

CHAPTER 1

The inspired historian begins his narrative of the Acts of the Apostles,

I. With a reference to, and a brief recapitulation of, his gospel, or history of the life of Christ, inscribing this, as he had done that, to his friend Theophilus (v. 1, 2).

II. With a summary of the proofs of Christ's resurrection, his conference with his disciples, and the instructions he gave them during the forty days, of his continuance on earth (v. 3-5).

III. With a particular narrative of Christ's ascension into heaven, his disciples' discourse with him before he ascended, and the angels' discourse with them after he ascended (v. 6-11).

IV. With a general idea of the embryo of the Christian church, and its state from Christ's ascension to the pouring out of the Spirit (v. 12-14).

V. With a particular account of the filling up of the vacancy that was made in the sacred college by the death of Judas, by the electing of Matthias in his room (v. 15-26).

ACTS 1:1-5

PROOFS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

In these verses,

I. Theophilus is put in mind, and we in him, of St. Luke's gospel, which it will be of use for us to cast an eye upon before we enter upon the study of this book, that we may not only see how this begins where that breaks off, but that, *as in water face answers to face*, so do the acts of the apostles to the acts of their Master, the acts of his grace.

1. His patron, to whom he dedicates this book (I should rather say his *pupil*, for he designs, in dedicating it to him, to instruct and direct him, and not to crave his countenance or protection), is Theophilus, v. 1. In the epistle dedicatory before his gospel, he had called him *most excellent*

Theophilus; here he calls him no more than *O Theophilus*; not that he had lost his excellency, nor that it was diminished and become less illustrious; but perhaps he had now quitted his place, whatever it was, for the sake of which that title was given him, — or he was now grown into years, and despised such titles of respect more than he had done, — or Luke was grown more intimate with him, and therefore could address him with the more freedom. It was usual with the ancients, both Christian and heathen writers, thus to inscribe their writings to some particular persons. But the directing some of the books of the scripture so is an intimation to each of us to receive them as if directed to us in particular, to us by name; for *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*.

2. His gospel is here called *the former treatise which he had made*, which he had an eye to in writing this, intending this for a continuation and confirmation of that, *ton proton logon* — *the former word*. What is written of the gospel is the word as truly as what was spoken; nay, we now know no unwritten word that we are to give credit to, but as it agrees with that which is written. He made the former treatise, and now is divinely inspired to make this, for Christ's scholars must *go on towards perfection*, ^{<RMB>}Hebrews 6:1. And therefore their guides must help them on, must *still teach the people knowledge* (^{<RMB>}Ecclesiastes 12:9), and not think that their former labours, though ever so good, will excuse them from further labours; but they should rather be quickened and encouraged by them, as St. Luke here, who, because he had laid the foundation in a former treatise, will build upon it in this. Let not this therefore drive out that; let not new sermons and new books make us forget old ones, but put us in mind of them, and help us to improve them.

3. The contents of his gospel were *that, all that, which Jesus began both to do and teach*; and the same is the subject of the writings of the other three evangelists. Observe,

(1.) Christ both did and taught. The doctrine he taught was confirmed by the miraculous works he did, which proved him *a teacher come from God* (^{<RMB>}John 3:2); and the duties he taught were copied out in the holy gracious works he did, for he hath *left us an example*, and that such as proves him a *teacher come from God* too, for *by their fruits you shall know them*. Those are the best ministers that both do and teach, whose lives are a constant sermon.

(2.) *He began both to do and teach*; he laid the foundation of all that was to be taught and done in the Christian church. His apostles were to carry on and continue what he began, and to do and teach the same things. Christ set them in, and then left them to go on, but sent his Spirit to empower them both to do and teach. It is a comfort to those who are endeavouring to carry on the work of the gospel that Christ himself began it. The great salvation *at the first began to be spoken by the Lord*, ~~REV~~ Hebrews 2:3.

(3.) The four evangelists, and Luke particularly, have handed down to us *all that Jesus began both to do and to teach*; not all the particulars — the world could not have contained them; but all the heads, samples of all, so many, and in such variety, that by them we may judge of the rest. We have the beginnings of his doctrine (~~REV~~ Matthew 4:17), and the beginnings of his miracles, ~~REV~~ John 2:11. Luke had spoken, had treated, of all Christ's sayings and doings, had given us a general idea of them, though he had not recorded each in particular.

4. The period of the evangelical story is fixed *to the day in which he was taken up*, v. 2. Then it was that he left this world, and his bodily presence was no more in it. St. Mark's gospel concludes with *the Lord's being received up into heaven* (~~REV~~ Mark 16:19), and so does St. Luke's, ~~REV~~ Luke 24:51. Christ continued doing and teaching to the last, *till he was taken up to the other work he had to do within the veil*.

II. The truth of Christ's resurrection is maintained and evidenced, v. 3. That part of what was related in *the former treatise* was so material that it was necessary to be upon all occasions repeated. The great evidence of his resurrection was that *he showed himself alive to his apostles*; being alive, he showed himself so, and *he was seen of them*. They were honest men, and one may depend upon their testimony; but the question is whether they were not imposed upon, as many a well-meaning man is. No, they were not; for,

1. The proofs were infallible, *tekmeria* — *plain indications*, both that he was *alive* (he walked and talked with them, he ate and drank with them) and that *it was he himself, and not another*; for he showed them again and again the marks of *the wounds in his hands, and feet, and side*, which was the utmost proof the thing was capable of or required.

2. They were many, and often repeated: *He was seen by them forty days*, not constantly residing with them, but frequently appearing to them, and bringing them by degrees to be fully satisfied concerning it, so that all their sorrow for his departure was done away by it. Christ's staying upon earth so long after he had entered upon his state of exaltation and glory, to confirm the faith of his disciples and comfort their hearts, was such an instance of condescension and compassion to believers as may fully assure us *that we have a high priest that is touched with the feeling of our infirmities*.

III. A general hint given of the instructions he furnished his disciples with, now that he was about to leave them, and they, since *he breathed on them* and *opened their understandings*, were better able to receive them.

1. He instructed them concerning the work they were to do: *He gave commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen*. Note, Christ's choice is always attended with his charge. Those whom he elected into the apostleship expected he should give them preferments, instead of which *he gave them commandments*. When *he took his journey, and gave authority to his servants, and to every one his work* (^{411B}Mark 13:34), *he gave them commandments through the Holy Ghost*, which he was himself filled with as Mediator, and which he had breathed into them. In giving them the Holy Ghost, he gave them his commandments; for the Comforter will be a commander; and his office was *to bring to their remembrance what Christ had said*. *He charged those that were apostles by the Holy Ghost*; so the words are placed. It was their receiving the Holy Ghost that sealed their commission, ^{412D}John 20:22. He was not taken up till after he had given them their charge, and so finished his work.

2. He instructed them concerning the doctrine they were to preach: *He spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. He had given them a general idea of that kingdom, and the certain time it should be set up in the world (in his parable, Mark 13), but here he instructed them more in the nature of it, as a kingdom of grace in this world and of glory in the other, and opened to them that covenant which is the great charter by which it is incorporated. Now this was intended,

(1.) To prepare them to receive the Holy Ghost, and to go through that which they were designed for. He tells them in secret what they must tell

the world; and they shall find that the Spirit of truth, when he comes, will say the same.

(2.) To be one of the proofs of Christ's resurrection; so it comes in here; the disciples, to whom *he showed himself alive*, knew that it was he, not only by what he showed them, but by what he said to them. None but he could speak thus clearly, thus fully, *of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. He did not entertain them with discourses of politics or the kingdoms of men, of philosophy or the kingdom of nature, but pure divinity and the kingdom of grace, the things which most nearly concerned them, and those to whom they were sent.

IV. A particular assurance given them that they should now shortly receive the Holy Ghost, with orders given them to expect it (v. 4, 5), *he being assembled together with them*, probably in the interview at the mountain in Galilee which he had appointed before his death; for there is mention of their *coming together again* (v. 6), to attend his ascension. Though he had now ordered them to Galilee, yet they must not think to continue there; no, they must return to Jerusalem, and not depart thence. Observe,

1. The command he gives them to wait. This was to raise their expectations of something great; and something very great they had reason to expect from their exalted Redeemer.

(1.) They must wait till the time appointed, which is now *not many days hence*. Those that by faith hope promised mercies will come must with patience wait till they do come, according *to the time, the set time*. And when *the time draws nigh*, as now it did, we must, as Daniel, look earnestly for it, ^{<200B>}Daniel 9:3.

(2.) They must wait in the place appointed, *in Jerusalem*, for there the Spirit must be first poured out, because Christ was to be as *king upon the holy hill of Zion*; and because *the word of the Lord must go forth from Jerusalem*; this must be the mother-church. There Christ was put to shame, and therefore there he will have this honour done him, and this favour is done to Jerusalem to teach us to forgive our enemies and persecutors. The apostles were more exposed to danger at Jerusalem than they would have been in Galilee; but we may cheerfully trust God with our safety, when we keep in the way of our duty. The apostles were now to put

on a public character, and therefore must venture in a public station. Jerusalem was the fittest candlestick for those lights to be set up in.

2. The assurance he gives them that they shall not wait in vain.

(1.) The blessing designed them shall come, and they shall find it was worth waiting for; *You shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost*; that is,

[1.] “The Holy Ghost shall be poured out upon you more plentifully than ever.” They had already been breathed upon with the Holy Ghost (~~412~~ John 20:22), and they had found the benefit of it; but now they shall have larger measures of his gifts, graces, and comforts, and *be baptized with them*, in which there seems to be an allusion to those Old-Testament promises of the pouring out of the Spirit, ~~403~~ Joel 2:28; ~~244B~~ Isaiah 44:3; 32:15.

[2.] “You shall be cleansed and purified by the Holy Ghost,” as the priests were baptized and washed with water, when they were consecrated to the sacred function: “They had the sign; you shall have the thing signified. You shall be sanctified by the truth, as the Spirit shall lead you more and more into it, and have your consciences purged by the witness of the Spirit, that you may serve the living God in the apostleship.”

[3.] “You shall hereby be more effectually than ever engaged to your Master, and to his guidance, as Israel was *baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea*; you shall be tied so fast to Christ that you shall never, for fear of any sufferings, forsake him again, as once you did.”

(2.) Now this gift of the Holy Ghost he speaks of,

[1.] As *the promise of the Father, which they had heard of him*, and might therefore depend upon. *First*, The Spirit was given by promise, and it was at this time the great promise, as that of the Messiah was before (~~417~~ Luke 1:72), and that of eternal life is now, ~~412S~~ 1 John 2:25. Temporal good things are given by Providence, but the Spirit and spiritual blessings are given by promise, ~~403S~~ Galatians 3:18. The Spirit of God is not given as the spirit of men is given us, and formed within us, by a course of nature (~~311E~~ Zechariah 12:1), but by the word of God.

1. That the gift may be the more valuable, Christ thought the promise of the Spirit a legacy worth leaving to his church.

2. That it may be the more sure, and that the heirs of promise may be confident of the immutability of God's counsel herein.

3. That it may be of grace, peculiar grace, and may be received by faith, laying hold on the promise, and depending upon it. As Christ, so the Spirit, is received by faith. *Secondly*, It was *the promise of the Father*,

(1.) Of Christ's Father. Christ, as Mediator, had an eye to God as his Father, fathering his design, and owning it all along.

(2.) Of our Father, who, if he give us *the adoption of sons*, will certainly give us *the Spirit of adoption*, ^{<4045}Galatians 4:5, 6. He will give the Spirit, as *the Father of lights*, as *the Father of spirits*, and as *the Father of mercies*; it is *the promise of the Father*. *Thirdly*, This promise of the Father they had heard from Christ many a time, especially in the farewell sermon he preached to them a little before he died, wherein he assured them, again and again, that *the Comforter* should come. This confirms the promise of God, and encourages us to depend upon it, that we have heard it from Jesus Christ; *for in him all the promises of God are yea, and amen*. “You have heard it from me; and I will make it good.”

[2.] As the prediction of John Baptist; for so far back Christ here directs them to look (v. 5): “You have not only heard it from me, but you had it from John; when he turned you over to me, he said (^{<4011}Matthew 3:11), *I indeed baptize you with water, but he that comes after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost*.” It is a great honour that Christ now does to John, not only to quote his words, but to make this great gift of the Spirit, now at hand, to be the accomplishment of them. Thus *he confirmeth the word of his servants, his messengers*, ^{<2405}Isaiah 44:26. But Christ can do more than any of his ministers. It is an honour to them to be employed in dispensing the means of grace, but it his prerogative to give *the Spirit of grace*. *He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost*, shall teach you by his Spirit, and give his Spirit to make intercession in you, which is more than the best ministers preaching with us.

(3.) Now this gift of the Holy Ghost thus promised, thus prophesied of, thus waited for, is that which we find the apostles received in the next chapter, for in that this promise had its full accomplishment; this was it *that should come*, and *we look for no other*; for it is here promised to be given *not many days hence*. He does not tell them how many, because they must keep every day in a frame fit to receive it. Other scriptures speak of *the gift of the Holy Ghost* to ordinary believers; this speaks of that

particular power which, by the Holy Ghost, the first preachers of the gospel, and planters of the church, were endued with, enabling them infallibly to relate to that age, and record to posterity, the doctrine of Christ, and the proofs of it; so that by virtue of this promise, and the performance of it, we receive the New Testament as of divine inspiration, and venture our souls upon it.

406 ACTS 1:6-11

CHRIST'S ADDRESS TO HIS APOSTLES

In Jerusalem Christ, by his angel, had appointed his disciples to meet him in Galilee; there he appointed them to meet him in Jerusalem again, such a day. Thus he would try their obedience, and it was found ready and cheerful; *they came together*, as he appointed them, to be *the witnesses* of his ascension, of which we have here an account. Observe,

I. The question they asked him at this interview. *They came together* to him, as those that had consulted one another about it, and concurred in the question *nemine contradicente* — *unanimously*; they came in a body, and put it to him as the sense of the house, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* Two ways this may be taken: —

1. “Surely thou wilt not at all restore it to the present rulers of Israel, the chief priests and the elders, that put thee to death, and, to compass that design, tamely gave up the kingdom to Caesar, and owned themselves his subjects. What! Shall those that hate and persecute thee and us be trusted with power? *This be far from thee.*” Or rather,

2. “Surely thou wilt now restore it to the Jewish nation, as far as it will submit to thee as their king.” Now two things were amiss in this question:

(1.) Their expectation of the thing itself. They thought Christ would *restore the kingdom to Israel*, that is, that he would make the nation of the Jews as great and considerable among the nations as it was *in the days of David and Solomon, of Asa and Jehoshaphat*; that, as Shiloh, he would *restore the sceptre to Judah, and the lawgiver*; whereas Christ came to set

up his own kingdom, and that a kingdom of heaven, not to *restore the kingdom to Israel*, an earthly kingdom. See here,

[1.] How apt even good men are to place the happiness of the church too much in external pomp and power; as if Israel could not be glorious unless the kingdom were restored to it, nor Christ's disciples honoured unless they were peers of the realm; whereas we are told to expect the cross in this world, and to wait for the kingdom in the other world.

[2.] How apt we are to retain what we have imbibed, and how hard it is to get over the prejudices of education. The disciples, having sucked in this notion with their milk that the Messiah was to be a temporal prince, were long before they could be brought to have any idea of his kingdom as spiritual.

[3.] How naturally we are biased in favour of our own people. They thought God would have no kingdom in the world unless it were *restored to Israel*; whereas the kingdoms of this world were to become his, in whom he would be glorified, whether Israel should sink or swim.

[4.] How apt we are to misunderstand scripture — to understand that literally which is spoken figuratively, and to expound scripture by our schemes, whereas we ought to form our schemes by the scriptures. But, *when the Spirit shall be poured out from on high*, our mistakes will be rectified, as the apostles' soon after were.

(2.) Their enquiry concerning the time of it: “*Lord, wilt thou do it at this time?* Now that thou hast called us together is it for this purpose, that proper measures may be concerted for the restoring of the kingdom to Israel? Surely there cannot be a more favourable juncture than this.” Now herein they missed their mark,

[1.] That they were inquisitive into that which their Master had never directed nor encouraged them to enquire into.

[2.] That they were impatient for the setting up of that kingdom in which they promised themselves so great a share, and would anticipate the divine counsels. Christ had told them that they should *sit on thrones* (⁴²²⁰Luke 22:30), and now nothing will serve them but they must be in the throne immediately, and cannot stay the time; whereas *he that believeth doth not make haste*, but is satisfied that God's time is the best time.

II. The check which Christ gave to this question, like that which he had a little before given to Peter's enquiry concerning John, *What is that to thee?* v. 7, *It is not for you to know the times and seasons.* He does not contradict their expectation that the kingdom would be restored to Israel, because that mistake would soon be rectified by the pouring out of the Spirit, after which they never had any more thoughts of the temporal kingdom; and also because there is a sense of the expectation which is true, the setting up of the gospel kingdom in the world; and their mistake of the promise shall not make it of no effect; but he checks their enquiry after the time.

1. The knowledge of this is not allowed to them: *It is not for you to know,* and therefore it is not for you to ask.

(1.) Christ is now parting from them, and parts in love; and yet he gives them this rebuke, which is intended for a caution to his church in all ages, to take heed of splitting upon the rock which was fatal to our first parents — an inordinate desire of forbidden knowledge, and intruding into things which we have not seen because God has not shown them. *Nescire velle quae magister maximus docere non vult, erudita inscitia est* — *It is folly to covet to be wise above what is written, and wisdom to be content to be no wiser.*

(2.) Christ had given his disciples a great deal of knowledge above others (*to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God*), and had promised them his Spirit, to teach them more; now, lest they should be puffed up with the abundance of the revelations, he here lets them understand that there were some things which it was not for them to know. We shall see how little reason we have to be proud of our knowledge when we consider how many things we are ignorant of.

(3.) Christ had given his disciples instructions sufficient for the discharge of their duty, both before his death and since his resurrection, and in this knowledge he will have them to be satisfied; for it is enough for a Christian, in whom vain curiosity is a corrupt humour, to be mortified, and not gratified.

(4.) Christ had himself told his disciples *the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*, and had promised that the Spirit should *show them things to come* concerning it, ^{16:13}John 16:13. He had likewise given them *signs of the times*, which it was their duty to observe, and a sin to overlook,

Matthew 24:33; 16:3. But they must not expect nor desire to know either all the particulars of future events or the exact times of them. It is good for us to be kept in the dark, and left at uncertainty concerning *the times and moments* (as Dr. Hammond reads it) of future events concerning the church, as well as concerning ourselves, — concerning all the periods of time and the final period of it, as well as concerning the period of our own time.

*Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosa nocte premit Deus —*

*But Jove, in goodness ever wise,
Hath hid, in clouds of thickest night,
All that in future prospect lies
Beyond the ken of mortal sight. — Hor.*

As to the times and seasons of the year, we know, in general, there will be summer and winter counterchanged, but we know not particularly which day will be fair or which foul, either in summer or in winter; so, as to our affairs in this world, when it is a summer-time of prosperity, that we may not be secure, we are told there will come a wintertime of trouble; and in that winter, that we may not despond and despair, we are assured that summer will return; but what this or that particular *day will bring forth* we cannot tell, but must accommodate ourselves to it, whatever it is, and make the best of it.

2. The knowledge of it is reserved to God as his prerogative; it is what *the Father hath put in his own power*; it is hid with him. None besides can reveal the times and seasons to come. *Known unto God are all his works*, but not to us, Acts 15:18. It is in his power, and in his only, *to declare the end from the beginning*; and by this he proves himself to be God, Isaiah 46:10. “And though he did think fit sometimes to let the Old-Testament prophets know the times and the seasons (as of the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt four hundred years, and in Babylon seventy years), yet he has not fit to let you know the times and seasons, no not just how long it shall be before Jerusalem be destroyed, though you be so well assured of the thing itself. He hath not said that he will not give you to know something more than you do of the times and seasons;” he did so afterwards *to his servant John*; “but he has put it in his own power to do it or not, as he thinks fit;” and what is in that New-Testament prophecy discovered concerning the times and the seasons is so dark, and hard to be

understood, that, when we come to apply it, it concerns us to remember this work, that it is not for us to be positive in determining the times and the seasons. Buxtorf mentions a saying of the rabbin concerning the coming of the Messiah: *Rumpatur spiritus eorum qui supputant tempora* — *Perish the men who calculate the time.*

III. He appoints them their work, and with authority assures them of an ability to go on with it, and of success in it. “*It is not for you to know the times and the seasons* — this would do you no good; but know this (v. 8) that you shall receive a spiritual *power*, by the *descent of the Holy Ghost upon you*, and shall not receive it in vain, for *you shall be witnesses unto me* and my glory; and your testimony shall not be in vain, for it shall be received here in Jerusalem, in the country about, and all the world over,” v. 8. If Christ make us serviceable to his honour in our own day and generation, let this be enough for us, and let not us perplex ourselves about times and seasons to come. Christ here tells them,

1. That their work should be honourable and glorious: *You shall be witnesses unto me.*

(1.) They shall proclaim him king, and publish those truths to the world by which his kingdom should be set up, and he would rule. They must openly and solemnly preach his gospel to the world.

(2.) They shall prove this, shall confirm their testimony, not as witnesses do, with an oath, but with the divine seal of miracles and supernatural gifts: *You shall be martyrs to me, or my martyrs*, as some copies read it; for they attested the truth of the gospel with their sufferings, even unto death.

2. That their power for this work should be sufficient. They had not strength of their own for it, nor wisdom nor courage enough; they were naturally of *the weak and foolish things of the world*; they durst not appear as witnesses for Christ upon his trial, neither as yet were they able. “*But you shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you*” (so it may be read), “shall be animated and actuated by a better spirit than your own; you shall have power to preach the gospel, and to prove it out of the scriptures of the Old Testament” (which, when they were *filled with the Holy Ghost*, they did to admiration, ~~4838~~ Acts 18:28), “and to confirm it both by miracles and by sufferings.” Note, Christ's witnesses shall receive

power for that work to which he calls them; those whom he employs in his service he will qualify for it, and will bear them out in it.

3. That their influence should be great and very extensive: “*You shall be witnesses for Christ, and shall carry his cause,*”

(1.) “*In Jerusalem;* there you must begin, and many there will receive your testimony; and those that do not will be left inexcusable.”

(2.) “*Your light shall thence shine throughout all Judea,* where before you have laboured in vain.”

(3.) “*Thence you shall proceed to Samaria,* though at your first mission you were forbidden to preach in *any of the cities of the Samaritans.*”

(4.) “*Your usefulness shall reach to the uttermost part of the earth,* and you shall be blessings to the whole world.”

IV. Having left these instructions with them, he leaves them (v. 9): *When he had spoken these things, and had said all that he had to say, he blessed them* (so we were told, ^{<428f>}Luke 24:50); and *while they beheld him, and had their eye fixed upon him, receiving his blessing, he was gradually taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.* We have here Christ's ascending on high; not fetched away, as Elijah was, with *a chariot of fire and horses of fire*, but rising to heaven, as he rose from the grave, purely by his own power, his body being now, as the bodies of the saints will be at the resurrection, a spiritual body, and raised in power and incorruption. Observe,

1. He began his ascension in the sight of his disciples, even *while they beheld.* They did not see him come up out of the grave, because they might see him after he had risen, which would be satisfaction enough; but they saw him go up towards heaven, and had actually their eye upon him with so much care and earnestness of mind that they could not be deceived. It is probable that he did not fly swiftly up, but moved upwards gently, for the further satisfaction of his disciples.

2. He *vanished out of their sight, in a cloud,* either a thick cloud, for God said that he would *dwell in the thick darkness;* or a bright cloud, to signify the splendour of his glorious body. It was a bright cloud that overshadowed him in his transfiguration, and most probably this was so, ^{<477f>}Matthew 17:5. This *cloud received him,* it is probable, when he had

gone about as far from the earth as the clouds generally are; yet it was not such a spreading cloud as we commonly see, but such as just served to enclose him. Now he *made the clouds his chariot*, ^{<B4A>}Psalm 104:3. God had often come down in a cloud; now he went up in one. Dr. Hammond thinks that the clouds receiving him here were the angels receiving him; for the appearance of angels is ordinarily described by a cloud, comparing ^{<D52>}Exodus 25:22 with ^{<B4D>}Leviticus 16:2. By the clouds there is a sort of communication kept up between the upper and lower world; in them the vapours are sent up from the earth, and the dews sent down from heaven. Fity therefore does he ascend in a cloud who is *the Mediator between God and man*, by whom God's mercies come down upon us and our prayers come up to him. This was the last that was seen of him. The eyes of a great many witnesses followed him into the cloud; and, if we would know what became of him then, we may find (^{<D713>}Daniel 7:13), *That one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him in the clouds as he came near before him.*

V. The disciples, when he had gone out of their sight, yet still continued *looking up stedfastly to heaven* (v. 10), and this longer than it was fit they should; and why so?

1. Perhaps they hoped that Christ would presently come back to them again, to restore the kingdom to Israel, and were loth to believe they should now part with him for good and all; so much did they still dote upon his bodily presence, though he had told them that *it was expedient for them that he should go away*. or, they looked after him, as doubting whether he might not be dropped, as *the sons of the prophets* thought concerning Elijah (^{<D76>}2 Kings 2:16), and so they might have him again.

2. Perhaps they expected to see some change in the visible heavens now upon Christ's ascension, that either *the sun should be ashamed or the moon confounded* (^{<D323>}Isaiah 24:23), as being out-shone by his lustre; or, rather, that they should show some sign of joy and triumph; or perhaps they promised themselves a sight of the glory of the invisible heavens, upon their opening to receive him. Christ had told them that hereafter they should *see heaven opened* (^{<B413>}John 1:51), and why should not they expect it now?

VI. Two angels appeared to them, and delivered them a seasonable message from God. There was a world of angels ready to receive our

Redeemer, now that he made his public entry into *the Jerusalem above*: we may suppose these two loth to be absent then; yet, to show how much Christ had at heart the concerns of his church on earth, he sent back to his disciples two of those that came to meet him, who appear as *two men in white apparel*, bright and glittering; for they know, according to the duty of their place, that they are really serving Christ when they are ministering to his servants on earth. Now we are told what the angels said to them,

1. To check their curiosity: *You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven?* He calls them *men of Galilee*, to put them in mind of *the rock out of which they were hewn*. Christ had put a great honour upon them, in making them his ambassadors; but they must remember that they are men, earthen vessels, and men of Galilee, illiterate men, looked upon with disdain. Now, say they, “*Why stand you here*, like Galileans, rude and unpolished men, *gazing up into heaven?* What would you see? You have seen all that you were called together to see, and why do you look any further? *Why stand you gazing*, as men frightened and perplexed, as men astonished and at their wits' end?” Christ's disciples should never stand at a gaze, because they have a sure rule to go by, and a sure foundation to build upon.

2. To confirm their faith concerning Christ's second coming. Their Master had often told them of this, and the angels are sent at this time seasonably to put them in mind of it: “*This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven*, and whom you are looking thus long after, wishing you had him with you again, is not gone for ever; for there is a day appointed in which he *will come in like manner thence, as you have seen him go thither*, and you must not expect him back till that appointed day.”

(1.) “*This same Jesus shall come again in his own person, clothed with a glorious body; this same Jesus, who came once to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, will appear a second time without sin* (³⁰⁵ Hebrews 9:26, 28), who came once in disgrace to be judged, will come again in glory to judge. *The same Jesus* who has given you your charge will come again to call you to an account how you have performed your trust; *he, and not another,*” ³⁰⁷ Job 19:27.

(2.) “*He shall come in like manner. He is gone away in a cloud, and attended with angels; and, behold, he comes in the clouds, and with him an innumerable company of angels! He is gone up with a shout and with the sound of a trumpet* (³⁰⁵ Psalm 47:5), and he will *descend from heaven*

with a shout and with the trump of God, ^{<5046>}1 Thessalonians 4:16. You have now lost the sight of him in the clouds and in the air; and *whither he is gone you cannot follow him now*, but shall then, when you shall *be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*” When we stand gazing and trifling, the consideration of our Master's second coming should quicken and awaken us; and, when we stand gazing and trembling, the consideration of it should comfort and encourage us.

~~<4112>~~ ACTS 1:12-14

THE APOSTLES IN JERUSALEM

We are here told,

I. Whence Christ ascended — *from the mount of Olives* (v. 12), from that part of it where the town of Bethany stood, ^{<0281>}Luke 24:50. There he began his sufferings (^{<0229>}Luke 22:39), and therefore there he rolled away the reproach of them by his glorious ascension, and thus showed that his passion and his ascension had the same reference and tendency. Thus would he enter upon his kingdom in the sight of Jerusalem, and of those undutiful ungrateful citizens of his that would not have him to reign over them. It was prophesied of him (^{<3404>}Zechariah 14:4), *That his feet should stand upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem*, should stand last there; and presently it follows, *The mount of Olives shall cleave in two. From the mount of Olives he ascended who is the good olive-tree*, whence we receive *the unction*, ^{<3842>}Zechariah 4:12; ^{<6124>}Romans 11:24. This mount is here said to be near Jerusalem, *a sabbath day's journey* from it, that is, a little way; no further than devout people used to walk out on a sabbath evening, after the public worship was over, for meditation. Some reckon it a thousand paces, others two thousand cubits; some seven furlongs, others eight. Bethany indeed was *fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem* (^{<6118>}John 11:18), but that part of the mount of Olives which was next to Jerusalem, whence Christ began to ride in triumph, was but seven or eight furlongs off. The Chaldee paraphrast on Ruth 1 says, *We are commanded to keep the sabbaths and the holy days, so as not to go above two thousand cubits*, which they build upon ^{<6004>}Joshua 3:4, where, in their march through Jordan, the space between them and the ark was to be *two thousand cubits*. God had not then thus limited them, but they limited

themselves; and thus far it is a rule to us, not to journey on the sabbath any more than in order to the sabbath work; and as far as is necessary to this we are not only allowed, but enjoined, ¹⁰⁴³2 Kings 4:23.

II. Whither the disciples returned: They came to Jerusalem, according to their Master's appointment, though there they were in the midst of enemies; but it should seem that though immediately after Christ's resurrection they were watched, and were *in fear of the Jews*, yet after it was known that they were gone into Galilee no notice was taken of their return to Jerusalem, nor any further search made for them. God can find out hiding-places for his people in the midst of their enemies, and so influence Saul that he shall not seek for David any more. At Jerusalem they *went up into an upper room, and there abode*; not that they all lodged and dined together in one room, but there they assembled every day, and spent time together in religious exercises, in expectation of the descent of the Spirit. Divers conjectures the learned have about this upper room. Some think it was one of the upper rooms in the temple; but it cannot be thought that the chief priests, who had the letting of these rooms, would suffer Christ's disciples constantly to reside in any of them. It was said indeed, by the same historian, that *they were continually in the temple* (¹⁰²⁵Luke 24:53), but that was *in the courts of the temple, at the hours of prayer*, where they could not be hindered from attending; but, it should seem, this upper room was in a private house. Mr. Gregory, of Oxford, is of this opinion, and quotes a Syriac scholiast upon this place, who says that it was *the same upper room in which they had eaten the passover*; and though that was called *anogeon*, this *hyperoon*, both may signify the same. "Whether," says he, "it was in the house of St. John the evangelist, as Euodius delivered, or that of Mary the mother of John Mark, as others have collected, cannot be certain." Notes, Acts 13.

III. Who the disciples were, that kept together. The eleven apostles are here named (v. 13), so is Mary the mother of our Lord (v. 14), and it is the last time that ever any mention is made of her in the scriptures. There were others that are here said to be the brethren of our Lord, *his kinsmen according to the flesh*; and, to make up *the hundred and twenty* spoken of (v. 15), we may suppose that all or most of *the seventy disciples* were with them, that were associates with the apostles, and were employed as evangelists.

IV. How they spent their time: *They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.* Observe,

1. *They prayed, and made supplication.* All God's people are praying people, and *give themselves to prayer.* It was now a time of trouble and danger with the disciples of Christ; they were as sheep in the midst of wolves; and, *Is any afflicted? Let him pray;* this will silence cares and fears. They had new work before them, great work, and, before they entered upon it, *they were instant in prayer to God* for his presence with them in it. Before they were first sent forth Christ spent time in prayer for them, and now they spent time in prayer for themselves. They were waiting for the descent of the Spirit upon them, and therefore abounded thus in prayer. The Spirit descended upon our Saviour when he was praying, ^{<4181>}Luke 3:21. Those are in the best frame to receive spiritual blessings that are in a praying frame. Christ had promised now shortly to send the Holy Ghost; now this promise was not to supersede prayer, but to quicken and encourage it. God will be enquired of for promised mercies, and the nearer the performance seems to be the more earnest we should be in prayer for it.

2. *They continued in prayer,* spent much time in it, more than ordinary, prayed frequently, and were long in prayer. They never missed an hour of prayer; they resolved to persevere herein till the Holy Ghost came, according to the promise, *to pray, and not to faint.* It is said (^{<4253>}Luke 24:53), *They were praising and blessing God;* here, *They continued in prayer and supplication;* for as praise for the promise is a decent way of begging for the performance, and praise for former mercy of begging further mercy, so, in seeking to God, we give him the glory of the mercy and grace which we have found in him.

3. They did this *with one accord.* This intimates that they were together in holy love, and that there was no quarrel nor discord among them; and those who so keep *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* are best prepared to receive the *comforts of the Holy Ghost.* It also intimates their worthy concurrence in the supplications that were made; though but one spoke, they all prayed, and if, when *two agree to ask, it shall be done for them,* much more when many agree in the same petition. See ^{<4189>}Matthew 18:19.

~~<4115>~~ ACTS 1:15-26

MATTHIAS ELECTED TO BE AN APOSTLE

The sin of Judas was not only his shame and ruin, but it made a vacancy in the college of the apostles. They were ordained twelve, with an eye *to the twelve tribes of Israel*, descended from the twelve patriarchs; they were *the twelve stars* that make up the church's crown (~~<4112>~~ Revelation 12:1), and for them *twelve thrones* were designated, ~~<4113>~~ Matthew 19:28. Now being twelve when they were learners, if they were but eleven when they were to be teachers, it would occasion every one to enquire what had become of the twelfth, and so revive the remembrance of the scandal of their society; and therefore care was taken, before the descent of the Spirit, to fill up the vacancy, of the doing of which we now have an account, our Lord Jesus, probably, having given directions about it, among other things which he spoke *pertaining to the kingdom of God*. Observe,

I. The persons concerned in this affair.

1. The house consisted of *about a hundred and twenty*. This was *the number of the names*, that is, the persons; some think the men only, distinguished from the women. Dr. Lightfoot reckons that *the eleven apostles, the seventy disciples*, and about thirty-nine more, all of Christ's own kindred, country, and concourse, made up this *one hundred and twenty*, and that these were a sort of synod, or congregation of ministers, a standing presbytery (~~<4103>~~ Acts 4:23), *to whom none of the rest durst join themselves* (~~<4113>~~ Acts 5:13), and that they continued together till the persecution at Stephen's death dispersed them all but the apostles (~~<4111>~~ Acts 8:1); but he thinks that besides these there were many hundreds in Jerusalem, if not thousands, at this time, that believed; and we have indeed read of many that *believed on him there, but durst not confess him*, and therefore I cannot think, as he does, that they were now formed into distinct congregations, for the preaching of the word and other acts of worship; nor that there was any thing of this till after the pouring out of the Spirit, and the conversions recorded in the following chapter. Here was the beginning of the Christian church: this hundred and twenty was the grain of mustard-seed that grew into a tree, the leaven that leavened the whole lump.

2. The speaker was Peter, who had been, and still was, the most forward man; and therefore notice is taken of his forwardness and zeal, to show that he had perfectly recovered the ground he lost by his denying his Master, and, Peter being designed to be the apostle of the circumcision, while the sacred story stays among the Jews, he is still brought in, as afterwards, when it comes to speak of the Gentiles, it keeps to the story of Paul.

II. The proposal which Peter made for the choice of another apostle. He *stood up in the midst of the disciples*, v. 15. He did not sit down, as one that gave laws, or had any supremacy over the rest, but stood up, as one that had only a motion to make, in which he paid a deference to his brethren, standing up when he spoke to them. Now in his speech we may observe,

1. The account he gives of the vacancy made by the death of Judas, in which he is very particular, and, as became one that Christ had breathed upon, takes notice of the fulfilling of the scriptures in it. Here is,

(1.) The power to which Judas had been advanced (v. 17): *He was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry* which we are invested with. Note, Many are numbered with the saints in this world that will not be found among them in the day of separation between the precious and the vile. What will it avail us to be added to the number of Christians, if we partake not of the spirit and nature of Christians? Judas's having obtained part of this ministry was but an aggravation of his sin and ruin, as it will be of theirs who *prophesied in Christ's name*, and yet were *workers of iniquity*.

(2.) The sin of Judas, notwithstanding his advancement to this honour. He was *guide to those that took Jesus*, not only informed Christ's persecutors where they might find him (which they might have done effectually though he had kept out of sight), but he had the impudence to appear openly at the head of the party that seized him. He went before them to the place, and, as if he had been proud of the honour, gave the word of command: *That same is he, hold him fast*. Note, Ringleaders in sin are the worst of sinners, especially if those that by their office should have been guides to the friends of Christ are guides to his enemies.

(3.) The ruin of Judas by this sin. Perceiving the chief priests to seek the life of Christ and his disciples, he thought to save his by going over to

them, and not only so, but to get an estate under them, of which his wages for his service, he hoped, would be but an earnest; but see what came of it.

[1.] He lost his money shamefully enough (v. 18): *He purchased a field* with the *thirty pieces of silver*, which were the *reward of his iniquity*. He did not purchase the field, but the wages of his unrighteousness did, and it is very elegantly expressed thus, in derision of his projects to enrich himself by this bargain. He thought to have purchased a field for himself, as Gehazi did with what he got from Naaman by a lie (see ^{<116>}2 Kings 5:26), but it proved the purchase of a field to bury strangers in; and what was he or any of his the better for this? It was to him an unrighteous mammon, it deceived him; and the reward of his iniquity was the *stumbling-block of his iniquity*.

[2.] He lost his life more shamefully. We were told (^{<17>}Matthew 27:5) that he *went away* in despair, and was suffocated (so the word signifies there, and no more); here it is added (as latter historians add to those who went before) that, being strangled, or choked with grief and horror, he *fell headlong*, *fell on his face* (so Dr. Hammond), and partly with the swelling of his own breast, and partly with the violence of the fall, he *burst asunder in the midst*, so that *all his bowels tumbled out*. If, when the devil was cast out of a child, he *tore him*, *threw him down*, and *rent him*, and almost killed him (as we find ^{<116>}Mark 9:26; ^{<190>}Luke 9:42), no wonder if, when he had full possession of Judas, he threw him headlong, and burst him. The suffocation of him, which Matthew relates, would make him swell till he burst, which Peter relates. he burst asunder *with a great noise* (so Dr. Edwards), which was heard by the neighbours, and so, as it follows, it came *to be known* (v. 19): *His bowels gushed out*; Luke writes like a physician, understanding all the entrails of the middle and lower ventricle. Bowelling is part of the punishment of traitors. Justly do those bowels gush out that were shut up against the Lord Jesus. And perhaps Christ had an eye to the fate of Judas, when he said of the wicked servant that he would *cut him in sunder*, ^{<125>}Matthew 24:51.

(4.) The public notice that was taken of this: *It was known to all the dwellers in Jerusalem*. It was, as it were, put into the newspapers, and was all the talk of the town, as a remarkable judgment of God upon him that betrayed his Master, v. 19. It was not only discoursed of among the disciples, but it was in every body's mouth, and nobody disputed the truth of the fact. *It was known*, that is, it was known to be true, incontestably so.

Now one would think this should have awakened those to repentance that had had any hand in the death of Christ when they saw him that had the first hand thus made an example. But their hearts were hardened, and, as to those of them that were to be softened, it must be done by the word, and the Spirit working with it. Here is one proof of the notoriety of the thing mentioned, that the field which was purchased with Judas's money was called *Aeldama* — *the field of blood*, because it was bought with the *price of blood*, which perpetuated the infamy not only of him that sold that innocent precious blood, but of those that bought it too. Look how they will answer it, when God shall make inquisition for blood.

(5.) The fulfilling of the scriptures in this, which had spoken so plainly of it, *that it must needs be fulfilled*, v. 16. Let none be surprised nor stumble at it, that this should be the exit of one of the twelve, for David had not only foretold his sin (which Christ had taken notice of, ~~133~~ John 13:18, from ~~149~~ Psalm 41:9, He that *eateth bread with me hath lifted up the heel against me*), but had also foretold,

[1.] His punishment (~~165~~ Psalm 69:25): *Let his habitation be desolate*. This Psalm refers to the Messiah. Mention is made but two or three verses before of their giving him gall and vinegar, and therefore the following predictions of the destruction of David's enemies must be applied to the enemies of Christ, and particularly to Judas. Perhaps he had some habitation of his own at Jerusalem, which, upon this, every body was afraid to live in, and so it became desolate. This prediction signifies the same with that of Bildad concerning the wicked man, that his *confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and shall bring him to the king of terrors: it shall dwell in his tabernacle, because it is none of his; brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation*, ~~184~~ Job 18:14, 15.

[2.] The substitution of another in his room. His *bishopric*, or *his office* (for so the word signifies in general) *shall another take*, which is quoted from ~~198~~ Psalm 109:8. With this quotation Peter very aptly introduces the following proposal. Note, We are not to think the worse of any office that God has instituted (whether magistracy or ministry) either for the wickedness of any that are in that office or for the ignominious punishment of that wickedness; nor will God suffer any purpose of his to be frustrated, any commission of his to be vacated, or any work of his to be undone, for the miscarriages of those that are entrusted therewith. *The unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of no effect*. Judas is

hanged, but his bishopric is not lost. It is said of *his habitation*, that *no man shall dwell therein*, there he shall have no heir; but it is not said so of his bishopric, there he shall not want a successor. It is with the officers of the church as with the members of it, if the *natural branches be broken off*, others shall be *grafted in*, [☞]Romans 11:17. Christ's cause shall never be lost for want of witnesses.

2. The motion he makes for the choice of another apostle, v. 21, 22. Here observe,

(1.) How the person must be qualified that must fill the vacancy. It must be one of *these men*, these seventy disciples, *that have companied with us*, that have constantly attended us, *all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*, preaching and working miracles for three years and a half, *beginning from the baptism of John*, from which the gospel of Christ commenced, *unto that same day that he was taken up from us*. Those that have been diligent, faithful, and constant, in the discharge of their duty in a lower station, are fittest to be preferred to a higher; those that have been faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more. And none should be employed as ministers of Christ, preachers of his gospel, and rulers in his church, but those that are well acquainted with his doctrine and doings, from first to last. None shall be an apostle but one that has companied with the apostles, and that continually; not that has visited them now and then, but been intimately conversant with them.

(2.) To what work he is called that must fill up the vacancy: He must be *a witness with us of his resurrection*. By this it appears that others of the disciples were with the eleven when Christ appeared to them, else they could not have been *witnesses with them*, as competent witnesses as they, of his resurrection. The great thing which the apostles were to attest to the world was Christ's resurrection, for this was the great proof of his being the Messiah, and the foundation of our hope in him. See what the apostles were ordained to, not to a secular dignity and dominion, but to preach Christ, and the power of his resurrection.

III. The nomination of the person that was to succeed Judas in his office as an apostle.

1. Two, who were known to have been Christ's constant attendants, and men of great integrity, were set up as candidates for the place (v. 23): *They appointed two*; not the *eleven*, they did not take upon them to determine

who should be put up, but the *hundred and twenty*, for to them Peter spoke, and not to the eleven. The two they nominated were *Joseph* and *Matthias*, of neither of whom do we read elsewhere, except this Joseph be the same with that *Jesus who is called Justus*, of whom Paul speaks (^{<504>}Colossians 4:11), and who is said to be of *the circumcision*, a native Jew, as this was, and who was a *fellow-worker with Paul in the kingdom of God* and a comfort to him; and then it is observable that, though he came short of being an apostle, he did not therefore quit the ministry, but was very useful in a lower station; for, *Are all apostles? Are all prophets?* Some think this Joseph is he that is called *Joses* (^{<408>}Mark 6:3), the *brother of James the less* (^{<450>}Mark 15:40), and was called *Joses the just*, as he was called *James the just*. Some confound this with that *Joses* mentioned ^{<408>}Acts 4:36. But that was of Cyprus, this of Galilee; and, it should seem, to distinguish them, that was called *Barnabas* — *a son of consolation*; this *Barsabas* — *a son of the oath*. These two were both of them such worthy men, and so well qualified for the office, that they could not tell which of them was the fitter, but all agreed it must be one of these two. They did not propose themselves nor strive for the place, but humbly sat still, and were appointed to it.

2. They applied to God by prayer for direction, not which of the seventy, for none of the rest could stand in competition with these in the opinion of all present, but *which of these two?* v. 24, 25.

(1.) They appeal to God as the searcher of hearts: “*Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men*, which we do not, and better than they know their own.” Observe, When an apostle was to be chosen, he must be chosen by his heart, and the temper and disposition of that. Yet Jesus, who knew all men's hearts, for wise and holy ends chose Judas to be one of the twelve. It is comfortable to us, in our prayers for the welfare of the church and its ministers, that the God to whom we pray *knows the hearts of all men*, and has them not only under his eye, but in his hand, and turns them which way soever he will, can make them fit for his purpose, if he do not find them so, by giving them another spirit.

(2.) They desire to know which of these God had chosen: *Lord, show us this*, and we are satisfied. It is fit that God should choose his own servants; and so far as he in any way by the disposals of his providence or the gifts of his Spirit, shows whom he hath chosen, or what he hath chosen, for us, we ought to comply with him.

(3.) They are ready to receive him as a brother whom God hath chosen; for they are not contriving to have so much the more dignity themselves, by keeping out another, but desire to have one to *take part of this ministry and apostleship*, to join with them in the work and share with them in the honour, *from which Judas by transgression fell*, threw himself, by deserting and betraying his Master, *from the place* of an apostle, of which he was unworthy, that he might go *to his own place*, the place of a traitor, the fittest place for him, not only to the gibbet, but to hell — this was his own place. Note, Those that betray Christ, as they fall from the dignity of relation to him, so they fall into all misery. It is said of Balaam (^{<025>}Numbers 24:25) that he *went to his own place*, that is, says one of the rabbins, *he went to hell*. Dr. Whitby quotes Ignatius saying, There is appointed to every man *idios topos* — *a proper place*, which imports the same with that of God's rendering to every man according to his works. And our Saviour had said that Judas's own place should be such that *it had been better for him that he had never been born* (^{<024>}Matthew 26:24) — his misery such as to be worse than not being. Judas had been a hypocrite, and hell is the proper place of such; other sinners, as inmates, have their portion with them, ^{<051>}Matthew 24:51.

(4.) The doubt was determined by lot (v. 26), which is an appeal to God, and lawful to be used for determining matters not otherwise determinable, provided it be done in a solemn religious manner, and with prayer, the prayer of faith; for *the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord*, ^{<033>}Proverbs 16:33. Matthias was not ordained by the imposition of hands, as presbyters were, for he was chosen by lot, which was the act of God; and therefore, as he must be baptized, so he must be ordained, by the Holy Ghost, as they all were not many days after. Thus the number of the apostles was made up, as afterwards, when James, another of the twelve, was martyred, Paul was made an apostle.