

Unit 4, Lesson 24: Together in one place

Memory Verse: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

Jesus' followers had been through an emotional roller coaster ride of epic proportions. They had begun to follow him, believing him to be the Messiah or Christ. (Messiah, from Hebrew, and Christ, from Greek, both mean “Anointed One.”) They believed he was the hope of Israel. Most even believed that, when the time was right, Jesus would drive the hated Roman oppressors out of the land and give Israel back her sovereignty.

Then the Jews had captured Jesus and handed him over to the Romans to be crucified, the cruelest death then known. And Jesus had let it happen. They knew he had miraculous powers and couldn't understand why he didn't use them to save himself and his mission. They were brutally disappointed.

Then came Sunday, when some women claimed to have seen Jesus alive. It took all day, but eventually they saw Jesus for themselves and believed that he had been resurrected. Now what? They even asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) Might he, now that he had been resurrected, fulfill the prophecies the way they thought he would all along?

“It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7, 8)

Jesus didn't directly answer their question because they weren't ready to accept the answer, which would have been, “No.” Instead he told them they didn't need to know that and went on to tell them what they really did need to know. Jesus planned for them to share the message he had taught them while they had followed him.

So they waited. The Bible's accounts leave out a lot of details, so we don't know how much Jesus told them about when and how they would receive the Spirit. But they waited in Jerusalem as Jesus had instructed (Luke 24:49). And as they waited they decided to name someone to replace Judas.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled with the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus—he was one of our number and shared in this ministry....”

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” (Acts 1:15-17, 21, 22)

Some Bible students have suggested that the believers went ahead of the Holy Spirit when they selected two men and, by lot, selected Matthias to replace Judas among the 12. They think God had reserved that spot for Saul of Tarsus, who we will learn a lot more about in coming lessons. But this is pure conjecture as nothing in the Bible says what the believers did that day was either good or bad.

What might be more important to consider is what the book of Acts says about the days after Jesus left the disciples, as described in verses 3-11 of the first chapter.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14)

Many believe the “upstairs” room they stayed in is the same room where Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples the night he was betrayed. This is possible, even likely, but not certain. The point is that they all came to the same place and spent time in prayer as Jesus had instructed. It's hard to get into fights when you're always praying.

One sign of the unity they experienced in those days was the fact that they were able to reach consensus about which two men should be considered to replace Judas. We don't know how many of the one hundred twenty believers had been with Jesus from the beginning, but it could easily have been a dozen or more.

And when the lot was cast and Matthias chosen there's no record that the supporters of Joseph (Justus) were in any way upset about the choice. They believed, as Jews were prone to believe, that God had spoken through the lot, and the decision stood.

Most important in this matter, however, would have been the teaching of Jesus himself. “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” (John 13:35) The love Jesus spoke of is the love he demonstrated when he died for the human race. It was a love that led him to sacrifice self for the good of others. When self and self-preservation are taken out of the picture many good things can happen because nobody cares who gets the credit, only that the good thing actually happen.

Plus, they were praying for the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised.

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:25, 26)

These people were living what Jesus had taught them while he was here with them. And so they were united in purpose and thought.

This book, by the way, is written by Luke. We know this from the first two verses, which address “Theophilus” as the audience for the book, just as the Gospel of Luke does. There is also evidence from late in the book, when the author switches between “us” and “them” in his narrative.

Possible thought papers:

1. Read the Psalms (69:25 and 109:8) Peter quotes and applies to Judas. How do they apply?
2. Read verse 11, the message of the angels to the disciples after Jesus disappeared from their sight. What do you think these words mean? What do they mean to you?
3. Read Jesus' prayer in John 17. How do you think these followers helped it come true?