRUTH FOR TODAY COMMENTARY

“they gave lots for them.” The KJV has “they gave forth their lots.” The New Century Version has “they used lots.” Some other translations have “they cast lots.” Many suggestions concerning this procedure are given in various commentaries. Some suggested methods involve white stones and black stones. Other suggestions draw parallels with the Urim and Thummim used by the high priest. All are guesses. However, since the text says “*they* drew lots,” we can probably eliminate any method in which *one* person drew or cast a lot. We are not sure of the procedure, but today it would be roughly equivalent to drawing straws or tossing a coin.

Though we may not be sure of the exact procedure, two points should be stressed: (1) “Giving forth their lots” did not mean that those present were *voting* on the two candidates. Only God knew the hearts of these men; the disciples did not. (2) “Giving forth their lots” did not mean that those present were leaving the matter to *fate* or *chance*. Rather, they were putting the decision into the hands of *God*.

The possibility has already been suggested that the replacement of Judas may have been part of Jesus’ “opening the minds” of the apostles to understand the Scriptures (Lk. 24:45). Perhaps Jesus also gave them the procedure to use, or perhaps the apostles used this method because it was familiar to them. The casting of lots was a common practice in the Old Testament (Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:56). This method was still being used in the days of the apostles to determine which tasks the priests performed (Lk. 1:9). The Old Testament said, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:33). Once the Holy Spirit came, this method was never used again by Christians to determine the will of God. This was “the final act of the old dispensation.”<sup>5</sup> They did not select elders and deacons this way in the early church (6:1–6; 1 Tim. 3:1–13; Tit. 1:5–9). They did not settle doctrinal issues this way (15:1–31). In chapter 1, “casting lots” to learn God’s will was a temporary, God-approved measure; today it would be superstition.

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<sup>5</sup>Rick Atchley, “Is It Nice to Use Dice?” Sermon preached at the Southern Hills church of Christ, Abilene, Texas, on 16 September 1984.

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Which of the two did God choose? **And the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.** God had made His choice. **Matthias** became the twelfth apostle. Strangely enough, some believe that the apostles made a mistake in choosing Matthias. They insist that God intended Paul to be the twelfth apostle. However, Paul did not meet the qualifications given by Peter. He did not travel with Jesus and His disciples. Paul *was* an apostle, as he stressed in the opening words of most of his epistles. More than that, he was a *special* apostle—the apostle to the Gentiles. Since Acts 1 was written at least thirty years after the fact and long after Paul had become an apostle, it would have been simple for Luke to note that a mistake had been made. There was no mistake. Matthias was added to the eleven; he became “one of their number,” one of the Twelve.

The name of Matthias does not appear again in the New Testament, but each time we read of “the apostles” in our studies, Matthias was present. According to one legend, he became a missionary to Ethiopia and was imprisoned and blinded there. Another legend was that Matthias was sent to Damascus and later died at Phalaeon, a city of Judea.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not these legends were true, like all the apostles he became a witness of Jesus “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (v. 8).

The full number of twelve was restored to the apostleship. The apostles were again known as “the twelve” (see 6:2). The preparation was finished. Everything was ready. It was time for the coming of the Spirit.

## APPLICATION

### **The Establishment of the Kingdom/Church (Chs. 1, 2)**

*The kingdom/church existed in purpose.* Throughout eternity, it existed in the plans and purposes of God (see Eph. 3:10, 11).

*It existed in promise.* Throughout the Old Testament, the king-

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<sup>6</sup>C. M. Kerr, “Matthias,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 2012.

dom/church existed in prophecy and promise. Isaiah said that in the last days the Lord's house would be established and that the Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem (Is. 2:2, 3); Paul identifies the Lord's house as the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Daniel prophesied that God's kingdom would be established in the days of the Roman Empire (Dan. 2:44).

*It existed in preparation.* Christ began His personal ministry during the days of the Roman Empire. During His personal ministry, the kingdom/church existed in preparation. Both Jesus and John the Baptist preached that the kingdom was "at hand" or almost there (Mt. 4:17; 3:1, 2). Jesus stressed that His kingdom was a spiritual institution (Jn. 18:36) and used the terms "kingdom" and "church" interchangeably (Mt. 16:18, 19).

Jesus said that His kingdom would come "with power" (Mk. 9:1). After His resurrection, He told the disciples that the power would come when the Holy Spirit came and that they would be His witnesses beginning at Jerusalem (v. 8). They were to wait in Jerusalem until that power came; at that time repentance for the remission of sins would be preached in His name "beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:45-49).

*It existed, and continues to exist, in power.* The Holy Spirit came on the first Day of Pentecost after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (2:1-4). The power came; thus the kingdom/church was established.

As Isaiah and Jesus had foretold, the preaching of the gospel began at Jerusalem (2:29-38). People who believed, repented, and were baptized were added to the kingdom/church (2:41, 47; KJV). From that point, the kingdom/church was spoken of as being in existence (5:11; 8:1, 3; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:6).

Christ is now reigning in heaven over His kingdom, and He will continue to reign until He returns at the end of time (1 Cor. 15:24-27) to take His faithful followers with Him to heaven (Jn. 14:1-3).

### **Preparation (1:1-11)**

We must learn the importance of adequate preparation for doing God's work. Jesus prepared His apostles for the coming of the kingdom and the Holy Spirit. During His ministry, Jesus

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prepared His disciples to teach and evangelize by sending them out on the “Limited Commission” (Lk. 10:1–24). He also prepared His followers for His imminent death by instructing them (Mt. 20:17–19). We should adequately prepare ourselves and others for mission work, evangelistic meetings, and personal work. Preparation is an important key to training disciples.

### **Proclamation (1:8)**

Jesus prepared the apostles to be His witnesses throughout the world. Although we have not physically seen the risen Lord (as eyewitnesses), we have been changed by the power of His Word. One of today’s great needs is for Christians to proclaim their faith boldly—at home and away from home. An essential part of preparing to fulfill that task is recognizing the challenge—and realizing that God will empower us to do what He asks. We may not have the miraculous power the apostles had, but there is still “power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20).

Rick Atchley has a sermon on Acts 1 called “Witnessing the Difference.” The sermon draws a contrast between the evangelistic spirit of first-century Christians and that often exhibited by modern-day Christians. The difference is their *faith*. The sermon makes three points: (1) They believed that Jesus is *risen*; this gave them a *message*. (2) They believed that Jesus is *ruling*; this gave them a *mission*. (3) They believed that Jesus is *returning*; this gave them a *motivation*.

### **Developing a Mission Mindset (1:8)**

The same mission strategy that Christ gave the apostles should be used in His church today: begin at Jerusalem (our hometown), go to Judea and Samaria (our country), and then to “the remotest part of the earth” (the world). Are we interested in the lost souls of our community, nation, and world? Some are excited about local and national work, but exhibit little concern for other nations of the world. They ask, “Why spend money sending missionaries overseas when so many are lost here in our own country?” Why indeed? We might as well ask, “Why spend money to send preachers to unevangelized parts of our own country when there are so many lost in our own state?” or

“Why spend money to send the gospel all over our state when there are so many lost in our own town?” Or “Why spend money to evangelize this town when *I* need it so much?” The answer is simple: Because we are *Christians*, that is why.

### **Dependence on Christ (1:12)**

In America, we are proud of the Declaration of Independence. This famous document was signed on July 4, 1776, by the founders of the United States, declaring this nation’s independence from Great Britain. The War of Independence occurred shortly after this. When the apostles returned to Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded, they were signing their “Declaration of *Dependence*.” They were committing themselves to obey the Lord no matter what—and to depend entirely upon Him.

### **Patience (1:13, 14)**

As the apostles spent their time in the temple and the upper room, they were enduring one of the hardest parts of preparation: *waiting*. Most of us do not like to wait. Preparation takes time, but most of us do not get excited about the time it takes. We all need to learn this lesson. “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD” (Ps. 27:14). When we have to “wait on the Lord,” there is no better way to spend the time than in making sure all is right between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and our brothers in Christ.

### **Betrayal (1:18, 19)**

Luke’s graphic description of Judas’ suicide is ugly, even repulsive—probably deliberately so. Luke wanted Christians to know the ugliness of betraying the Lord and the consequences of that betrayal.

### **Seeking God’s Will (1:26)**

To determine God’s will today, we go to His Spirit-inspired Word. Even when we have to make decisions that are not spelled out in God’s Word, there are God-approved ways of learning His will, such as talking to mature Christian friends or looking

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for “open doors” (1 Cor. 16:9). To leave important decisions to chance (casting lots, etc.) is to try to escape the responsibility for our decisions.

