

**Prayers That Avail Much
Part II**

As we continue from last week the two angels have just told the disciples that their beloved Lord would return someday in the same way in which He ascended. Before Jesus left to be taken up, He gave the disciples and His followers instructions to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the promise given by God the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts is the history of the ministry of Jesus continued after He ascended and of the early church. Today's message is a blend of history and God's will revealed and obeyed. As we begin, notice with me how the followers of Christ are obedient and how they are all in complete unity. This is the result of trust in Jesus and His Words. They believe and obey. This is our goal as well, to believe, to trust and obey God.

Pray

Scripture and Prayer Fulfilled

The theme of the 2nd half of Acts chapter 1 is **when our prayers and God's will align, great things happen**. God gives us reasons to trust Him. Let me begin with showing the relationship and alinement between Acts and the Old Testament. The Book of Acts is similar to Book of Joshua in that it is a bridge book. It is a bridge between the Gospels, which describe the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the epistles, which unfold the life and nature of Christ's church, just as in the

Old Testament the Book of Joshua bridges the period between the time of preparation in the wilderness and the time of settling down in the land.

At the beginning of the Book of Acts we find a striking parallel to Joshua. After the Jewish people had crossed the Jordan River into Palestine, we would have thought that it was time for them immediately to move against the fortified cities of the land, when the citizens of the land were still unsettled by the Jews' arrival. Instead, we find that God told them to wait and consecrate themselves. This took four days. They crossed the Jordan on the tenth of the first month, and they waited at Gilgal for 10 days where they observed the Passover, circumcised those who were born in the wilderness, and waited until the fourteenth to enter. This is similar to what we find in Acts. Instead of moving directly on to Pentecost, we find a 10-day waiting period in which God worked in the disciples to accomplish several important things, including preparing them to receive the Holy Spirit and replacing Judas.

We, by our nature, are people of action. So, we expect action and we want things immediately. The Holy Spirit should come at once. The gospel should be preached right away. People should hear and accept Christ. Instead, for the disciples and for us, there are times of delay.

Do you ever have periods like this in your life? If so, are those not difficult times because we want answers and solutions. These are often the hardest periods for us to live through. We want to do something we desire to be in control and we are task oriented. What is even more significant, we want God to do something - now. When God does not do anything, we think, "Have things gone wrong or am I being punished for being unfaithful?". Things should be happening if I really am a Christian and really am on track with God. What is wrong? Am I the only one who

experiences these thoughts? We need to stop this self-talk and doubt and seek God and ask for wisdom to understand what He is doing or why He is waiting and what is His will?

This period of waiting in Joshua and Acts was not, however, a period of inactivity. It was a period of preparation, which is what waiting times are for. This is true in our lives as well, waiting on the Lord is a time of preparation. Sometimes in periods of waiting we can see the preparation. At other times we cannot. God is doing things in our lives that we cannot see or at least of which we are unaware. Perhaps He is developing our character. We seldom see that, either in others or in ourselves. The second half of Acts 1 shows the early Christians practicing obedience, having fellowship, praying, studying the Scriptures with brothers and sisters in Christ, and then choosing leaders in preparation for their future ministry.

As we journey through this passage, I hope you will see some similarities with Joshua. The followers of Jesus are in the upper room, the disciples soon to be Apostles and many other men and women, about 120 and amazingly they are in complete agreement. They are discussing all Jesus taught and how He fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Himself and they are connecting the dots. They realize all Jesus taught and the prophecies of the Old Testament and the miracles and promises He made were fulfilled.

Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College Peter Stoner has calculated the probability of one man fulfilling the 48 major prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. The estimates were worked out by twelve different classes representing some 600 university students. The students carefully weighed all the factors, discussed each prophecy at length, and even examined the various circumstances which might indicate that men had conspired together to

fulfill a particular prophecy. They made their estimates conservative enough so that there was even unanimous agreement among the most skeptical students. The professor then took their estimates, and made them even more conservative. He also encouraged other skeptics and scientists to make their own estimates to see if his conclusions were fair. Finally, he submitted his figures for review to a committee of the American Scientific Affiliation. Upon examination, they verified that his calculations were dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented. Mathematically the odds of one person fulfilling the major 48 prophecies are 10^{157} or 10 followed by 157 zeros! The Old Testament rabbis identified 456 passages pointing to or describing the Messiah centuries before Jesus was born, yet Jesus fulfilled all 456. Imagine if the professor had used the rabbis' 456 passages - I could not put that many zeros on a screen there would be multiple of thousands of zeros. Professor Stoner concluded, "Any man who rejects Christ as the Son of God is rejecting a fact, proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world."

These 120 in the upper room are finally getting it and the big picture is coming into focus and their belief in Jesus as the Christ or Messiah and everything He said and taught is now fueling their obedience. They go straight back to the city, like Jesus instructed and wait – waiting but praying, studying and sharing.

We also know that they are not locked up in the upper room with no way out. As Luke told us in chapter 24 of his gospel account the followers of Jesus, while they waited for the Holy Spirit, were worshipping daily in the Temple as well. They wait and pray but they also go in and out of the upper room to engage people. I can imagine them sharing the Gospel on their way to and from the temple and striking up conversations at the temple explaining how Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures concerning the Messiah. I wonder if they did the math like Professor

Stoner or just shared their testimony. No one can debate your testimony for its what God has done in your life, in your heart, in your mind and in your soul. The process of change and preparation for 10 days included as Paul wrote, ¹⁶“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.** ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.** We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

The 120 gathered in Jerusalem as God’s Word was fulfilled and do you know that each of you are the fulfillment of God’s Word, each of you is a miracle of God. My beloved, use this gift for the glory of God’s Kingdom, knowing **when our prayers and God’s will align, great things happen!**

All Scripture Has and Will Be Fulfilled (vs. 15-20)

In the upper room during the next 10 days between the ascension and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles begin to reflect on all Jesus taught them concerning Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Christ. They begin to think about all Jesus taught them and the amazing recent events. They also focus on the vacancy left in their number because of Judas’ betrayal and suicide. Reading verses 15 to 20 of Acts chapter 1, “*In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (meaning believing brothers and sisters) the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,* ¹⁶ ‘Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit

spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.’¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)²⁰ ‘For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”; (Psalm 69:25) and “Let another take his office.” ’ ’ (Psalm 109:8) In these days, Peter becomes the spokesman for the apostles. Luke reports that Peter stood up and began to exposit the Scriptures that spoke of Judas and his betrayal. The fact that Peter quotes King David in verse 20 by using both Psalm 69 and 109 indicates Peter spend time during the 10 days studying and meditating on the Scriptures. Peter gives us a good picture or overview of what the disciples thought of Scripture, its Sovereignty, and its Inspiration.

Scripture Fulfilled

Peter equates Scripture to God’s Word. Because God is sovereign and everything come to pass as God decrees then it is a logical conclusion that His Word will without a doubt always be fulfilled. We know that both Old and New Testaments are Scripture and Scripture will always stand the test of time and always come to pass as God determines. God wrote it through men, using their personalities and guided by God the Holy Spirit these writers write as God has determined. The writer’s words are the Word of God, therefore, all things in God’s Word, the Bible will come to pass. I relate to Peter, he was stubborn, he at times got ahead of himself and at times he thought he understood it all, but did not. Maybe Jesus, before His ascension, sat Peter down and explained things bringing into focus the big picture and all that had transpired. Now, Peter with full apostolic

authority stands and does what Jesus did before him; he opened up the Scriptures and explained to the others why Judas had to happen.

Peter quotes from two Psalms of David and tells us that while David wrote these Psalms down concerning an event in his day, the Holy Spirit was speaking through him with such prophetic magnitude that David wrote about Judas centuries before Judas was even born. The Holy Spirit through David spoke hundreds of years into the future about Judas.

Reading from King David's 69th Psalm, ²² “**Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.** (*It was revealed during the Last Supper at the table that Judas would betray Jesus.*) ... ²⁵ **May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.**” Peter is saying that this Psalm is speaking of Judas’ office as an apostle of Jesus being vacated. Then Peter quotes from Psalm 109, ⁶ “**Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand.** ⁷ **When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin!** ⁸ **May his days be few; may another take his office!**” Judas is the wicked man who was at Jesus’ right hand, betrayed Him. Judas found himself guilty and now his office is to filled. So, as God directs, Peter proceeds to organize the others and obey what the Word of God tells him.

Peter also says in verse 18, that Judas fell “**headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.**” Those who spend their time trying to disprove the Bible use Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5, “**Throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, Judas departed, and he went and hanged himself.**” in an attempt to say only one can be true and most likely these claims are false and thus proving the Bible is false. I believe they are grasping at straws. For they are both true. Judas could have hung himself and the tree or the rope could not hold his

weight and his body fell to the rocks; that whole area was strewn with rocks or perhaps after he hung there for some time rotting his dead body separated and fell. The point is this detail shows the Apostles were witnesses and recording different details of the same story.

The need before the apostles is there is a need to replace Judas. Earlier Jesus was asked by the rich young man what “deed” he must do to be saved. Jesus told keep the commandments, which as sinners, no one can keep them all. This made it sound like no one could make it to heaven. Jesus knew He was the solution to the problem saying to Peter, “**‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’** Then Peter said in reply, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?’²⁸ Jesus said to them, ‘**Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**’”
(Matthew 19:26-28) So, if the twelve apostles were the foundations of the Church, then Judas needed to be replaced prior to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and subsequently Pentecost.

Scripture Being Fulfilled (vs. 21-26)

Out of obedience to God’s Word as studied by Peter, he gathered the others to begin the process of choosing a replacement for the vacancy. Reading at verse 21, “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.’²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.²⁴ And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen²⁵ to

take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Peter explains to be numbered as one of the twelve, the man had to meet a few requirements; having been with them from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry starting at His baptism by John until He ascended back to heaven. We know there were those who traveled with Jesus and the disciples, but were not among the 12. Judas replacement would then need to be a witness to all that Jesus did and taught and his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. In this group of followers there were two men who meet these qualifications; Justus (Luke 18:7 and Colossians 4:11) and Matthias, which we never read of again. There was also, James and Judas who were Jesus’ brothers and they were somewhat qualified in that they were with Jesus the entire time but prior to the resurrection they did not believe. Once Jesus was raised, they too became followers and leaders in the church. So, the 11 meet to pray and examine Justus and Matthias.

Some are critical of the process Peter used, the casting of lots. We in our time often think of dice and gambling. However, this is not the rolling of dice to see what number comes up or as the Casinos would say a “crap shoot”. Once their prayers concluded, they then “cast lots” as we read in verse 26. The Greek text reads literally “they gave lots to them.” The meaning seems to be that they *assigned* lots for them. The method was likely the one depicted in the Old Testament. One example of casting lots at God’s direction is found in the Book of Leviticus, God tells Moses the people must separate from all uncleanness. But Aaron’s two sons appeared near God unclean and were struck dead. God tells Moses his brother Aaron cannot come before the Mercy Seat. Reading at verse 6 of chapter 16, “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make

atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸ And Aaron shall **cast lots** over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel (*meaning to another place, a place separated from the people of God*). ⁹ And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

(Leviticus 16:6-10) This is where the concept and practice of scapegoat comes from. On-the-other-hand some scholars believe the lots cast were the Urim and Thummim found in Exodus (28:30), Deuteronomy (33:8) and Ezra (2:63). So, the disciples would have marked stones. The one whose stone came out first when the lots were cast was chosen. Some wanted to see Matthias selected by vote, but the text points more to the ancient procedure of lot-casting and one must understand the church is a theatrocracy not a democracy. One should not be put off by the “chance” element of casting lots, with God there is no element of chance. In the Old Testament the outcome was always seen to be determined by God. That was the consideration in this case. Before Pentecost, before the presence of the Holy Spirit to lead it, the church sought the direction of God and used the Old Testament procedure of securing divine decision by casting lots. After Pentecost the church in Acts made its own decisions under the direction of the Spirit. Lots were never cast again, but in this particular instance, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it was all the more important that the decision be the Lord’s, not theirs. Like God’s first selection of the Twelve, the men were as God determined. Jesus Christ’s Church was not founded on error for it happen just as God ordained and the outcome was God’s. So, by God’s will the Apostles are twelve in number again and ready for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Again, we can see the theme of this chapter in action, **when our prayers and God's will align, great things happen**. Let me ask, my beloved, as saints saved by the grace of God are our individual, family and church prayers in line with the will of God? Are we praying for the same things God desires? If so, prepare for great things to happen! Are you ready? When Joyce and I return after our vacation we will launch into chapter 2 of Acts and witness just how powerfully God answers effectual, fervent prayers.

My beloved, may we strive to make our prayers seeking after the will of God. As James, who did not believe in his brother Jesus until after His resurrection, a converted sinner, so he was like us, he wrote, **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”** (James 5:16) Now we will take some time to gather in small groups. The chairs come apart, sit them in groups and pray – pray for the forgiveness of sin and pray for each other and pray for the revelation of God's will for you and your family and for Canyon Bible.