

The Match Is Struck

Acts 1:12-26

I am so eager to get right into the Word with you this week! We've had a long break over the last few months, a much deserved time of rest and renewal. I hope your respite has left you reenergized for our study over the next few weeks. In preparing for this study the Lord has impressed upon me how much we must rely on the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. I pray that as you pursue your studies this week you will seek out the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit. Let Him be your teacher and inspiration as we delve into the Word this week. The Lord will delight in your efforts and reward you with understanding and insight.

This week's homework will focus on the first two chapters of Acts. We will see how much the apostles depend on the Holy Spirit's guidance in selecting a new member of The Twelve. Then we will witness the coming of the Holy Spirit upon The Twelve as they receive the gift promised by Jesus. We will stand awe-struck in the crowds of Jerusalem as watching a transformed Peter speak forcefully, eloquently, and persuasively to a bewildered crowd. And finally we will be present at the birth of the Church.

Before you launch into your homework this week, let me offer a prayer on your behalf: *Heavenly Father, pour out a measure of your grace upon your daughter as she steps back in time to experience a world where your Holy Spirit moved with such force and wonder. Open her heart and mind to receive a new understanding of who you are and the gift you have bestowed in allowing the presence of your Holy Spirit to dwell within her heart. Bless her time spent in your word with insight and joy at the revelation she will receive in your living word. Amen.*

Position Available: 12th Apostle
See Peter, James or John for requirements

Our first passage reveals to us how dependent the apostles were upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the absence of Jesus' leadership and direction, the men are left to themselves and the tradition of seeking God's guidance through prayer. Follow the disciples' example and present yourself before the throne of God with both heart and mind prepared to receive a fresh word from the Lord.



Read Acts 1:12-26 and answer the following questions.

From where did the apostles return to Jerusalem?

Who is present?

What does verse 14 tell us they did? _____ Surmise what you think the apostles were seeking from the Lord or doing at this moment.

The apostles returned from the Mt. of Olives to Jerusalem. This tells us where the Ascension took place. Some scholars hold this detail to be significant because they believe that when Jesus returns at the second coming he will return to the same location from which he departed: The Mount of Olives. The description of a Sabbath's day journey should be understood as a measurement of distance (approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile). This distance is the farthest Jews could walk without it being considered "work" on the Sabbath. It would appear that Luke is using the descriptive "Sabbath's journey" as the distance travelled, and not necessarily that it was on the Sabbath that the Lord ascended.

Luke then goes on to describe who is present: the 11 remaining disciples; the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Think back to who was with Jesus at the cross: John (the only disciple present), some women, and his mother. Not only have the followers been reunified, but their numbers have swelled. And interestingly his brothers are now counted amongst his followers. We know that Jesus' brothers had been against his ministry up until after the resurrection. Paul mentions in (1Corinthians 15:7) Jesus' post-resurrection visit with his brother James. We will see in the latter part of Acts that it was James who assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem church after Peter.

The purpose for their gathering is to pray together constantly. This becomes one of their main activities in the days to come between the Lord's Ascension and Pentecost. There can be no effective witness without spiritual empowerment. Spiritual empowerment is not only the presence of the Holy Spirit, but also its authority and power. The only way to spiritual empowerment is to wait in prayer. The time before Pentecost was a time for waiting upon the Lord and preparation, a time spent in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit and for powerful witness.

Verse 15 marks a transition in Luke's account of these first days after the Ascension. The phrase "*In those days*" tells us that it is no longer the day of the Ascension, it is sometime within the time frame of the Ascension and Pentecost. The days in which their sole purpose was to gather together in prayer, wait upon the Lord and prepare for a future ministry. Part of that time of waiting includes some preparations and the handling of an important bit of church business: creating a governing body within their organization and appointing a twelfth apostle. An apostle is literally "someone who is sent" – a messenger, proxy, or ambassador. In Jewish law an *apostolos* was a person acting in full authority for another in business or legal transactions.¹

Who takes on a role of leadership within the group?

How large is the group at this time?

What is the first order of business?


What are the criteria necessary to fulfill this position?

¹ New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

Why must the person replacing Judas meet this requirement?

Who were the two candidates presented?

How was a decision between the two candidates reached?

 We are told that Matthias was added to the eleven apostles. What do you think is the difference between apostle and disciple?

Peter steps up to the role of leader which will carry the early church throughout the book of Acts. We are told that when the church gathers together they number 120 members. According to Jewish tradition, 120 was the minimum number of members required to establish a local sanhedrin. The Jewish Sanhedrin of the Jerusalem temple was the highest court and council of the ancient Jewish nation, governing religious and civil concerns. It was abolished with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. With 120 members and Peter taking the role of leader, this band of Jesus' followers are establishing a "church", for lack of a better term.

The first official business at hand is to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot (who is not the same person as "Judas son of James" listed in verse 13). The primary role of the apostles was to be an eyewitness to the life, teaching, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The criteria listed permitting one of the disciples to become ranked among The Twelve Apostles was very specific. Only two men qualified. Because of the strict criteria of being an eyewitness, apostolic succession is not possible after the first generation of eyewitnesses to be counted among The Twelve. Note that in Acts Chapter 12, James is not replaced after his martyrdom. The twelfth apostle had to be someone who was among the disciples from the beginning of Jesus' ministry at the baptism in the Jordan up through Jesus' death and resurrection. He had to be an eyewitness of Jesus' teachings, miracles, crucifixion and resurrection. He had to have interacted with the risen Lord. To have learned of these things second hand was not sufficient. In order to be an apostle one had to have been an *eyewitness*, to have first hand personal experience of all of these events in order to effectively testify to these events before all men.

The number of Apostles was significant. A full complement of 12 Apostles was necessary to fulfill what Jesus had started in his ministry. Luke 6:12 says Jesus prayed over and chose twelve men to be in his inner circle, and to receive special teaching and preparation. The Jewish nation was established on the Twelve Tribes or the sons (and two grandsons) of Jacob. The Twelve Apostles continued this legacy through their eyewitness accounts establishing a restored people of God. Judas had voluntarily left his position as one of The Twelve, it was necessary to fill his position before the church could truly establish itself.

Peter led the process of discerning between the two candidates by seeking guidance from the Lord in prayer and by the casting of lots. Just as Jesus had prayed when he chose his disciples, those remaining of The Twelve followed his example. They prayed to the Lord "*Show us which one of these two you have chosen*". The Holy Spirit did not yet reside within and among them. They had to appeal

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to the Lord and use lots to determine an outcome. Casting lots was an ancient method of discerning God's will recorded in the Old Testament. After Pentecost the church could make its own decisions under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Personal Reflection

In what ways were the apostles and disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit in our passage today?

What example(s) have they set for you regarding a relationship with God and in particular the Holy Spirit?

A Flame Ignites

Dear Ones, we continue today with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and disciples assembled together. As we saw in our previous scripture passage the believers gathered together to pray and wait upon the Lord in expectation of receiving the gift of the Lord promised by Jesus. The waiting has come to an end and the Holy Spirit enters into their lives in a dramatic and miraculous way.

Take a few minutes to prepare yourself for the study of our scripture passage today. *Heavenly Father, bless this dear child of yours with a new understanding of these events recorded by your beloved Luke. We have often heard or read this passage before. Let today's study of this account be fresh and revelatory of the power of your Holy Spirit. Let your Spirit ignite a fresh enthusiasm for your word and your ways in this child of yours. Amen.*



Read Acts 2:1-13 and answer the following questions.

The believers are assembled in a room, likely near the Temple precincts. Comprising the assembly are the twelve apostles and most likely the 120 disciples, including the women who had followed Jesus throughout his ministry. We can surmise this from Acts 1:12-15.

Describe the events of verses 1-3.

In the following verses how does the Lord appear and to whom:

Genesis 15: 17		
Exodus 3:1-6		
Exodus 13:21-22		
Exodus 19:18		
Exodus 40:38		
Deuteronomy 4:24		
Malachi 3:2-3		
Luke 3:16		
Rev 1:14,17-18		

What do these verses tell you about God and the fire image?

Going back to Exodus 3:12 for a moment, what is promised to Moses?

Fill the missing word in Acts 2:4: “All of them were _____ with the Holy Spirit...”

The word “filled” is translated from the Greek word “*plēthō*”² meaning to fill completely, to accomplish, complete; in this case, to be completely filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way the presence of the Lord filled the tabernacle or the burning bush. The Spirit took residence in the believers and empowered them to do miraculous things, things only God himself can do.

The descent of the Holy Spirit comes in three parts: wind, tongues, and flame³. Luke is using highly metaphorical language to describe a spiritual event which is beyond human experience. He can only describe this event by using earthly analogies. We explored several images of the Lord’s presence signified by fire or flames above. Images of the Lord present in wind were well known events in the Old Testament. Elijah’s encounter with God is found in 1 Kings 19:11 and Isaiah records a description of the Lord in Isaiah 66:15 using a wind image as well. As Luke wrote this account of the wind blowing

² Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

³ New American Commentary: Acts

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through the house, he used the Greek word *pneuma*⁴ which has the double meaning of both wind and spirit. The image of tongues is also symbolic. The Greek word *glossa*⁵ also carries a double meaning of both the tongue as part of the mouth, as well as a spoken tongue or language.


What is it that the Spirit enabled the believers to do? (Acts 2:4-8)

On the attached map, highlight or circle as many of the places as you can listed in verses 9-11.

What were the believers exclaiming?

Verses 9-11 detail the far flung places from which the Jews of the Diaspora have returned to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. The feast of Pentecost was one of three Jewish Holy Feasts that required Jewish men to present themselves and their offerings to the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem. Pentecost, which is the Feast of Weeks is so called because it falls 7 weeks after the Feast of First Fruits (celebrating the spring harvest), which commences on the day after Passover. It falls 50 days after Passover, hence the Greek name “Pentecost”. It is a harvest celebration during which Jews present offerings for the summer harvest. Jewish men and possibly their families would travel from all over the Roman Empire to present themselves at the Temple. This explains the presence of the crowds in the temple area who are all speaking different languages.

The miracle of the crowds hearing the Galileans praise God in the dialects of the Diaspora Jews, and not in Aramaic or Greek the languages of Palestine, attests to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Each person present in the crowd was a witness to that power and presence as they saw and heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, and prepared them to hear Peter’s forth coming speech starting in verses 14, which will be our next scripture passage in our homework this week.

 What is the significance of the fulfillment of the gift of the Holy Spirit falling on this *second* harvest festival of the year? What has been harvested?

See 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23

Matt 9:35-38

⁴ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

⁵ Ibid

Personal Reflection

The Jews in the crowd are a world-wide representation of the Jews in the Diaspora. The territories which Luke lists in v9-11 all contained extensive Jewish communities. Reread Jesus' commission in 1:8-9. What has the Holy Spirit empowered these believers to commence or to do?

The Holy Spirit that descended upon these first believers is the same Holy Spirit that resides in you. Above I wrote, "The Spirit enabled or empowered them for the specific purpose of proclaiming God's love and glory". What does this tell you about the power resident within you?

Peter on Fire!

Dear Ones, today we will be looking at Peter's speech before the Jews in Jerusalem. In our last passage I explained that Jews from all over the (known) world travelled to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of Pentecost. Most of the Jews at the temple where Peter is speaking had previously been in Jerusalem for the week long festivities surrounding Passover and would have been known about the crucifixion of Jesus. He was a well known and popular teacher and miracle worker who constantly had crowds gathered around him. Take a few minutes to prepare yourself before you start today's lesson. *Heavenly Father, help me to see with the eyes of my heart the transformation of Peter as he speaks with such eloquence and conviction. Help me to see how the Holy Spirit worked in him and can work in me. Amen.*



Review Acts 2:5-13 and then read Acts 2:13-41 to answer the following questions.

What are the disciples accused of having been doing as an explanation of these "perplexing" events?

What is Peter's explanation of the events before the Jews? (Consider v. 15, 17-18).

Verses 17-21 are quoted from Joel 2:28-32. The "last days" refer to the period between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ, also known as the Church Age, the time in which Acts takes place and in which we live. According to Joel and Peter, what is to occur in that time period?

In verses 22-24, to what does Peter testify?

In verses 25-34a, Peter then recites Psalm 16:8-11, written by King David. What does this psalm prophesy and what does Peter explain in verses 29-36?

Peter then quotes Psalm 110:1 in verses 35-35 of our passage. To what do these verses prophesy and testify?

What was the effect of Peter's speech upon the gathered crowd?

What did Peter answer?

What did Peter promise they would receive upon their repentance and belief that Jesus is the Messiah?

Peter continued to plead with them to what result?

Peter's very reasoned speech methodically establishes Jesus as the Messiah through fulfillment of prophecy and the establishment of facts known to be true and witnessed not only by Jesus' disciples but also by those in the crowd. Peter's audience was comprised of Jews. It was a Jewish holy day. It wouldn't have been likely that many Gentiles would have been near the temple. Peter starts his speech by answering the charge that the men were drunk. He points out that it is 9 in the morning which was a customary hour for prayer and that the Jews wouldn't eat until after their prayers at 10:00. He gets their attention by essentially pointing out (which according to the New American Commentary is a better translation): "Folks don't get drunk first thing in the morning...that comes later in the day!" That's one way of winning the crowd's attention and also is probably true for a holy day like Pentecost when the celebrating wouldn't really start until after sundown. After winning the crowd's attention, Peter gets on with what is really the explanation of what the crowd is seeing.

First he addresses scriptural proofs surrounding their current experience – the disciples glorifying God in all the foreign languages of the visiting Jews. Peter connects the miracle the crowd is experiencing of the Spirit filled Christians with the Joel prophecy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Joel’s prophecy starts with v17 “*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people*” The last days are strongly connected with the coming of the Messiah, or the Days of the Lord leading up to his return. He was pointing out to the crowd that this is what they were seeing. The “last days” were upon them. Jesus the Messiah had come, and they missed it, and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all people to bring them to repentance and come to Christ. He concludes in V 21 that all who will call upon the Lord will be saved. Peter is telling the crowd it is to Jesus they need to turn to be saved from the perils that will befall on the last days.

The Psalms establish Jesus as the fulfillment of David’s prophecy contained within the Psalms. This proof is based on the Davidic descent of the Messiah. Psalm 16 is not to prove the resurrection, but the messianic status of Jesus.

- Psalm 16: Originally the psalm seems to be a plea from the psalmist to God to vindicate him and to deliver him from death. Peter applies this psalm messianically seeing in it a prophecy that David himself could not fulfill. V27 is the key. He is hoping that God will not allow him to die or to allow his Holy one to suffer decay, both meaning a hope that God will not abandon him to death. It is well known that David died, and therefore the prophecy could not apply to him, but to someone descended from him who would occupy his throne. “Holy One” or “Anointed One” would apply to a king, but even more so to the Messiah. Peter is making the statement that the psalm applies to the Messiah, who has indeed risen to life and is descendant of David.
- Psalm 110 in v32-36. Peter makes the case that the eyewitness accounts of the 12 disciples testify to the resurrection. The exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God previously implied in verse 30 is now explicitly stated by Peter as is the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out, that Spirit can only be poured out on mankind once the Messiah ascends to the right hand of God. Peter substantiates this claim by citing another psalm of David. David spoke of one being exalted to God’s right hand. It couldn’t have been David so it again must be the messianic descendant of David. The out pouring of the Holy Spirit testifies to the ascent of the Messiah since David predicted this ascent.

By the end of our passage Peter’s speech has reached the hearts of the Jewish crowd. They recognized that they were guilty of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah. In v37 they ask “*Brothers, what shall we do?*” Peter’s response is to offer them the four essentials of conversion: repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus, forgiveness of sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit. The Jews of Jerusalem were under a grave and impending judgment⁶ from God for ignoring, rejecting and ultimately killing his Messiah sent to all Israel for repentance, forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Individual Jews who came to faith in Jesus as the Messiah would be spared God’s wrath and judgment. But judgment against Israel as a nation that followed the corruption of the religious leaders would still be held accountable for their actions against the Messiah. We see by the end of this passage that the Holy

⁶ This judgment by God against Israel as a nation would be fulfilled with the Fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple at the hands of the Romans in 70AD. While not all Christians escaped in a physical sense, those who died at the hands of the Romans were assured of eternal life because they had embraced the Good News.

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Spirit working through Peter accomplished a great harvest of believers on this Pentecost. *“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their numbers.”* (v. 41)

🔥 Peter’s speech was nothing but miraculous and Spirit filled. During Jesus’ earthly ministry we saw Peter as one of Jesus’ inner circle. He was strong, confident and forceful, but this seemed to stem from a physical strength, not an inner spiritual maturity. At one moment he would boldly claim to stand to the death for Jesus, but when that moment came, he ran for his life. Never during those times did we hear him speak with such eloquence and reason. He almost sounds like a student of Paul in this speech! He presents such a logical and scripturally based argument for Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah and testifies boldly to the signs and wonders worked among them during Jesus’ ministry, at his death and resurrection, as well as on this day of Pentecost. What has caused this change in Peter’s manners and convictions?

Personal Reflection

How has the presence of the Holy Spirit changed you and your testimony that Jesus is our Salvation?

A New Community of Faith

Our last passage this week is a short one and upon first reading may not seem as exciting or interesting as everything else we’ve studied this week. But don’t take this little summary of events for granted! It contains some very special information and instruction that deserves our time and patience. *Heavenly Father, this dear child of yours has devoted so much time this week to the study of your word. Give her the desire to finish this week with new insight into the movement of your Spirit among your people. Let her see how your Spirit built up your church in these early days of the Church Age. Amen.*



Read Acts 2:42-47 and answer the following questions.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (v. 42)

The word “they” commencing the verse above refers not only to the apostles and original 120 disciples from the beginning of Acts, but also includes the 3000 new believers who came to faith at Pentecost and any subsequent conversions. Their numbers exploded! Many of those 3000 believing Jews were part of the Diaspora and would have returned to their homes carrying the Gospel with them. Even as the pilgrim Jews departed Jerusalem, those remaining Jews continued to add to their numbers.

What are we told are the four main activities of these early Christians devoted themselves to as they gathered together? (v.41)

What was done by the apostles?

What was done with possessions and goods?

What were the two places they continued to meet?

Along with breaking bread in their homes, what else did they do?

What did the Lord do?

Verse 42 tells us that “*they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship*”; what the NIV had translated as “devoted” comes from the Greek word *proskarterountes*, which means “persisting in or continuing in steadfastly”⁷. Also according to Greek grammar, “breaking of bread” and “prayer” is actually fellowship. The believers therefore, persisted and continued in learning from the apostles and fellowshiping (breaking bread and praying together) steadfastly. This became the daily focus of their lives. These believers would go to the temple courts to receive instruction from the apostles. This followed the Jewish tradition of gathering in the temple courts to receive instruction from the learned rabbis of their era. The courts surrounding the temple served as a location for theological higher learning. The believers would gather together in homes for their time of fellowship – prayer and breaking bread. This is the birth of the smaller local churches in Jerusalem. Likely the inner circle continued to meet in their usual place, the famed “upper room”, but they also probably circled around to the other homes where believers were meeting to encourage and participate among the body of believers throughout Jerusalem. Their numbers were becoming just too large to be accommodated in any one person’s home. The necessity of meeting in homes arose out of the fact that some of the apostles’ teachings were not accepted by the non-believing Jews and would not have been permitted in the local synagogues. In fact growing friction between the two groups would eventually lead to the Christian Jews being excommunicated from their synagogues and even the temple itself.

The Christians focused their attention in the house-meetings on fellowship – breaking bread and prayer – and praising God. From these more intimate meetings, believers came to know one another and their needs. Because of their shared faith, shared rejection by non-believing Jews, and their faith in the teachings of the apostles, “*they had everything in common*”. Those who had material possessions sold them to help those among them in need. We need not take these verses to mean they started a commune where no one had personal possessions and everyone shared all things. Jesus’ own teachings do not

⁷ Bible Knowledge Commentary

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support this concept. But believers who had material wealth supported those within their church who were in need. They watched out for and helped their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The “breaking of bread” was an activity done in the house meetings. It actually refers to two activities. The first activity is the sharing in the institution of communion, as established by Jesus at the Last Supper. The second meaning of the phrase has to do with sharing a meal together. They would gather together to pray, receive communion, praise the Lord (likely with song), study scripture and then share a meal together as part of their fellowship. This meal together is often referred to as a “fellowship meal”. Much time was spent together getting to know one another intimately. New believers were welcomed in on a daily basis and included in the teachings and fellowship. Verse 47 tells us that “*the Lord added to their numbers daily.*” These early church-home gatherings were full of spiritual life. We see that the Holy Spirit moved actively among them in that believers were awed by the number of wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles attesting to the Lord being among them. The signs and wonders served to point out that the work of the apostles’ was the work of the Lord and He was pleased with his growing church.

Personal Reflection



What do you think contributed to the rapid growth of the early church?

What are you doing to make your church the kind of place that will attract others to Christ?