

THE DAYS OF PREPARATION (continued)

Acts 1:1-26.

1. The Forty Days. Acts 1:1-8.
2. The ascension of Christ. Acts 1:9-11.
3. The Days of Waiting. Acts 1:12-14.

Acting in simple obedience to the will of Christ, and confident of His protection, they returned from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem into the midst of those who had shed His blood. He defended them and enabled them to fulfill His will by making known His gospel to those who had come up to the feast.

By their return to Jerusalem they displayed obedience to Christ, Who had commanded them to tarry at Jerusalem until they should receive the promise of their Father. They also showed a fearless faith, because Jerusalem was the home of those who insulted, persecuted, tortured, and murdered their Master. It was nobly courageous, therefore, for them to hold their first meeting there, now that their great Protector and Lord had left them.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, they went up into the upper room. In all probability this upper room was the place where our Lord had eaten the Passover, where He had departed to Gethsemane. This room was full of hallowed memories, and going there was the most natural thing for them to do. They had suffered a great shock in the loss of Christ. The rabble of the street was out of keeping with their spirit, so they sought the shelter of seclusion. That is where men go in trouble, in sorrow, and in distress. It was the most beautiful and the most important thing which they might have done.

This upper room was symbolic of solitude. The quiet place has been a most important place in life; great souls are made there; great visions are seen there; great battles are won there. It was also symbolic of courage. The quiet place is where men courageously face themselves, and deal unmercifully with their faults. It was symbolic with the secret forces of power. There they could tap the springs of inexhaustible resources of strength and power. There they found comfort for their sorrows, strength for their weaknesses, assurance for their doubts, and light for their darkness. It was the symbol of unity. They were together. They prayed themselves together. That is the best way to get together--far better than argument. The place was shaken, and no wonder, because such unity would shake any place.

We are impressed with this assembly of Christians because all were there, in an attitude of expectancy, and they were clinging to their absent Lord in believing and loving fellowship.

Sad to say, there are those who look upon a prayer meeting as a foolish waste of time. The failure to have an upper room and to wait in that upper room explains the weakness of many churches today. When prayer ends, power ceases.

Those who were present at that memorable prayer meeting were a notable company. They included the eleven Apostles, the women, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and the brethren of our Lord. Ultimately a hundred and twenty attended that prayer meeting.

In the circle of that prayer group was Mary, the Mother of Jesus, along with other worshippers. When the writer mentioned her attendance at that meeting the curtain dropped forever upon Mary, and all her subsequent history is involved in obscurity. We do not know, when, or where, or how she died. This silence must be painful for those who worship her as God.

Mary was a good woman, but not without sin. She was highly honored, but was never to be worshipped. She suffered as others suffer. She repented of sins as others repent. She prayed as others pray. She died as others die, and her body returned to dust, as other bodies do, and she will be raised in the end as others are. She is not different from any other believer. She was faithful to her duty; she asked no favors, nor was she granted any. God was no more real to her than He was to the others. To ask her help in prayer is the sheerest folly; Christ will hear us as quickly as He would Mary. She is a worshipper, and not to be worshipped.

We must note the spirit of this prayer meeting. They were not only assembled together in the same place, and for the same purpose, but there was also a wonderful spirit of unity among them. They agreed in the blessings they sought, and in the mode of seeking them. A common desire ruled them all. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." They were together in purpose as well as in the place of assembly. That was a mark of the early disciples of Christ at all times, and an example for the disciples of Christ through all ages. Their persons, voices, hearts, and hopes were united. There was united, believing, persevering prayer.

4. The Completion of The Apostolate. Acts 1:15-26

One hundred and twenty persons were present in that upper room. Peter arose and spoke to them. In his remarks he called attention to the terrible fate of Judas Iscariot. In the mildest utterance imaginable he referred to Judas as the one "who was guide to them that took Jesus." This terrible end of Judas was in accordance with the predictions of scripture. It was an awful and an overwhelming catastrophe, but it was not unforeseen.

Peter's statement concerning Judas to the effect that "he was numbered with us" indicates that Judas was a mere name on the roll. He was numbered with the Apostles. In like manner church rolls today are burdened with the mere names of those who are numbered with us, but who have no interest in the Lord's work. Judas gave his name without his heart, his sympathy, his character, or his help. His name padded the roll, and became a liability instead of an asset. His enemies could hardly believe that he was one of the disciples, because he did not act like them. He was one of their number, but he proved such a disappointment that all the rest were embarrassed by the fact that he was numbered with them.

There is a sharp contrast between what Judas became and what he might have been. No one can excuse his shame on the ground that predestination drove him to it, for that is not true. He had a day and lost it. The divine favors which he received carried great responsibilities, but he refused to bear them. Power was placed in his hands, but he used it for destruction. He is mocked by the wreck he made of his life.

A field was purchased with the thirty pieces of silver which Judas received for his crime of betraying Jesus. It was purchased with his money, just as a man is said to build a house, although the house was not actually constructed by him. The field received its name, Aceldama, for a two-fold reason--because it was purchased by blood-money, and because the traitor employed came to a violent end.

How great was the fall of Judas! Judas went and hanged himself, and after a time the rope broke and he fell from that great height with such violence that "He burst asunder in the midst." What a striking retribution! The very plot of ground, which was purchased at the price of blood, was strewn with his mangled frame and dyed with his gore. The fact that his body was dashed to pieces on the spot which had been purchased with the money for which he had sold the Son of God to an excruciating death had a significance so terrible that it made the spot memorable for all time.

Peter proceeded to interpret the present by the scriptures of the past. He quoted from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8, and distinctly asserted that David wrote these things concerning Judas.

The Selection of Matthias As Apostle

Verses 21 to 26 chronicle their first meeting for the transaction of mere business, and from this incident we note certain things:

- (1) The business was of very grave importance. The business was nothing less than the election of an apostle to fill the place which Judas had desecrated and deserted.
- (2) The church members had an important duty to perform. Each of the hundred and twenty members assembled had a duty to perform in that meeting. They were responsible for exercising their best judgment in the selection of candidates. Note that these candidates were not selected by the eleven, but by the entire group of disciples assembled there.
- (3) They were competent to transact the business. These one hundred and twenty sought no counsel from any group of men external to themselves, nor would they have received any dictation from any person or society on side, however dignified in authority. The authority of a church to transact its own business is in itself, inspired and guided by Christ, its Head.
- (4) The meeting was presided over by the ablest of its members. For various reasons Peter was the most competent man to supervise the work at hand. His conduct proved that he was the man to direct the affairs on that particular occasion.

Peter maintained that the new apostle should be selected from those who were most intimate with Christ--one who had been associated with Christ during the whole of His public ministry, which ministry began with His baptism at the hands of John and terminated with His ascension. In other words, knowledge and faithfulness were the two qualities that were absolutely necessary. The one to be chosen must necessarily have been with Christ during His public ministry and have shown his steadfastness as the follower of Christ. The outstanding fact in the life of Christ to which the apostle had to bear witness was His resurrection from the dead. That was the crowning proof of His deity, the divine declaration

of His Sonship, and that which gave efficacy to His vicarious sufferings and death.

- (5) The meeting was characterized by earnest prayer for divine guidance. Their united prayer indicated their recognition of divine omniscience. They said, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men." Their prayer indicated a strong desire to have their choice determined by the choice of their Lord. They said, "Show whether of these two thou hast chosen." The meaning of their prayer was, "thy choice shall be ours. We desire only to vote for him whom thou hast ordained for the office. Thy will be done." That is the spirit of all true prayer.

Matthias was the Lord's choice, and he was named to take the place of Judas, thereby completing the apostolic circle. All that we know about Matthias is that he was a disciple of Christ, and a constant attendant on His travels and ministry from its commencement to His ascension. According to Nicephorus, he preached the gospel and later suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia. As to the correctness of this statement we are unable to state.