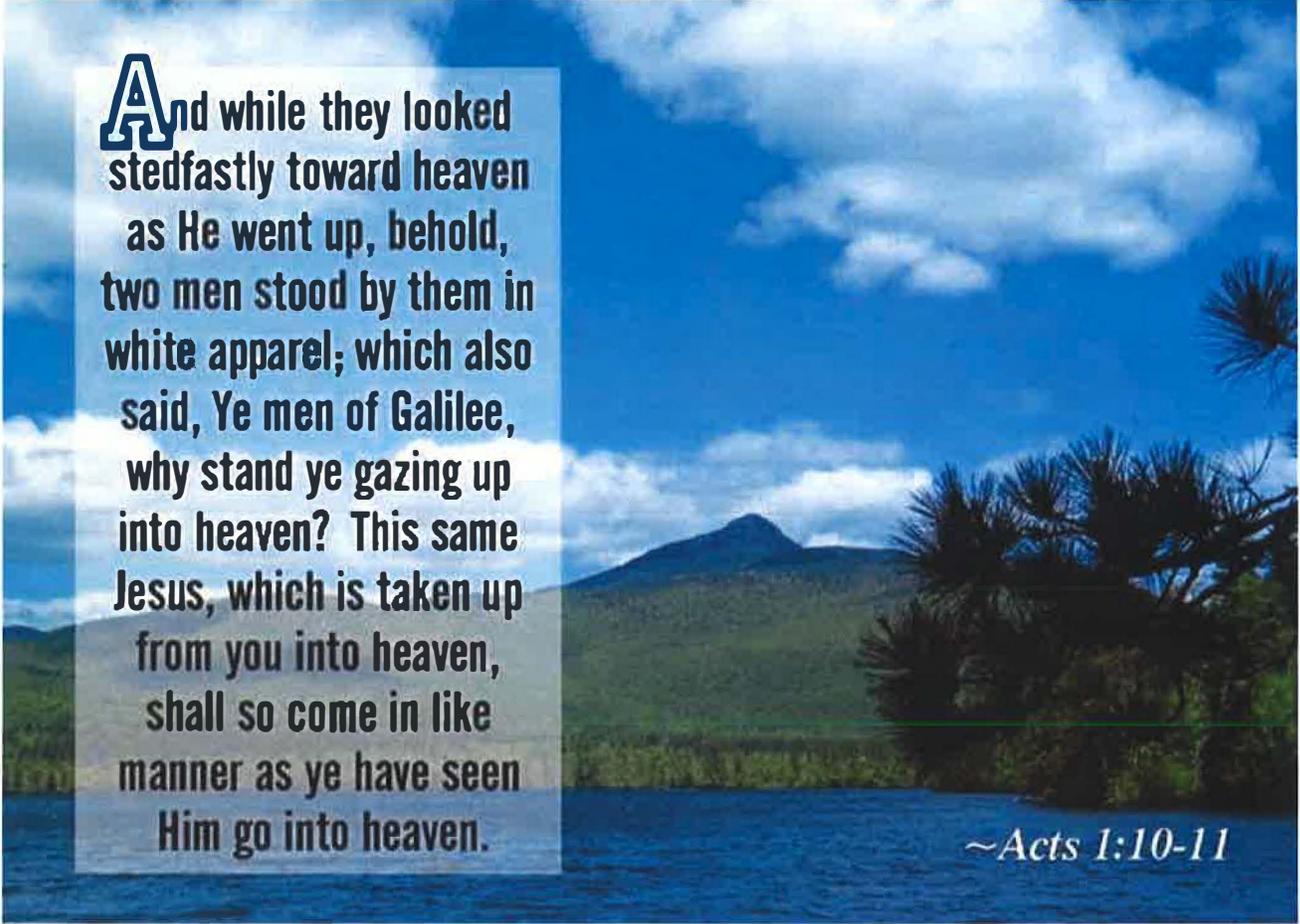


The Ascension of Christ in a Glorified Body to the Right Hand of His Father in Heaven

A Study in Acts Chapter 1



And while they looked
stedfastly toward heaven
as He went up, behold,
two men stood by them in
white apparel; which also
said, Ye men of Galilee,
why stand ye gazing up
into heaven? This same
Jesus, which is taken up
from you into heaven,
shall so come in like
manner as ye have seen
Him go into heaven.

~Acts 1:10-11

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Acts Chapter 1

Acts 1 - Introductory Comments

This precious book of Scripture is commonly known as *The Acts of the Apostles*. In the Scofield notes it is called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*. The book could be summarized as the acts and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ through the apostles and the other saints in the power of the Holy Spirit. God wonderfully established the body and bride of Christ on the day of Pentecost to be a testimony to all the world. This was accomplished in spite of all the opposition from Satan and demons and depraved people. The fact that the Church was created then and has survived for 2000 years is a spectacular miracle of God's keeping power. The Church is still alive because Christ is alive, and He has ascended into the heavens where He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Acts 1:1-2

The "former treatise" is a reference to Luke's former work, now known as the Gospel of Luke. Luke's writings, while only consisting of two books, are highly significant. Which New Testament human author wrote the most pages? Most might answer "Paul," since he authored 13 of the 27 New Testament books. Actually Luke's writings are more voluminous than those of Paul, since his two books are very lengthy.¹ John comes in third, having written five books, including his gospel and Revelation. Luke's gospel is the longest gospel, even though Matthew's gospel has four more chapters. Luke's chapters are lengthier than Matthew's chapters on average. There are 1151 verses in Luke's gospel as compared to 1071 verses in Matthew's gospel.

Luke wrote the book of Acts under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. Apparently, Theophilus was Luke's sponsor, subsidizing this enormous research project now known as Luke and Acts. Theophilus was a very noble person in the Roman Empire who obviously had become a believer, was well instructed (Luke 1:4), and wanted deeper teaching pertaining to the life of Christ and the history of the early Church. The term "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) is used elsewhere only of Roman officials (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).

Luke's accuracy as a historian must not be understated:

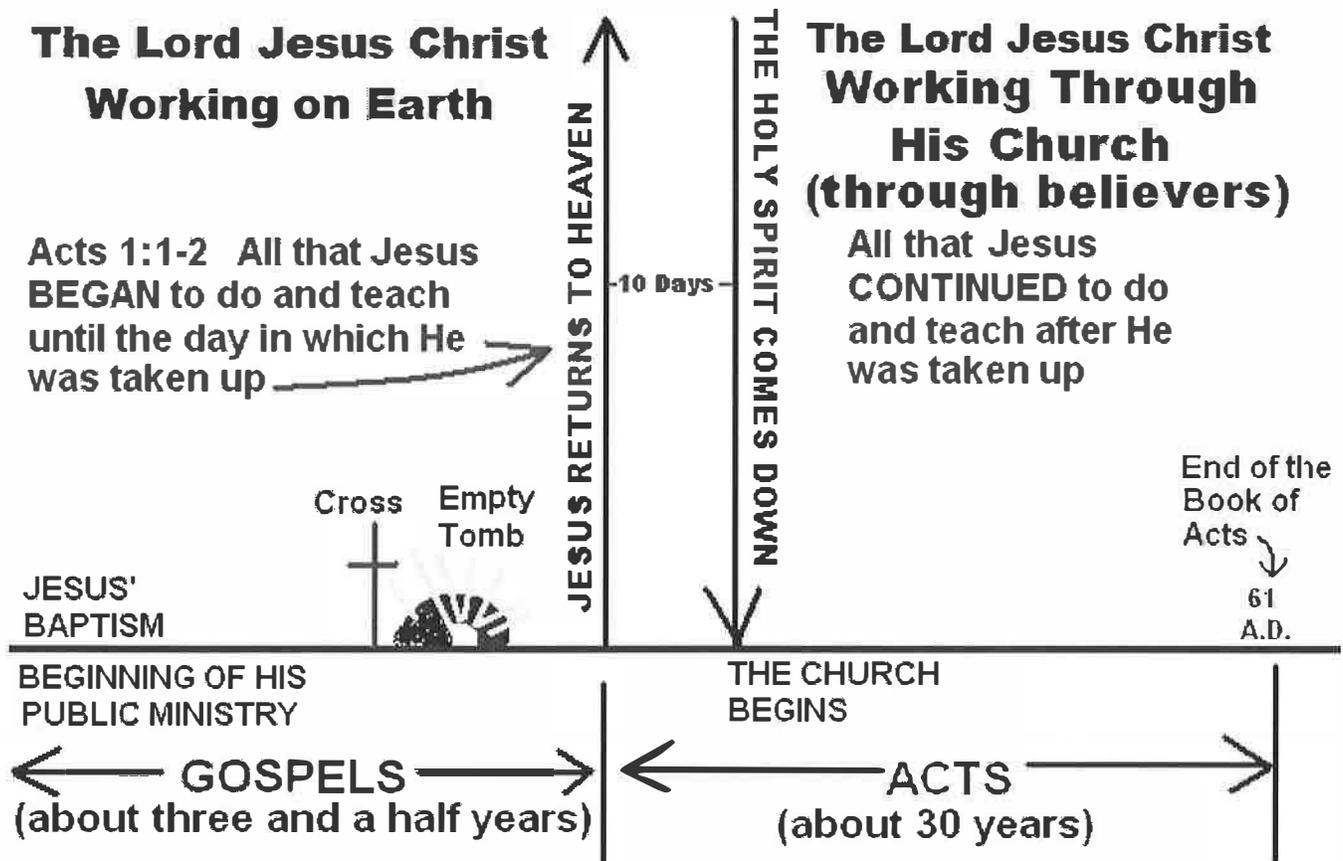
Although Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, claimed that his Book of Mormon is "the most correct of any book upon the earth," archaeology has repeatedly failed to substantiate [such] claims. Archaeologists see no direct connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book. No Book of Mormon cities have ever been located, no Book of Mormon person, place, nation, or name has ever been found, no Book of Mormon artifacts, no Book of Mormon scriptures, no Book of Mormon inscriptions...has ever been found. However, the story is totally different for the New Testament. Those who know the facts now recognize that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book. Luke's gospel as well as the book of Acts

¹If Paul authored the book of Hebrews, which some believe, then his writings would exceed Luke's writings in volume.

which he also authored contain numerous references to geographic locations. Given the large portion of the New Testament written by Luke, it's extremely significant that he has been established to be a scrupulously accurate historian, even in the smallest details. One prominent archaeologist carefully examined Luke's references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake. If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting, on what logical basis may we assume he was inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, such as the resurrection of Christ?²

In Acts 1:1 the reader must not miss the significance of the word “began.” Luke is referring to his former treatise, the Gospel of Luke, which dealt with Jesus’ deeds and Jesus’ teachings until the day of His ascension (Acts 1:2). So in essence Luke was saying this: “The Gospel of Luke was just the beginning. If you want to learn the rest of the story, you must go to the second treatise, the book of Acts. There you will learn all that Jesus **continued to do and teach** through His apostles and other servants.” So the title, *The Acts of the Apostles*, is not completely accurate. It is actually *The Acts and Teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ which He Continued to Do Through His Apostles and Other Servants in the Power of the Holy Spirit*. The work of Christ on earth did not end at His ascension. Mark 16:19-20 teaches us that after Jesus was received up into heaven, He continued to work with and through the disciples. So the One who had gone into heaven was still with them on earth!

All this is illustrated in the following chart:



²Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pages 107, 98-99.

Acts 1:3

The term “passion” is from the verb “to suffer” and refers to our Lord’s suffering at Calvary. “For Christ hath once **suffered** for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Three days later He rose again and showed Himself alive for a period of 40 days. This time period is significant. The Lord began His ministry being tempted by the devil 40 days in the wilderness. The rain which caused the flood came pouring down for 40 days and 40 nights. Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on Mt. Sinai preparing to be the leader of the nation. The children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness 40 years. The number 40 seems to signify a time of testing or training. Christ was preparing His chosen apostles for the work ahead. What was the purpose of this forty-day period? Actually the Bible reveals a fourfold purpose:

1. To Convince Men of His Resurrection

The first purpose of this forty-day period was to convince the disciples of the reality of His resurrection. Their Lord was risen indeed! How did they know this? For forty days Jesus "showed Himself alive after His passion [His suffering and death on the cross] by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). He proved it to them again and again.

The need for such verification was great. After His resurrection many of the disciples did not believe that Jesus was actually alive. In fact, every Gospel account makes mention of those who doubted:

Matthew 28:17—“But **some doubted.**”

Mark 16:11,14—“And they, when they had heard that He was alive, and had been seen of her, **believed not**...Afterward He appeared unto the eleven...and upbraided them with **their unbelief** and hardness of heart, because **they believed not** them which had seen Him after He was risen.”

Luke 24:11, 25—“And their words [the words of the women who had seen the risen Christ] seemed to them as idle tales, and **they believed them not.**” “**O fools, and slow of heart to believe** all that the prophets have spoken.”

John 20:24-29—The example of doubting Thomas: “**Except I shall see...I will not believe**” (v.25).

It is noteworthy that the Lord did not show Himself alive to those who were His enemies. If we had been orchestrating these events, we might have the risen Lord appear to Pontius Pilate and to Herod (“that fox”) and to Caiaphas the high priest to prove to them that He is the victorious Son of God. However, the Lord did appear to His disciples and to other believers. To unbelievers He left an empty tomb, but not a personal appearance.

Many deny the **bodily** resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the Bible proclaims this fact in unmistakable terms. The Scriptures are very specific in describing our Lord’s resurrection body. Consider the following:

1. It was a body that was missing from the tomb (Mark 16:6; Luke 24:3,23; John 20:2,12).
2. It was a body that could be seen (Matthew 28:10,17; Mark 16:14; John 20:18,25,29; Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

3. It was a body that had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39).
4. It was a body that could be touched and held onto and handled (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:17–“stop clinging to Me”).
5. It was a body that could stand (Luke 24:14; John 20:19; 21:4).
6. It was a body that could walk (Luke 24:14-15,28).
7. It was a body that could breathe (John 20:22).
8. It was a body that could prepare a meal (John 21:9,12-13).
9. It was a body that could speak (Matthew 28:9,18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:17,32; John 20:18)
10. It was a body that had hands and feet (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39-40,50).
11. It was a body that could hold and handle bread and other foods (Luke 24:30; John 21:13).
12. It was a body that could eat (Luke 24:30, 41-43).
13. It was a body that still had the wounds or scars from His crucifixion on His hands and on His side (John 20:27).
14. It was a body that could appear in another form (Mark 16:12).
15. It was a body that could vanish out of sight (Luke 24:31).
16. It was a body that could pass through a sealed and secured tomb and through locked doors (Matthew 27:62-66; John 20:19,26). Apparently His body also passed through the linen grave clothes (John 20:6-8).
17. It was a body that could go up into heaven (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9) and that could also return to earth many centuries later (Acts 1:9-11).

Some of these descriptions are very normal, such as speaking, eating, standing, walking, etc. Some of these descriptions speak of activities which are abnormal and unusual: appearing in another form, vanishing, passing through solid objects, etc.

All of this is fascinating when we remember the believer’s resurrection body will be patterned after “His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20-21).

2. To Communicate Truth About His Kingdom

A second purpose for this forty-day period was to provide the apostles with a comprehensive course on the kingdom, taught by the King Himself! The Lord was "seen of (by) them forty days...speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Their Master and Teacher supplied them with needed information concerning this vast subject of God’s reign on earth.

The book of Acts ends the same way it began, with Paul “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:31, the last verse in Acts). Expounding kingdom truth was a central part of Paul’s ministry: “And now, behold, I know that ye all, **among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God**, shall see my face no more” (Acts 20:25). Kingdom teaching was prominent in our Lord’s major discourses, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)³ and the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), so we should not be surprised to find our Lord teaching truths about the kingdom after His resurrection. Indeed, the timing for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel was foremost on the minds of the disciples (Acts 1:6).

Sound, biblically accurate teaching on the kingdom was sadly lost for many centuries of church history, but has been rediscovered and revived in these latter days. In the nineteenth century George N. H. Peters wrote the masterful three volume set, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, which championed the premillennial position held by the early Church. In the twentieth century, Dr. Whitcomb’s mentor and colleague and founder of Grace Theological Seminary, Alva McClain, authored *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, considered by many to be the greatest study on the kingdom. In this present century Andy Woods has built upon Alva McClain’s foundational work and has written *The Coming Kingdom*, which brilliantly exposes the dangers of the “Kingdom Now” theology which is so prevalent in our day.

3. To Confirm The Promise of His Presence

Before our Lord returned to heaven, He promised His disciples that He would not leave them alone. Though He was received up into heaven, there was a sense in which He was still present "working with" His chosen apostles (see Mark 16:19-20).

Actually, for a period of forty days Jesus was teaching His followers by a method we might compare to the game "peek-a-boo." He would appear and then disappear. They would see Him, but then He would be gone. A week later He would be seen again (John 20:19-26). When parents play "peek-a-boo" with a baby, they are teaching the child an important truth. Even though you cannot see Mommy and Daddy, they are still there!

Our Lord, therefore, by His frequent resurrection appearances, was skillfully instructing His beloved disciples concerning His abiding presence. They were then better prepared to understand His promise, "Lo, I am with you always [though you will not see Me], even unto the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Their Lord would not leave them, but He would come in the Person of the Holy Spirit to be present with them forever (John 14:16-18)!

Our Lord appeared to His own, interacted with them, then vanished, only to reappear at a later time and then vanish again. This cycle was repeated during those 40 days. The disciples were learning that they needed to be careful what they were doing at all times because He might appear at any moment, and they needed to be ready. This was good training for anticipating the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus at the time of the rapture. We do not know when He will come, but we need to be ready at all times.

4. To Command His Chosen Apostles

During the forty-day period immediately following the resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His marching orders

³See the study, *The Sermon on the Mount—Is it For the Church Today?* Found at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/dispen/sermon.htm>

THE 40 DAYS FROM CHRIST'S RESURRECTION TO HIS ASCENSION

“Central to Christian faith is the bodily resurrection of Jesus. By recording the resurrection appearances, the New Testament leaves no doubt about this event.”

(*New Geneva NKJV Study Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995.)

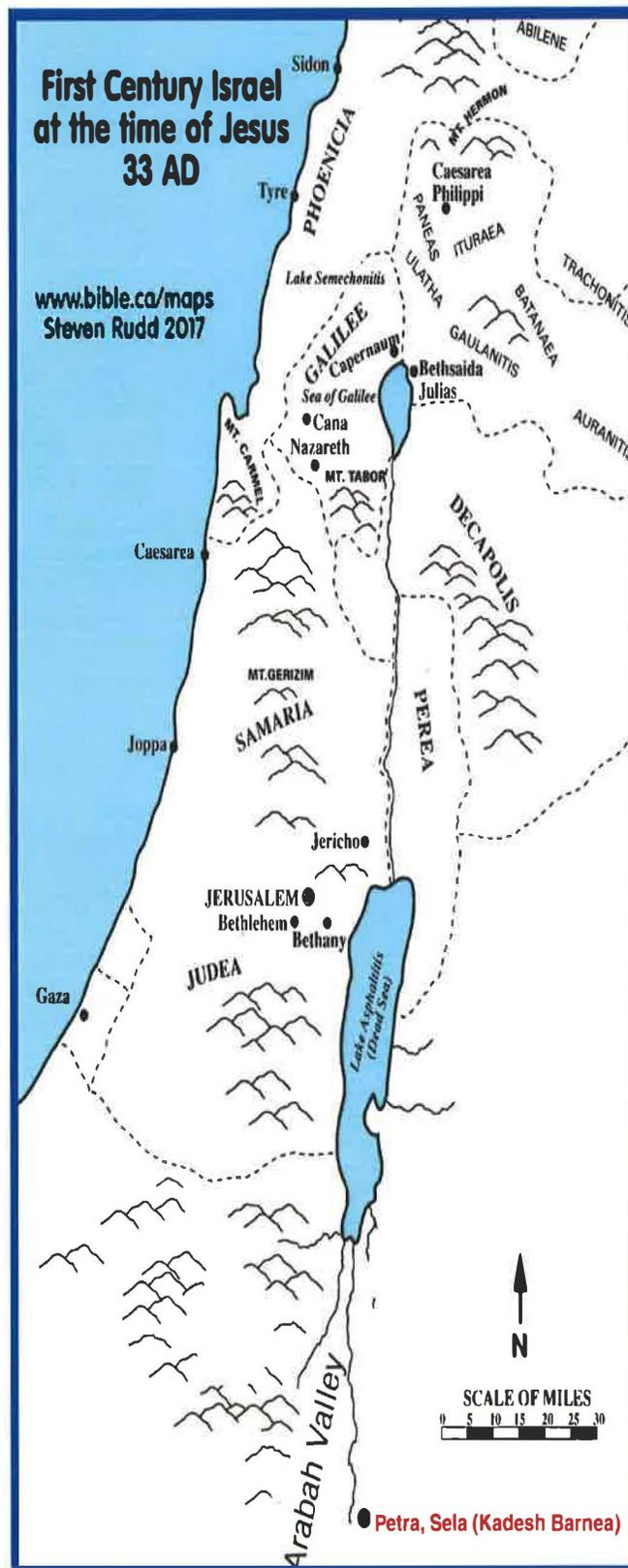
1. Near the empty tomb, He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) and to Mary the mother of James and Joseph (Matthew 27:61; 27:56).
2. To the apostle Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)
3. To two disciples on the road to Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13-35)

“Jesus Himself appeared to two people as they were walking to Emmaus—one of them named Cleopas—and rebuked them for not believing the report of His resurrection: ‘O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:13-27).

4. To ten of the apostles in Jerusalem—Judas Iscariot was dead and Thomas was absent (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25)
5. To the eleven apostles a week later in Jerusalem (John 20:26-29)
6. To the eleven apostles at a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20)
7. To more than five hundred “brethren” (1 Cor. 15:6)
8. To James, our Lord’s half-brother (1 Cor. 15:7)
9. To seven of the apostles at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23)

“Why does Matthew record a resurrection appearance in Galilee (100 miles north of Jerusalem)? The answer surely lies in the combination of two themes that have permeated his entire gospel:

1. The Messiah emerges from a despised area [cf. John 1:46] and first shed His light on a despised people, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit.
2. ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ [Matt. 4:15] is compatible with the growing theme of Gentile mission in this gospel and prepares us for the Great Commission [Matt. 28:18-20]”
(Barker, Kenneth L., and John R. Kohlenberger. *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.)



to His faithful disciples. Luke records that before Christ was taken up to heaven He gave “commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2). These solemn commandments comprise what is generally known as “The Great Commission.”

In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ gave His farewell address, His parting words, His final instructions to the men who would soon become the first members of His Church. What really is the mission of the Church today? What is our God-given task and responsibility? Why does the Church of Jesus Christ exist? What exactly has our sovereign Lord and Head told us to do? These crucial questions can only be answered by a careful study of the Great Commission passages.⁴

All four of the gospel writers contribute significantly to our understanding of what the Great Commission really entails. They each accurately record the words and commands of Christ which were given after His resurrection and before He returned to heaven. Study the following passages which comprise our Lord’s Great Commission and ask yourself this important question: What is the God-given task and responsibility of the Church of which I am a member?

The Great Commission According to Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20
(The word "teach" in verse 19 means "make disciples of.")

The Great Commission According to Mark: Mark 16:14-20

The Great Commission According to Luke: Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-8

The Great Commission According to John: John 20:19-23 (compare John 17:18)

Acts 1:4

The disciples were instructed by Christ to stay in Jerusalem and tarry (wait) for the promise of the Father. This same instruction was given in Luke 24:49. The promise of the Father involved the promise that “another Comforter” would be sent (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7), even the Holy Spirit.

The tarrying experience, as often practiced in Charismatic circles today, is described as follows:

The tarrying procedure for seeking tongues goes like this: Following the sermon, the preacher invites those who want the tongues experience to come to the altar and kneel. Then those who already have received this experience join the seekers to pray with them and offer help and advice. In a relatively short time, some of the seekers begin talking in tongues. For others, it is a much longer ordeal. In an evening service, it is not unusual for seekers to pray until after midnight, even though few of the "altar workers" may remain. And if a seeker doesn't succeed on this particular night, he is encouraged to keep trying. I tarried many nights; I spent many hours in prayer at altars but no matter how long I prayed, I went without success.⁵

⁴See the study, *What the Great Commission is Not*, found at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/mevangel/greatcom.htm>

⁵Wayne A. Robinson, *I Once Spoke in Tongues*, pages 37-38.

Biblical tarrying is quite different. It is mentioned only in Luke 24:49 and here in Acts 1:4. The word “tarry” simply means “to wait.” Prior to Pentecost the disciples were told to wait for the promise of the Spirit. Once He came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the waiting period was over. In the Bible we find no command to wait or tarry for the Holy Spirit after Pentecost.

Suppose you go to the airport to wait for the arrival of certain family members whom you love. You may wait for some time at the airport, but once the plane arrives the waiting time is over. Your loved ones have come and it is time to enjoy their presence. So also, the Comforter has come. How foolish to wait for Him to come if He has already come! Let us enjoy His blessed Person and Presence and Power (Acts 1:8).

Acts 1:5

Spirit baptism is a vital doctrine in the New Testament, and is very often misunderstood. In this verse we have an important hint as to the timing of the event. In Matthew 3:11 (also Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16) we learn that the Lord Jesus is the Baptizer and that this baptism would take place in the future (“He shall baptize you”—future tense). In Acts 1:5 we learn that this baptism would take place very soon, “not many days hence.” That is, it would take place in just a few days. This promise was made on the day of the ascension which was just ten days prior to the Day of Pentecost. On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came in a spectacular way, but in Acts 2 we are not specifically told that Spirit baptism took place on that day. The fact that Spirit baptism took place on the Day of Pentecost is clearly revealed by Peter in Acts 11:15-16.

Keep in mind that Spirit baptism was first announced in the context of the promised kingdom which was offered to Israel by Christ, Israel’s promised King (Matt. 3:2,11). In the context of the kingdom, how would the Jews have understood Spirit baptism? Based on many Old Testament prophecies, the Jews knew that the Messianic kingdom would be inaugurated by a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Here are some examples:

“Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field” (Isaiah 32:15). “A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you...and I will put my Spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). “I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 39:29). “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28-29). See also Isaiah 44:3; 59:21; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 37:14 and Zechariah 12:10. John the Baptist announced that the kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:2) and he predicted that Israel would be baptized with (in) the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). The Jews of his day probably would have been mindful of some of these Old Testament prophecies concerning the outpouring of the Spirit. Indeed, all of these prophecies will be literally fulfilled in the kingdom.

The establishment of the kingdom was contingent upon Israel’s repentance and reception of their promised Messiah. Israel’s rejection of Christ climaxed at the crucifixion event, but even after the ascension God continued to be very longsuffering with His wayward and unbelieving people. Even then, Israel still could have repented as a nation and received God’s blessings, which would have included the coming of the Messiah and the promised kingdom (Acts 3:9-21). Since the restoration of the kingdom was contingent on Israel’s response, we are not surprised that the Lord could not be definitive in His answer as to when the King would return and the kingdom be restored (Acts 1:6-7). God knew what Israel’s response would be, but this had to be worked out in time, to the point where Israel’s ultimate rejection and necessary judgment would be obvious to all.

It is important to understand the transitional nature of the book of Acts. Early in Acts there is still the possibility that the nation could repent and turn to Christ, but as we proceed through the chapters, Israel’s

rejection of their King became more and more settled and obvious and official. At the same time we have the unveiling of God's new program, the Church, which at first was not clearly understood, even by the apostles. However, as we proceed through the book of Acts we find God's people learning more and more about the Church, most notably due to the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And it was Paul who carefully defined Spirit baptism as it relates to this present age. According to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Spirit baptism is that work of God in which believers are baptized (immersed or placed) into the body of Christ, thus becoming members of His Church. This was true beginning at Pentecost, even though it was little understood. This in no way nullifies the future outpouring of the Spirit which will take place in connection with the kingdom, as predicted by many of the prophets (as cited above).

Acts 1:6-7

We have already seen that during His post-resurrection appearances the Lord Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). There seemed to be one question uttermost on their minds: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (verse 6) These men were certain about the fact of the restoration of the kingdom, but they were uncertain about the timing of this event. They knew it would happen, and they wondered if it would happen "at this time," that is, immediately.

The expression "restore again" means that in the past Israel enjoyed a kingdom. The disciples' question assumes the restoration of the Theocratic Kingdom which once existed on earth.⁶ "This could be nothing else than the Theocratic Kingdom of Old Testament history, the Kingdom set up at Sinai and which ended at the Babylonian Captivity."⁷ Of course, the kingdom under the Messiah would be greater than anything Israel experienced in its past history, as we learn in the writings of all the prophets. Their question also assumes that the kingdom did not exist at the time they asked the question. They knew the kingdom was not present yet, and they asked when it would come.

In His answer, the Lord dealt with the timing of the kingdom, but He never challenged their assumptions as to the nature of the kingdom. If the disciples had been mistaken, this would have been the ideal time for the Lord to have corrected their thinking. He could have said, "You are wrong to look for an earthly kingdom where Israel is prominent. You need to realize that the kingdom is here and now. It is a spiritual kingdom that is within you and within the hearts of all those who believe in Me. It's not a future expectancy but it's a present reality. I now rule in your hearts." Or, He could have corrected their concept that Israel was to have a restored kingdom: "You should not expect the kingdom to be restored to Israel. Israel, in unbelief, has rejected Me and crucified Me. Because of this they have disqualified themselves from having the kingdom; their rejection has made them unfit. Instead, My kingdom is for anyone who will receive Me, whether Jew or Gentile. Believers today have replaced Israel. They have now received what Israel was once promised. The kingdom has been taken from them and given to those who are worthy." No, the Lord made no such corrections.

The Lord's answer dealt with the issue of timing. *When* would the kingdom be restored to Israel? His basic answer was, "It is not for you to know" (Acts 1:7). God the Father knows exactly when that time will be, but He has not revealed it to His own. In His pre-cross teaching, the Lord had made it clear that the future

⁶A theocracy is a form of government in which God is the King, but a representative administers His rule. In the millennial kingdom, Christ, the God-Man, will be God's perfect representative.

⁷Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, page 393.

kingdom would be set up at the second coming of the King (Matthew 25:31-32), but the timing of this event was not revealed (Mark 13:32-33). Even today, two thousand years later, we do not know the timing of this event, though we believe it could be soon, possibly even less than a decade away. God knows. We do not. May we be ready always for the next events in God's prophetic program.

Acts 1:8

If the kingdom is not to be established immediately, then what should His disciples do? What is God's present program for His people? Acts 1:8 needs to be seen as a continuation of what Luke recorded in Luke 24:47-49. Both passages together may be viewed as the Great Commission according to Luke. Both passages emphasize that the disciples would be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) and this promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Both passages emphasize that God's people are to be His witnesses (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). Both passages emphasize that this new program would begin in Jerusalem and reach out to the uttermost parts of the earth from there (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

God's change in program was highly significant. For hundreds of years the center of God's program was Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem would merely be the beginning point (Luke 24:47—"beginning at Jerusalem"). For centuries God's witnesses comprised a nation, seeking to be a light to the surrounding nations (Isaiah 43:10). Now God's witnesses were to be "among all nations" (Luke 24:47-48). Under the old economy, the Spirit was with men and came upon men for special tasks, but now the Spirit would come upon all believers in a unique way. The Spirit would be in them and would abide with them forever (John 14:16-17). Therefore, seeking to accomplish anything prior to the coming of the Spirit would be absolute futility (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), like trying to fly a plane without fuel.

May we never forget that a key reason why we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit is that we might be bold witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth. We could never do it on our own. The obstacles are staggering and the evil one is a daunting foe (Eph. 6:12). However, our God enables us by His Spirit to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as we live in the world, in enemy territory. "You shall be witnesses unto Me" or literally, "You shall be My witnesses." May our lives be pointing clearly to the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us.⁸

Acts 1:8 provides a God-given outline of the book of Acts and also reminds us of the keys that were given to the Apostle Peter (Matthew 16:19). On the Day of Pentecost the gospel door was opened to the Jewish people who had gathered in Jerusalem from many nations (Acts 2). Later the gospel door was opened to the Samaritans for the first time (Acts 8). Finally, at the house of Cornelius the gospel door was opened to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter was instrumental in all three of these significant, God-ordered events. Following this the gospel began to spread to the uttermost part of the earth (cf. Matt. 28:19). Peter is the major focus of the first 12 chapters of Acts; Paul is the major focus in the rest of the book (chapters 13-28). Church history continues to be written today as we serve the Lord faithfully, each in our little corner of the world.

Acts 1:9

"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." This was not a rain cloud, but a "glory cloud." Compare, Matthew 17:5 (His

⁸Believers need to understand what means to **be** a witness, based on clear Biblical teaching. See the study, "What is a Witness?" found at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/mevangel/whiswit.pdf>

transfiguration), 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (His pretribulational coming for His Church), and Daniel 7:13 and Matthew 24:30 (His second coming). Such clouds were visible manifestations of the presence and glory of God.⁹ The disciples witnessed this remarkable event.

Acts 1:10

These two men in white clothing were angels. Angels are spiritual beings, messengers of the Most High God, and at times they would appear in the form of men (see Genesis 18:2, where two of these men were angels and one was the preincarnate Christ). God sent these angels to make an amazing announcement regarding the Lord’s second coming.

Acts 1:11

These angels provided an important lesson on eschatology. They announced the certainty of His second coming. They revealed that the Lord’s second coming to earth would be patterned in many ways after His ascension. As He went up, so He will come down. Let us chart some of these similarities:

THE ASCENSION	THE SECOND COMING
He went up from earth to heaven.	He will come down from heaven to earth.
He ascended in a glorified, resurrected body.	He will return in that same body.
He left earth from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12).	He will return to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4).
He ascended visibly and was watched by witnesses.	He will descend visibly, watched by “every eye” (Rev. 1:7).
His ascent was gradual and could be viewed and watched.	His descent will be gradual and will be viewed and watched (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).
He went up in a cloud of glory (Acts 1:9).	He will return in clouds of glory (Matt. 24:30).
He went up before the Church was formed.	He will return to earth after the Church is raptured.

Acts 1:12

The Mount of Olives, the location of the ascension, covered the whole eastern side of the city. It was there that the Lord Jesus gave His prophetic message found in Matthew 24-25, known as the Olivet Discourse. The Lord’s triumphal entry went from Bethany to Jerusalem, a course which led from this mount. Gethsemane was an olive grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives often visited by Jesus, and was the place where He prayed on the evening of His arrest.

⁹Some other places where clouds were connected with the Lord’s presence: Exodus 13:21; 16:10; 33:9; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 11:25; Isaiah 19:1; Revelation 1:7.

A “Sabbath day’s journey” was an interesting measurement of distance. The Jews on the Sabbath Day were not allowed to travel very far, no more than two thousand cubits, which would be a little more than a half mile. This distance came to be known as a “Sabbath day’s journey.” Hence, the disciples’ return trip to Jerusalem was but a short walk. There in the city they would wait for the Holy Spirit whom Christ promised to send before too many days had passed (Acts 1:5). The remainder of chapter 1 tells us what the disciples did prior to the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 1:13

In the upper room were gathered the eleven disciples, Judas having killed himself and Matthias not yet chosen. This may have been the same large upper room where the Lord instituted the bread and the cup (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12) and perhaps also where the risen Lord appeared to the eleven on two occasions, once with Thomas absent (John 20:19) and once with Thomas present (John 20:26).

There is indirect evidence in this verse of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. If men were to write a history of the early Church, then each of the 12 apostles (Matthias included) would be very prominent in the account. But Luke, guided by the Holy Spirit, makes no further mention of nine of these men, except as they are mentioned collectively as a group (as in Acts 6:2 and 8:1). Only Peter, James and John are mentioned by name in the rest of Luke’s account. God’s ways are not our ways, and if we had written about the early Church we would have wanted to include detailed information on each of the 12 apostles. However, in God’s book of Acts we are told practically nothing about nine of these men. God knows exactly what should be included in the sacred writings of Scripture! We would have written the Bible quite differently. How wonderful to know that God is the Author!

The twelve disciples are listed in four New Testament passages:

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
1) Simon Peter 2) Andrew 3) James 4) John	Simon Peter James John Andrew	Simon Peter Andrew James John	Peter John James Andrew
5) Philip 6) Bartholomew 7) Thomas 8) Matthew	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
9) James of Alphaeus 10) Thaddaeus 11) Simon the Zealot 12) Judas Iscariot	James of Alphaeus Thaddaeus Simon the Zealot Judas Iscariot	James of Alphaeus Simon the Zealot Judas of James Judas Iscariot	James of Alphaeus Simon the Zealot Judas of James -----

All four lists have three groups with four names in each group. The same name heads each group (Simon Peter, Philip and James of Alphaeus), and the same disciples are found in each group though there is variation in the exact order. Judas of James was also named Thaddaeus, and this is the disciple who is named in John 14:22. In New Testament times it was very common for a person to have two or more names.

Who were these men, these chosen ones? Were they men of great fame? Were they men of great power and position? Were they the brilliant intellectual giants of their day? According to Matthew 4:18-22, Peter, Andrew, James and John were common, ordinary fishermen. Matthew was a hated and despised publican or tax collector (Matthew 10:3). In Acts 4:13, Peter and John, like the other disciples, were described as "unlearned and ignorant men" (which means they had never received any formal education). In the world's eyes they were nobodies. Most of the disciples were from Galilee (Luke 22:59; Acts 2:7). They were just a group of ordinary, uneducated, unknown Galileans. Why did Christ choose such unlikely, unimpressive and undeserving men? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and James 2:5. Matthew certainly would have said "Amen!" to "...things which are despised, hath God chosen..." (1 Corinthians 1:28) because very few people were as despised as the tax collectors were.

If God had chosen only the rich and the wise and the powerful, where would that leave most of us? If God had chosen only the greatest and most powerful nation, where would that leave the nation Israel (see Deuteronomy 7:6-8)? God can take common, ordinary people, and make them great and godly men and women. What great hope and encouragement this gives every one of us!

One of the Lord's disciples was "Simon Zelotes" or Simon the Zealot (Acts 1:13; Luke 6:15). The Zealots were a zealous, enthusiastic party of Jews who were strongly opposed to Roman rule. These patriotic Jews wanted Israel to be a free nation, and they did not want to be dominated by the Romans. They wanted their country to be liberated and set free from the Roman yoke, free from Roman control. To achieve this end, they felt justified in using force. They would use violence, robbery, and even assassination to accomplish their goal of setting their nation free. They had a burning desire to accomplish their mission. They were passionate zealots dedicated to a free Israel. One of these Zealots was named Simon. This man decided to follow Jesus Christ. He grew to realize that Christ came primarily to liberate the soul, not society. Something much more terrible than Roman bondage is the bondage of sin (see John 8:32-36). Simon followed the Lord Jesus, the greatest Liberator of all! "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Totally opposed to Simon in his political views was another disciple, Matthew the publican (tax collector). On the one hand was Simon the Zealot, a hater of the Romans, and on the other hand was Matthew the publican, an "IRS" agent for the Romans. One wanted to destroy the Romans and the other worked for the Romans! Apart from Christ these two would have been at each other's throats. The Lord Jesus was able to bring these two men together, men who were on opposite ends of the political spectrum. He joined them together in the common cause of serving the Son of God. So also, in the local assembly of believers, there are people from all different backgrounds and viewpoints, yet wonderfully united together in one body, for God's glory.

The group of twelve disciples involved inner circles which are fascinating to consider. One disciple was unclean (unsaved, unregenerated), while the other eleven were clean (John 13:10-11; 6:70). But out of these eleven men, three were given special privileges. Peter, James and John were selected by the Lord to witness Jairus' daughter being raised from death (Mark 5:37). These same three men were allowed to witness the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1). Peter, James and John also were selected by Christ to be near Him when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-37). And finally, there was one disciple who enjoyed a very special closeness to the Lord, even the disciple John who leaned on His breast (John 13:25; 21:20). This can be likened to a shepherd surrounded by his sheep. Some of the sheep are toward the edge of the flock while others graze close to the shepherd. There might even be a lamb, enjoying special closeness, that the shepherd holds in his arms. As His sheep, may we always be seeking to be close to the Savior's heart, knowing that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

The apostles were chosen by the Lord Jesus and the choice was made after the Lord spent an entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12). He knew that these men would be the foundation pieces of His Church (Eph. 2:20), recognizing also that He would be the primary rock foundation (1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 16:18). The Son of Man, in total dependence upon His Heavenly Father, bathed this decision in prayer. What a lesson for us to spend significant time in prayer before making important decisions.

Acts 1:14

These early disciples were united together in one accord (literally, they were of “one mind”). They were of one heart and one mind. They were united around one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers are to be like-minded one toward another, having the mind of Jesus Christ. We, with one mind and one mouth, are to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:5-6). The unity of the early Christians was a constant theme, and was noted by Luke in Acts 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25. The enemies of the gospel were also *united* in their opposition to the truth (the same expression “one accord” is used; see Acts 7:57; 18:12; 19:29). The secret of the unity of God’s people was “prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14), maintaining a solid contact with God the Father in the third heaven. We will see repeatedly in the book of Acts that the early Church was a praying Church. Their connection to heaven was the key to their power and effectiveness.

The eleven disciples were not the only ones gathered in this upper room. There were about 120 believers there (Acts 1:15), including a number of women (Acts 1:15). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is mentioned as one of them. She is not referred to as “the mother of God,” because God has no origin or beginning. The name “Jesus” is used, a name pointing to our Lord’s humanity, and Mary was God’s chosen vessel to make it possible for Jesus to be born as a Man. In the book of Acts there is no record of anyone ever praying to Mary or worshiping her. She was one believer among many others. This is the first and last time Mary is mentioned in the book of Acts, making it obvious that the Spirit of God did not wish to make her prominent. This is the last reference to Mary in the entire Bible. In any discussion of Mary, the following passages must be considered: Mark 3:33-35 and Luke 11:27-28.

The brothers of Jesus are also mentioned. The Lord had four half-brothers, sons of Joseph and Mary, and they are named in Mark 6:3. The Roman Catholic position that Mary remained a perpetual virgin is clearly refuted in Matthew 1:24-25. Two of the Lord’s half-brothers became writers of Scripture (James and Jude) and in their books they each referred to himself, not as the Lord’s brother, but as the Lord’s slave (James 1:1; Jude 1:1). The spiritual relationship overshadowed the physical relationship. Prior to the cross the Lord’s brothers were unbelievers (John 7:5). Later James met the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7), which seems to be the chief reason for his remarkable transformation. No doubt he told his other brothers, or perhaps they too were among the hundreds who saw the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:6), and they were likewise converted. No mention is made in Acts regarding the Lord’s sisters of which there were at least two (Mark 6:3). Nothing is recorded concerning Joseph. We assume he died some time prior to our Lord’s public ministry.

The basis for the unity and oneness of these 120 disciples is found in Ephesians 4:4-6. Based on these great unifying facts, believers today can rejoice in the following:

We are fellow members of the same body (1 Cor. 12:27) under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22) to Whom we owe total obedience and submission (Eph. 5:24). We all have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:3); we all have been saved by the same blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19); we all boast in Calvary’s cross (Gal. 6:14). We all are indwelt and empowered by the same Spirit (Eph. 4:4) by

Whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

We all have one hope and future expectancy, even the blessed hope of the appearing of our great God and Savior (Tit. 2:14). We all share the same heavenly home (1 Pet. 1:4). We share the same Savior, our righteous Advocate (1 John 2:1), the One who ever lives to make intercession for us (Rom. 8:34). We all stand upon the same rock-solid foundation which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). May we never budge from this secure citadel (1 Cor. 15:58).

We all possess the same Bible which is our map and compass and flashlight and bread and sword and our all-sufficient guide (Psalm 119:105). To us, His saints, God has once delivered the faith, the body of truth which we are to believe, practice, defend, live for and die for (Jude 3).

We each have been gifted by the Lord for the mutual edification of the body (1 Cor. 12). Every member of Christ's body is important and has a vital place and ministry. The foot, the hand, the ear, the eye—all are needed for the functioning of the body (1 Cor. 12:15-17). When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; when one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:26). There should be no schism or division in the body, but the members should have the same tender, loving care one for another (1 Cor. 12:25).

We assemble together whenever God's people come together (Heb. 10:25), to be equipped for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). We are in full-time Christian service, bought by blood and bound by love. Whatever we do for a living is secondary; abiding in Christ and serving Him is primary (1 Cor. 1:9). Our love for Christ must be greater than our love for any other human being (Matt. 10:37). No other human being loves us as He does.

We all share the same commission: to be His witnesses in this dark world (Acts 1:8), and to proclaim His good news to every creature (Mark 16:15). His grace is sufficient for every situation (2 Cor. 9:8). His promises have never failed (Josh. 21:45). No good thing has been withheld from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11). We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), made rich by the God of the universe, possessors of all things (2 Cor. 6:10). We lack nothing (Psalm 23:1; 34:10). With one heart and with one mouth we can praise and glorify the God who has done all this for us (Rom. 15:6).

Acts 1:15

“In those days” refers to some point in the ten-day period between the ascension and the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Peter became the spokesman for the group, providing good leadership and seeking to be guided by the Scriptures. The issue at hand was to find a replacement for the apostate disciple Judas. Peter was a witness to the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane as Judas guided those who took Jesus by pointing Him out with a kiss. Following this Peter acted impulsively and cut off the right ear of Malchus with a sword, an injury which was immediately healed by Jesus. We learn this only from Doctor Luke (Luke 22:47-51).

Acts 1:16

In this verse Peter mentions a “scripture” in the Psalms which was fulfilled by Judas. Some believe Peter

was referring to Psalm 41:9. This Scripture is certainly applied to Judas by our Lord in John 13:18-19, but Psalm 41:9 pertains to the Lord being betrayed by someone very close to Him. The verse Peter has in mind involved the need to replace Judas, but we must wait until we get to verse 20 to discover what verse this is. But before leaving verse 16, it is important to notice the amazing testimony this verse gives to the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. David was God's instrument (His penman) whom the Lord used to give His Word (compare 2 Peter 1:21). Notice that the verse says that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke. But how did He speak? The Holy Spirit spoke by using David's mouth. David was God's mouthpiece to communicate His infallible Word. David, living a thousand years before Judas, knew nothing of the traitor, but God knew all about Judas, and gave David certain words which would appropriately fit the situation of Judas as well as David's own situation.

Acts 1:17

Peter said that Judas was "numbered with us." Seven times in the gospels Judas is described as "one of the twelve" (see John 6:71). He was certainly numbered with these other disciples. This raises the obvious question: Why did God choose this man to be one of the twelve?

When the Lord chose His twelve disciples, Judas was among those chosen. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). Why would the Lord make such a choice? Jesus was saying something like this: "I have chosen twelve disciples and one of them is on the devil's side! One of My disciples is a child of the devil. The devil is going to use this disciple to carry out his purpose (John 13:2) and this disciple will commit one of the greatest crimes the world has ever known. He will be the devil's man!" God had a purpose in choosing this man and there are amazing lessons we can learn from studying the tragic life of Judas. Here are three of these lessons:

1) It is possible to show outward indications of salvation and yet not be saved.

If you had been one of the other disciples what would you have thought of Judas? Would you have thought that Judas was very different from the other disciples? Or would Judas have fooled you into thinking that he was no different than the rest of the twelve?

Judas was a preacher of God's Word. We learn this in Matthew 10:4-7. Jesus commanded the twelve disciples, including Judas, to go forth and to preach the good news about the kingdom. As far as we know Judas actually did this. He went forth and preached this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (see Matthew 10:7).

Even more amazing, Judas most likely performed miracles! In Matthew 10:1 we learn that Jesus gave His twelve disciples (including Judas) power against unclean spirits and power to heal all manner of sickness (see also Matthew 10:8). It is very probable that there were people living in the land of Palestine who could say, "I was healed by Judas" or "I had a demon cast out of me by Judas!" When the disciples returned from their mission they did not say, "Lord, in Your Name we were able to heal people and cast out demons. But Lord, something is wrong with Judas. He was not able to heal anyone and the demons would not obey him." No, every indication seems to be that Judas performed miracles just like the other disciples.

Judas preached and performed miracles, and yet in spite of all this Judas was an unsaved man! Consider Matthew 7:22. Perhaps Judas will someday say, "Lord, Lord, have I not preached in Your Name? and in Your Name have I not cast out demons? and in Your Name have I not healed sick people? and in Your Name have I not done many wonderful works?" The Lord will say to him, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matthew 7:23).

The same thing is true today. People can go through the outward motions and still not be saved. Can a person preach and not be saved? Can a person sing hymns and not be saved? Can a person pray and not be saved? Can a person witness and tell others about Christ and not be saved? Can a person read the Bible and not be saved? Such are sobering possibilities.

2) It is possible to fool everyone but God.

Judas failed to get his heart right with God but he succeeded in fooling the other disciples. There is not a hint in the four Gospels that the other eleven disciples ever suspected Judas or realized that he was phoney. In fact, they seemed to trust him all the way to the end. Judas served as the treasurer of the disciples, and on the night Jesus was betrayed Judas still held the money bag (John 13:29). They still trusted him!

In reality, Judas was a thief! But the other disciples did not think so. When they heard what Judas said (John 12:4-5), they probably thought, "Judas is so concerned about the poor people. His heart is burdened for those poor starving children and for those poor widows!" Judas could put on a good show! He knew how to fool others!

There was one Person whom Judas did not fool. In John 13:10-11 Jesus said that all of the disciples were clean except for one. Jesus knew that Judas was unsaved and unclean. He knew that Judas was still filthy in his sins which had never been forgiven. Judas had never been born again and had never had his salvation bath.

Even at the very end, the other disciples did not suspect that Judas was the traitor. In Matthew 26:21 Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." What did the disciples think when He said this? Did they all say, "Lord, it must be that no-good scoundrel Judas! We always knew that something was wrong with him!" No, this is not what they said. They said, "Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26:22). Judas fooled every one of them! He fooled everyone but the Lord and himself. Deep down inside Judas knew that things were not right between himself and the Lord!

In Luke 22:47-48 we learn that Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. This word *kiss* comes from a verb which means "to love, to show affection towards a friend or a loved one." It was a kiss of "love" from a heart of hate. Judas performed this horrible deed of betraying the Lord under the guise of friendship and loving affection. It would have been far more appropriate and honest for Judas to come up to the Lord and spit in His face or slap Him with his hand. Why did Judas pretend to love Him when he really hated Him? Why did Judas pretend he was His friend when he was really His enemy?

Before we get too angry with Judas, let us search our own hearts. Do I really love the Lord Jesus, or am I just a pretender? Is my love and affection for Christ sincere or is it phony? Do I kiss the Lord on Sunday while in church, and then betray Him the rest of the week by the way I live and the things I do?

3) It is possible to be very close to the Lord and yet to end up forever lost.

Very few people have ever been as physically close to the Lord as Judas was. Very few people have ever spent so much time with Christ as Judas did. He had every opportunity and privilege that a person could have. He sat under the best Bible Teacher the world has ever known and he heard the best Preacher! He heard the message of salvation from the lips of the Savior Himself, and he heard this message again and again. He saw with his own eyes the many miracles which Christ performed, proving that Christ was everything He claimed to be. He lived and ate and traveled and slept in the very presence of the Son of God.

What more could a man ask for? What more could a man be given? And yet, here is what Jesus said about this man:

"The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24). Notice the delicate balance between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility as illustrated in the life of Judas: "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed" (Luke 22:22). The betrayal of Judas was part of God's predetermined plan, and yet Judas was fully responsible for what he did. He had a choice and he was not forced to betray the Lord. Yet, what he chose to do ended up being exactly what God had planned out ahead of time.

Don't be a pretend Christian, be a real Christian! Show the world what a real believer is! Don't be a disciple like Judas, but be a disciple indeed (John 8:31)! Be a true, genuine, real disciple!

Acts 1:18-19 [these verses are parenthetical, probably Luke's words, not Peter's]

How did Judas purchase a field? The gospel record (see Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-10) makes it clear that Judas received thirty pieces of silver as a reward for his wicked deed of betraying the Lord. Judas later confessed his sin to the chief priests and elders: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." How much better it would have been if Judas had confessed his sin to God! He felt great guilt and remorse, but not genuine repentance. The Jewish leaders were not interested in the plight of Judas, having already received what they wanted from him.¹⁰ Judas threw the pieces of silver into the temple and went out and hanged himself. The chief priests did not want to put this money into the treasury because it was blood money (money which was used to pay the traitor whose act of betrayal eventually led to the shedding of the Savior's blood). They decided to use the money to buy a potter's field, a cemetery to be used for the burial of strangers or foreigners. They probably purchased it in Judas' name since the money belonged to him. From then on the field was called "the field of blood." See the prophecy in Zechariah 11:12-13.

In Matthew's account we learn that Judas' death was a suicide by hanging: "he went and hanged himself" (Matt. 27:5). In Acts 1:18 we learn that Judas suffered a massive injury to the middle of his body as the result of a fall: "and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." These passages are **complementary and not contradictory**. If we had been there to witness this gruesome event we would have seen how these two descriptions harmonize. We are not given all the details. It is possible that Judas hanged himself and either the rope broke or the branch the rope was tied to broke, resulting in a fall upon sharp rocks that caused his midsection to be ripped open. "If he hanged himself from a tree located on a high cliff, above a valley, and if then the rope broke and the traitor fell on rocky ground, the result could very well have been as pictured in the book of Acts" [William Hendricksen, *Matthew*, p. 945]. If that is what happened, then what Judas thought would be a simple hanging turned out to be a more tortuous death, but nothing to be compared with the eternal punishment coming to the one of whom the Lord said, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 16:24). Another possibility is that when he was found dead from hanging, those who found him either accidentally or purposefully allowed his dead body to fall resulting in the injury described in this verse.

¹⁰"One is reminded of Benedict Arnold, another traitor. The reward he received from the British was of a very temporary character. He was hated by those whom he had betrayed and disliked even by the British whom he had favored. He died in poverty" [William Hendricksen, *Matthew*, p. 943.]

The very name Judas was given, “son of perdition” (John 17:12), reminds us of his eternal ruin. The only other man so named in Scripture is the man of lawlessness, that “son of perdition” (the Antichrist) who will be the first resident of the lake of fire, along with the false prophet (Rev. 19:20). Some have even suggested that the man of sin will be a reincarnation of Judas Iscariot, but there is no Scriptural warrant for such a theory.

Acts 1:20

Two Psalms are cited in this verse: Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. The first passage seems to refer to the **removal** of Judas due to judgment. The second passage shows the need for a **replacement**. The KJV term “bishopruck” means “office” and is the same word used in 1 Timothy 3:1, “the *office* of a bishop (overseer).” The office held by Judas was that of apostle, and he had to be replaced. The need to replace him was brought about because of his wicked defection, not because he died. Remember, the Apostle James, the brother of John, was the first apostle to be martyred, but there was no need to replace him (Acts 12:2). Matthias would assume Judas’ office and would replace him as the twelfth apostle.

Peter realized the necessity of replacing Judas because the Lord Jesus said that in the millennial kingdom there must be twelve disciples judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Also Revelation 21:14 demands the same, although Peter was unaware of this Scripture which John would later write towards the end of the first century.

Acts 1:21-22

It was required for the replacement of Judas to have been with the apostles throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry beginning with His baptism and continuing through His death, resurrection, and ascension. This requirement was met by Joseph and Matthias. It is fascinating to realize that the 12 apostle did not form an exclusive club because there were other individuals who followed Christ closely during His earthly ministry. This is illustrated in John chapter 6 where we see other disciples, in addition to the twelve, gathered around Jesus (verses 60, 66).

The other qualification was that the man to replace Judas had to be a witness of the resurrection. This harmonizes with 1 Corinthians 9:1 where one of the marks of an apostle was that he had seen the Lord. Not everyone who saw the Lord was an apostle (there were over 500 such people—1 Cor. 15:6), but every apostle was an eyewitness to His resurrection. Thus, there are no apostles today because believers living on earth today have not seen the risen Christ (John 16:10; 1 Peter 1:8), in spite of spurious claims from those who report visions or near-death experiences.

Acts 1:23

Two men were nominated to replace Judas, having met the clear qualifications given in verses 21-22. Notice that the first man had three names. He was Joseph, but was called Barsabas (“son of Sabas”), and another name he was given was Justus. It was not unusual to have multiple names (Peter, for example, was known as Simon, Cephas, and Barjona or son of Jonas). The other man was Matthias.

Acts 1:24

Any church decision, especially the appointment of leaders, must be bathed in prayer. Those who act independently of God will make mistakes for sure, because the Lord’s knowledge far surpasses ours. He

“knowest the hearts of all men” and only He can guide His people to the correct choices. Both Joseph and Matthias were probably devoted disciples, and which one to choose was beyond man’s wisdom. “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). God had already made the choice; the disciples merely needed to ascertain His will.

There are two major reasons why believers may have problems determining God’s will: 1) they may not fully desire to know God’s will; 2) they may not be willing to carry out God’s will once it is known. But for the seeking and obedient heart, God will make known what He wants, in His way and in His time, for His glory.

Acts 1:25

The ministry of apostleship was of immense importance in the church. It was the gift that was given first priority (1 Cor. 12:28—“first apostles”). It was a spiritual ministry that required fervent prayer and utmost attention to mastering the Scriptures and teaching them faithfully (Acts 6:4). The great transgression of Judas in betraying his Lord disqualified him from this lofty service and resulted in his God-ordained demise. Judas went to “his own place.” “This last phrase is a shocking and sobering statement. Judas, and all others who go to hell, belong there; it is the **place** of their **own** choosing. It belongs to them, and they to it!”¹¹ Judas’ place is characterized by “perdition” (John 17:12, being lost and perishing forever). Tragically he was under God’s **woe** (Luke 22:22) due to his unbelief and the wicked choices he made. May the fall of Judas be a solemn warning to our own hearts, lest there be in any of us a wicked heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12). Judas was, for a time, indwelt by the devil (John 13:27; Luke 22:3), and both will share the same eternal destiny, even the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10,14-15), which was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

Acts 1:26

Some argue that this whole procedure for replacing Judas was illegitimate and did not receive God’s stamp of approval. Some who argue this think that Paul was God’s choice to be the twelfth apostle. While Paul was certainly an apostle, whose apostolic ministry was especially geared to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8), he was not the replacement for Judas. There were others who had the gift of apostleship besides the twelve, James, the half-brother of Jesus, being one of them (Gal. 1:19). In a general sense we are all apostles, the term simply meaning “one who is sent on a mission” (see John 17:18; 20:21). But in the restricted sense, an apostle had to have seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1), thus making it impossible for someone living today to be a genuine apostle. Compare also Ephesians 2:20 where the apostles and prophets were foundational men, a foundation which was laid at the beginning of God’s program to build His Church. God used apostles and prophets as His instruments in giving us the 27 books of the New Testament, a rock-solid foundation indeed!

If the question were asked, “Who was the greatest apostle?” many of us might think of the Apostle Paul. But if you were to ask the same question to Paul he would say, “I am the least of the apostles,” “I am not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9). This beautiful humility is also seen in Ephesians 3:7-8—“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, **who am less than the least of all saints**, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

The fact that Matthias is not mentioned elsewhere in the book of Acts is not a reason to deny his genuine

¹¹John MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*, p. 35.

apostleship, because many of the other eleven are not mentioned either. The casting of lots was a legitimate method God gave to Israel to determine His will (Prov. 16:33) during the Old Testament economy. Add to this the fact that Peter was careful to be guided by the Scriptures (Acts 1:16,20) and that the disciples bathed the matter in prayer (Acts 1:14,24). Their earnestness in prayer and their attentiveness to Scripture was a wonderful example which ought to be emulated by today's leaders of God's local assemblies. They were certainly guided by the Lord in this matter, and we have no record anywhere in the book of Acts or in the Epistles that this decision to select Mathias was ever overturned by the Lord. It is worth noting, however, that this is the last time lots were ever cast in the name of the Lord to determine His will. After the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, we never again read about God's people casting lots. Today God's people are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), with the added benefit that we now have the completed Scriptures to guide us (Rev. 22:18-19).

We can trace the history of the twelve apostles through the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 5 they were arrested for the "crime" of preaching the gospel and even beaten (Acts 5:40). At this point did Mathias have second thoughts about being chosen to be a part of this despised and persecuted group of preachers? No, he and the other apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:29). In Acts chapter 6, other men were chosen as the first "deacons" or servants to handle certain matters pertaining to the care of the widows in order that the twelve apostles might give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). In Acts chapter 8 there was a great persecution under Saul's leadership forcing most believers to flee from Jerusalem, but the twelve apostles were able to remain in the city (Acts 8:1). The twelve were also present for the important meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15 pertaining to the conversion of the Gentiles. It was then that Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James clarified that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be saved (Acts 15:2,11). On the one hand Jews were not asked to abandon their Jewish culture (including even worship at the temple), but on the other hand the Gentiles were not put under the Jewish laws. This arrangement created tension during a unique transition period until God allowed the Romans to destroy the temple in 70 A.D. Following Acts 15 we never hear again of the 12 apostles gathered together as a group.

We know very little of the life and ministry of Mathias. Some traditions say he was stoned to death for the sake of the gospel. It is likely that all the apostles were martyred with the possible exception of the Apostle John, because God had some writing assignments for him late in life. The Lord had promised the disciples that they would partake in His sufferings (Matt. 20:22-23).

As we leave Chapter 1, the small band of disciples under the leadership of twelve men chosen by God, were of one accord, were much in prayer, were guided by the Scriptures, and were waiting for the promise of the Spirit which would be fulfilled shortly.

Excursus on the Ascension

A thousand years before Christ came, the Holy Spirit indicated that the Messiah would not only come and die for the sins of man, but that He would also rise again and ascend back to the third heaven from whence He had come. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them" (Psalm 68:18). Paul cited this very same passage in his discussion of Christ's ascension: "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on

high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men” (Eph. 4:8).¹²

Consider Psalm 110:1: “The LORD (Jehovah, referring to God the Father) said unto my Lord (David’s Lord being none other than the greater descendant of David, the Lord Jesus) ‘Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.’ ” The Lord Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will not sit upon the throne of David on this earth (in the holy land) until His second coming in glory. Only then will all His enemies be totally defeated as the result of Christ’s total victory at Armageddon when all military opposition by God-hating men will immediately and forever collapse. Indeed, God will laugh at man’s feeble attempt to overpower the Almighty (Psalm 2). The enemies of the Lord Jesus becoming His footstool is an image taken from the book of Joshua when all the kings were defeated (Joshua 10:24). Joshua told his captains to put their feet upon the necks of these kings as an outward symbol of total defeat. So likewise the Lord Jesus will some day come back to this earth in conquering victory, and all His enemies will become His footstool.

The ascension of Christ is also mentioned in the prelude to the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah 53. The prophecy actually begins in Isaiah 52:13, “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently (wisely, successfully), He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.” To what extent will He be successful? He will be exalted and extolled and be very high. How high? He will ascend to the third heaven, the highest heaven, even to the right hand of God the Father (Psalm 110:1). One cannot get any higher than this! And One cannot get any lower than He went, even enduring the shameful death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

How important is it to understand the true nature and cause of Christ’s sufferings? Many men died on Roman crosses. Following Spartacus’s unsuccessful slave revolt against Rome in 71 B.C., six thousand of his followers were fastened to crosses along the Appian Way. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, said at least five hundred Jews a day were crucified during the Roman siege of Jerusalem under Titus in A.D. 70.¹³ What then made the crucifixion of Christ so unique?

Jesus was on the cross for six hours, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. But many criminals suffered on crosses for a much longer duration, perhaps as long as two or three days. Some criminals were scourged or whipped so severely that they died from the scourging and never made it to the cross. Jesus was not scourged to this extent.

Other people have been tortured in ways just as painful or more so than crucifixion. Many Christian martyrs were put to death in ways that were horrible and merciless and gruesome. Anyone familiar with *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* knows something of the horrors of certain forms of torture that were used against God’s people down through the centuries. What then made the death of Christ so unique, in light of the fact that so many others have had to endure unimaginable sufferings which have led to their deaths?

It is interesting that the gospel writers give us very few details about the crucifixion of Christ. We might have expected them to describe all the gory and grim details of what Christ had to endure during those hours of torture, but they did not. For example, Luke’s concise account describes the event in few words: “And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him” (Luke 23:33).

¹²For the significance of the phrase, “He led captivity captive,” see John Peter Lange’s *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, Volume 12 (James-Revelation), published by Zondervan, pages 364-377. Also see the Middletown Bible Church article, “Where Do the Dead Go?” found at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/hades.htm>.

¹³*The Wars of the Jews* 5.11.1

God the Holy Spirit (the Divine Author of Scripture) had a reason for not overemphasizing the physical sufferings of Christ. The physical sufferings were not what made the death of Christ so terrible. The death Christ died involved far more agony and suffering than the deaths that other men have experienced. No man will ever be able to say, "Christ's death was nothing compared to what I had to go through." No, Christ's death was unique.

If we see only the physical aspect of the crucifixion, then we have really missed the whole point. What made the suffering and the death of Christ so significant was not what the Jews did to Jesus, and it was not what the Romans did to Jesus. The real significance of the suffering and death of Christ involved what God the Father did to Jesus as He bore the punishment for our sins. God must punish sin, and if God were to punish us for our sins, we would all be doomed to hell forever. But the Savior, in love, was willing to die in our place, as our Substitute, in order to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserve.

We should not blame the Jews for the death of Christ or the Romans, though each of these groups were at fault. If we want to blame someone, we must look in the mirror and see the sinner for whom Christ died. The wrath and anger and judgment of God against sin, which should have fallen upon us, fell upon Christ instead. "Christ hath once suffered for sins [for our sins!], the Just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18).

Ponder carefully these words from the prophet Isaiah: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Isaiah also says that He was "stricken" and "smitten by God" (Isaiah 53:4) and that He was "bruised" by God (Isaiah 53:10). True, the Jews and Romans struck Christ in many ways, but the blows which were infinitely more significant were inflicted by the hand of Almighty God as He was punishing our sinless Substitute for the sins which we committed. The hymnwriter said, "Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me!"

God's Servant dealt prudently (Isaiah 52:13) and was a total success, accomplishing everything God intended and winning a tremendous victory. No one took His life from Him; He laid down His life voluntarily to rescue us (John 10:17-18). Our Lord was not a victim of circumstances. He was in total control of everything, outworking the Father's plan flawlessly with complete success. The Son of God won the victory and He was extolled and highly exalted (Isa. 52:13).

In his "former treatise" Luke described the remarkable ascension event: "And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). Bethany was on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, the very place where Lazarus lived and died and was miraculously brought back to life. His God-honoring sisters, Mary and Martha, lived with him. The believers who witnessed this event worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy (Luke 24:52).

The disciples were troubled prior to the cross when the Lord told them that He would be leaving them (John 16:20). This was a frightening thought, as they were surrounded by enemies who wanted Jesus dead and who would certainly target His disciples as well. For the Lord to leave them was very distressing, but the resurrection changed all of this. They began to realize that their Lord was accessible to them in a new and wonderful way. Even though the Lord would leave them at the ascension (Mark 16:19), yet remarkably He would still be present "working with them" (Mark 16:20). The Lord also had repeatedly assured them that "another Comforter" (One just like Himself) would come to help and encourage them and abide with them

forever (John 14:16). The Lord Jesus is not an “absentee landlord,” only occasionally checking up on what is happening down below. No, He is vitally, infinitely and totally involved with His people. Therefore, the disciples were not depressed, but they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. The passion of Christ gave way to the ascension and exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father. He is now seated there having all power and authority in heaven and earth, making it possible for every believer to have deep joy and hope.

The ascension was a gradual, not a sudden event: “while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). The impression given is that they carefully watched and witnessed this unique event; it did not happen in two seconds. In contrast to this would be our Lord’s sudden disappearance in Luke 24:31, or Enoch’s rapid removal in Genesis 5:24. But our Lord’s gradual and magnificent ascension might be compared to Elijah’s departure as his chariot of fire was seen going all the way up and then finally disappearing in the sky (2 Kings 2:10-11). It may also be compared to our Lord’s second coming to earth at the close of the tribulation, which will be a gradual descent so that every eye will see Him in His resplendent glory (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7). His second coming to earth will be in sharp contrast to His pretribulational coming, which will take place so quickly that an observer blinking his eyes would miss it (1 Cor. 15:52). Christ’s return to the earth will not be a secret coming witnessed by only a few (Matt. 24:26), but it will be like lightning, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:27), so that no one will miss it. His coming will be as clear as daylight, as clear as the rising of the sun. It will not happen in some obscure corner of the world. When Christ returns to this earth in shining glory, accompanied by His beloved Church, it will be a spectacular global event.

Our Lord was in constant anticipation of His return to His heavenly Father (John 6:62; 13:1; 16:28). The fact that He must “go away” was often repeated in His upper room discourse (John 13-17). The Lord eagerly anticipated going to His Father (John 17:13) and reclaiming that glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). During His incarnation, the Lord Jesus emptied Himself temporarily and did not hold onto that glory as a thing to be grasped. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the despicable death of a cross, so that He might rescue us who were lost in sin. All of this would eventually result in His unparalleled exaltation to glory (Phil. 2:5-11). How wonderful and comforting to know that as believers we shall someday share in His glory (Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet. 4:13; 5:10).

On the day of His resurrection the Lord Jesus mentioned His ascension to the first person who saw Him alive: “Jesus saith unto her, ‘Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God’” (John 20:17). The Lord made it clear that the relationship that He had with the Father was different from the relationship she had. She was a child of God by faith in the Savior; He was the eternal Son of God. The expression “touch Me not” could be rendered “stop clinging to Me.” Once she recognized Jesus, she apparently embraced Him in some way, being so grateful that He was back in her presence and not wanting Him to ever leave again. Immediately the Lord reminded her that He must go away (compare John 16:17). His vital ministries of Intercessor, Advocate and High Priest at the right hand of the Father were necessary and would be for Mary’s eternal benefit.

The Lord’s ascension formed the climax to that great doctrinal hymn found in 1 Timothy 3:16. He was “received up into glory.” The six phrases found in this verse may be analyzed as follows:

1. Christ was manifested in the flesh. The living God became flesh (John 1:14) and made Himself known in and through a body (John 1:18). Likewise, God the Son is today manifesting Himself in and through His Body, the Church, which is on the earth (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24-27). As the visible and local

body of Christ stays healthy (Eph. 4:12-16), conducts itself in a godly way, and functions according to the Biblical pattern (1 Tim. 3:1-15), then the following will be true:

- a. God's LIFE will be manifested in and by the Church (Col. 1:27).
- b. God's WISDOM will be manifested in and by the Church (Eph. 3:10).
- c. God's POWER will be manifested in and by the Church (Eph. 3:20).
- d. God's GRACE will be manifested in and by the Church (Eph. 2:7).
- e. God's TRUTH will be manifested in and by the Church (1 Tim. 3:15).
- f. God's LOVE will be manifested in and by the Church (John 17:23).
- g. God's GLORY will be manifested in and by the Church (Eph. 3:21).

2. Christ was justified (declared righteous, vindicated) in the Spirit. Throughout His earthly ministry Christ was vindicated by the Spirit of God. His miracles and signs were performed by the power of the Spirit (Matt. 12:28), giving unmistakable evidence that Christ was all He claimed to be. The ultimate vindication of Christ took place when He was raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4). Likewise, God the Holy Spirit is today vindicating the Resurrected Christ in and through the local assembly, convicting the world that He indeed is the Righteous One (John 16:7-11). Note especially verse 7 which associates this convicting and vindicating ministry with the Spirit's coming on the Day of Pentecost.

3. Christ was seen of angels. Throughout His earthly life and ministry the God-man was the very center of angelic interest, attention and curiosity! They marveled at their holy Lord (Isa. 6:1-4; cf. John 12:41) as He humbled Himself (Phil. 2:5-8) and was made even lower than the angels so that He might taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9). And yet today, it is the Church that has become the theater of the universe and the center of angelic observation! Unto the principalities and powers God is now making known His manifold wisdom and grace by the Church (Eph. 3:10; 2:7; cf. 1 Cor. 4:9; 11:10). The living God is using the Church to teach angels concerning Himself!

4. Christ was preached among the nations and the responsibility and privilege of making known the unsearchable riches of Christ has been committed to the Church! Although the gospel was known in previous ages (Rom. 1:1-4; Gal. 3:8), there was a "mystery" aspect of the gospel which was unknown in previous ages, but which now forms the very core of gospel preaching of this age. The passages which delineate the "mystery of the gospel" are as follows: Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:5-8; 6:19; and Colossians 1:27; 4:3. Our distinctive message today is that Jews and Gentiles alike may believe the gospel and be united together into one Body (1 Cor. 12:13) for the purpose of manifesting and bearing witness to Christ who is the sovereign Head of this unique organism!

5. Christ was believed on in the world and it is the glorious privilege of the Church to bear witness to Christ as the sole object of faith! The Lord Jesus prayed for the unity of the Church for the purpose "that the world may believe that Thou sent Me" (John 17:21). As the Church functions according to godliness (1 Tim. 3:15) and edification (Eph. 4:12-16), then unbelievers will be convicted as they see the living God being manifested in the local assembly (see 1 Cor. 14:24-25; cf. Col. 1:27 and John the Baptist's purpose as a witness in John 1:7).

6. Christ was received up into glory when He was taken up into Heaven at the ascension. This marked the termination of the Lord's earthly ministry and witness. Likewise, the earthly ministry and witness of the Church also has a terminal point: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4; see also the "mystery" discussed in 1 Cor. 15:51-52; compare Rev. 12:5 with 1 Thess. 4:17 where the same word for the ascension of Christ is used for the Rapture of the

Church). According to Acts 1:1-2, the ascension of Christ did not mark the termination of our Lord's ministry and witness, but rather it marked the beginning! It is the Church that continues the witness (Acts 1:8) and teaching (Matt. 28:20) of the resurrected Lord who is the Head of the Body, God blessed forever!¹⁴

The book of Hebrews has much to say about our Lord's ascension. After He had fully satisfied the Father by His work on Calvary's cross which purged our sins completely, He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). He assumed the exalted place of honor. He "passed into the heavens" (Heb. 4:14) where He continually represents us before the Father as our great High Priest, Intercessor and Advocate. Christ entered the most holy place "within the veil" as our forerunner (Heb. 6:19-20), indicating that He is preparing the way for all His believers to follow Him someday. Therefore heaven is our home now and we are already citizens there (Phil. 3:20 where the word "conversation" means "citizenship"). The book of Hebrews emphasizes that Christ passed into the heavens and sat down at the right hand of God. This is in contrast with the priests of the old dispensation who never sat down (there were no chairs in the tabernacle) indicating that their work was never done (cf. Heb. 10:11-12). The work done by our Great High Priest was a finished work, totally satisfying to the Father, and He sat down.

"Who [Jesus Christ] has gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (1 Pet. 3:22). God the Father is not jealous of the infinite glory His Son now possesses. The Son is the only member of the Godhead who has a body and who is a human being—perfect Man and perfect God. The Father is infinitely joyful at the glory His Son has achieved. So should we be joyful in anticipation of some day being with Him and sharing in His awesome glory (1 Pet. 5:10).

We learn in Ephesians 4:8-9 that prior to His ascension Christ first descended into the lower parts of the earth (Sheol/Hades), and when He ascended up on high He led captivity captive.¹⁵ Though there are diverse understandings of this passage, many see this as the time when the souls of Old Testament saints were brought to the third heaven where the righteous dead are now located and where they await the resurrection of the just (Daniel 12:2). Paradise was once in the heart of the earth (Luke 23:43; Matt. 12:40), but is now located in the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2,4).

The ascension of our Lord has been a vital part of the Christian faith from the beginning. "He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead."¹⁶ He died for our sins, rose again, ascended to heaven and is coming to earth again someday!

¹⁴For a detailed study of the Mystery of Godliness and how it relates to the local assembly of believers, see <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/dispen/mysgod.htm>

¹⁵For a very helpful discussion of Ephesians 4:8-10 see "Excursus on Hades" in John Peter Lange's *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, Volume 12 (James-Revelation), published by Zondervan, pages 364-377).

¹⁶From *The Apostles' Creed*.