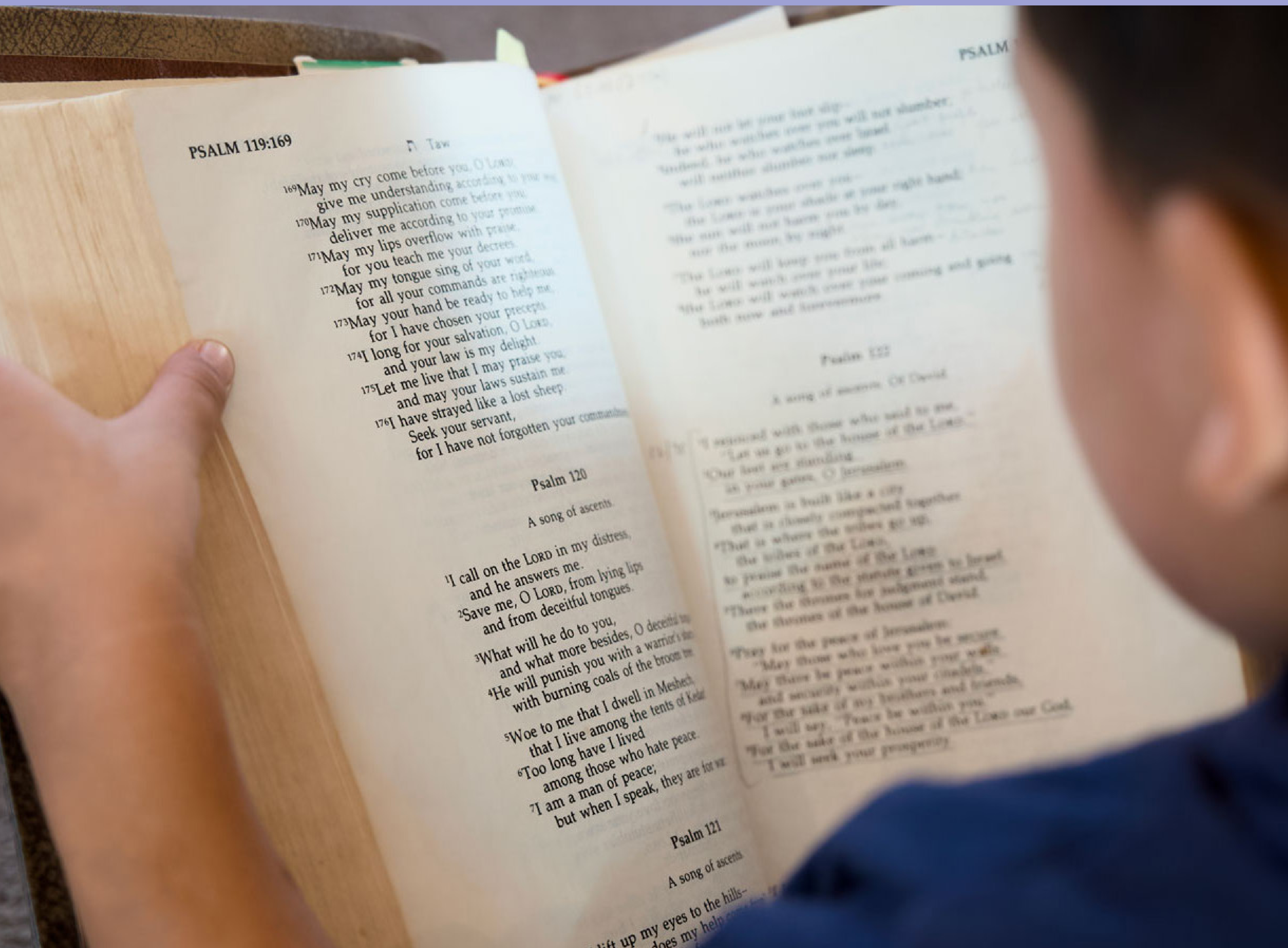




Into the Bible

The purpose of into the Bible
is to get children into the Bible,
and to get the Bible into children.

STEP FOUR: ACTS 1



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mi-pham@unsplash

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General Introduction



INTO THE BIBLE is a way to help children and young people, and anyone for that matter, to understand the Bible better. It's a simple translation from the original languages of the Bible, together with explanations, to make the Bible more clear.

Each Step INTO THE BIBLE is made up of three parts:

- 1) A **translation**, so that children can understand the passage in order to be able to read it in their own Bible.
- 2) An **introduction** to the passage for Beginners, so that they can get to know the background to the passage they are reading. This includes the history, geography, the issues of the time, and people involved, the culture, etc.
- 3) A **Bible study** on the passage for young people, or for parents, or teachers to help them grasp what the point of each paragraph is, and what are the issues spoken about in the text .

For five years in my ministry God put me in a government high school where I **discovered how interested children were in understanding a passage of the Scriptures**. Class after class, year after year there was sustained interest and even excitement. Among thousands of learners, I never had a class not interested.

During that time three of our four school-going children died. They died of extremely rare diseases that strike once in several million cases, and all three cases were entirely different from one another.

These two factors, teaching at the high school, and at the same time losing our children, are where the idea of INTO THE BIBLE came from.

The method of INTO THE BIBLE is to consult the Hebrew or Greek lexicons (dictionaries) to find out what meaning of the Hebrew/Greek word best fits the context of the passage, and will also make clear sense to a young reader. Where a word is difficult to understand I may turn it into a sentence to make sense of it. Where an issue is rather complicated, I use a footnote to explain it.

Hebrew and Greek lexicons open up the meanings of words and phrases in such a way that one sees more clearly what the Bible is saying. My aim is to share this information with children, with people who are beginning to read their Bibles, and with anyone who wants to teach children or adults, or those who simply want to get to know the Bible better.

The main principle on which INTO THE BIBLE is based is that the Bible comes from God, and it leads us to God, and that the whole Bible is true, and is perfectly reliable. The Bible is what we need to get through life, and to face death. The Bible has God's authority and goodness behind it.

Therefore, it is vital that everyone can understand their Bible.

- INTO THE BIBLE is intended to prepare youngsters to be able to **read their own Bible.**
- INTO THE BIBLE is planned to **introduce children to most of the Bible.**
- INTO THE BIBLE is **educational.** It is meant to develop their **reading skills as well as their characters.** It can also be used by parents or teachers to teach their children. **The focus is on our children.**

Our children are our heritage from God, and the Bible is the heritage for our children, which is also from God. The purpose of Into the Bible is to get children into the Bible, and to get the Bible into children.

Yours in Christ,

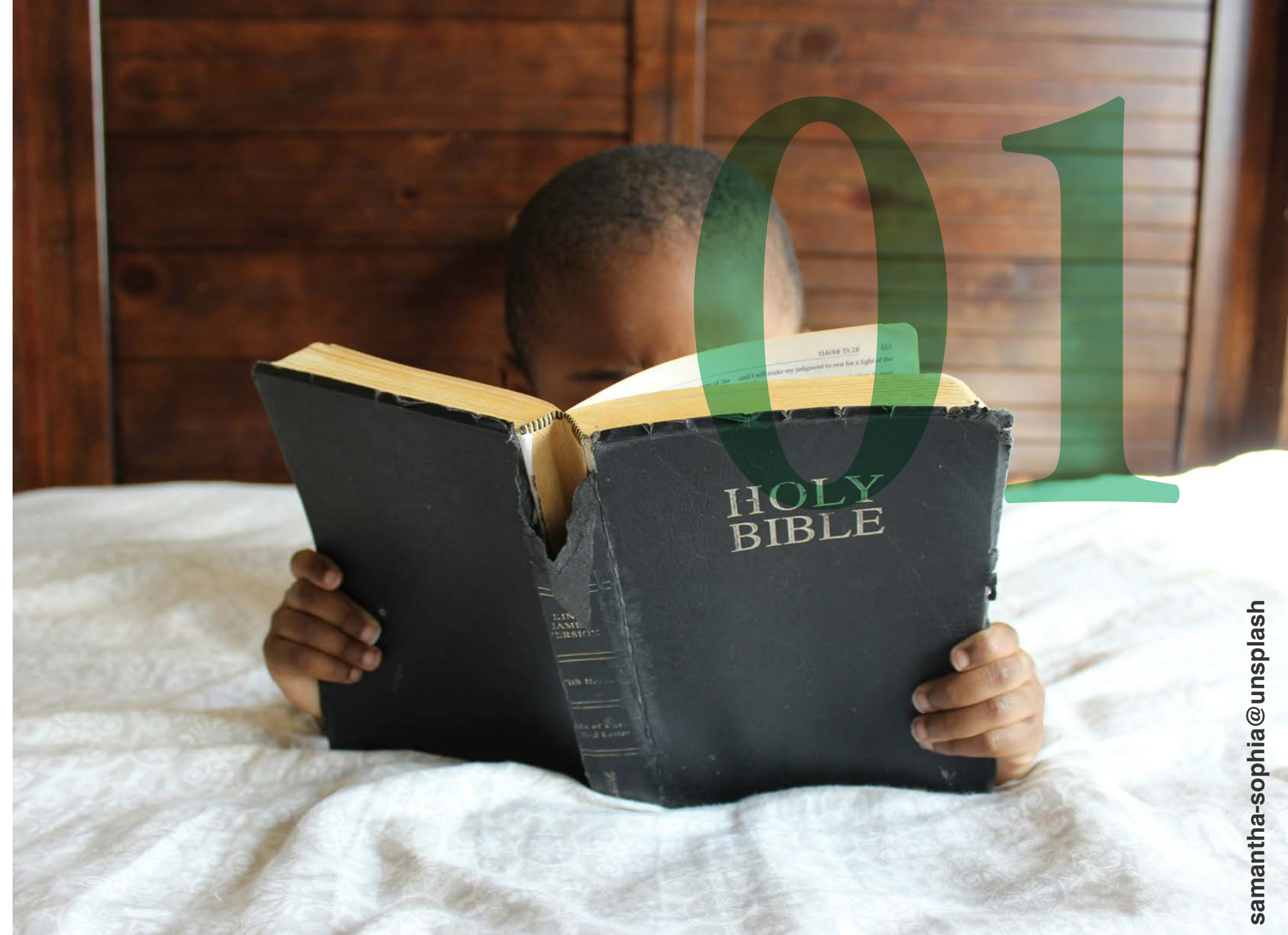
Peter Watson

Acts 1



Acts 1

A Simple Bible Translation



START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.



PART ONE

1: 1-5 JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES WHAT TO DO

Dear Theo, In the first part of my book I wrote about all the things that Jesus began to do, as well as to teach.

When the time came for him to go, he gave instructions to his apostles, the men whom he had chosen and trained. He gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could do what he told them to. Then he was taken up to heaven.

After he had suffered and died, Jesus proved to them that he was alive. He did this for forty days, in many ways that were absolutely convincing. He let them see him, and he talked to them about the kingdom of God.

When Jesus met together with his apostles, he gave them orders not to leave Jerusalem, even though that was a dangerous place to be for anyone who believed in Jesus. They were to wait there for the promise given by God the Father. Jesus said: You heard me tell you about that promise.

That promise was given in the time of John the Baptist, because John baptised only with water. But in a few days' time you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

1:6-8 JESUS TELLS THE APOSTLES WHAT WILL HAPPEN

So then, when the apostles got together with Jesus at the end of these forty days, they asked him: Lord, are you going to bring back the kingdom of Israel for us, as it used to be in the good old days of King David?

But Jesus answered them: It is not your business to know when God is going to carry out his plans for the future, or how he is going to do this. God has made that his own private business.

But you will get special power when the Holy Spirit comes into you. Then you will have authority to tell people about me. Tell the people in Jerusalem. Tell people in Judea and Samaria as well. Then go everywhere in the world, even to the furthest countries, and tell them about me.

1:9-12 JESUS GOES BACK TO HEAVEN

When Jesus had said this, he was taken up to heaven as his apostles watched. Then Jesus disappeared from their view behind a cloud.

They were watching, fascinated, as he went up to heaven. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes stood there next to them. They were angels.

They said: You men from Galilee, why are you standing here staring like this into the sky? This man Jesus has been taken away from you, up into heaven. But he will come back the same way you saw him going to heaven.

With that the apostles left that place, called the Mount of Olives, and went back to Jerusalem. That hill is quite near to Jerusalem. One can walk that distance even on the Sabbath day.

PART TWO: The apostles replace Judas with another apostle

1:13-14 THE APOSTLES WAIT AND PRAY

When they got back to Jerusalem, the apostles went to the upper room. An upper room, upstairs, meant a more private place. There they stayed put, as Jesus had told them to. Peter was there, as well as John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew [**b'thol-a'mew**] and Matthew, another James, the son of Alphaeus [**al-fee-is**], and another Simon, the Zealot [**zeh-lit**], and another Judas, the son of someone else called James (who was well-known in those days, but nowadays we don't know who he was.)

They all spent their time in prayer. They kept on praying, and they prayed together. They were completely united in the way they felt and believed. They prayed with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus. They also prayed with the brothers of Jesus who had not believed in him until he died and rose from the dead.

1:15-20 PETER SPEAKS ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BIBLE

In those days, after Jesus had gone back to heaven, Peter took the lead among the Christians. The believers were a big group. There were, all together, about a hundred and twenty of them.

Peter spoke to them: Men, brothers, The Bible had to come true. It had to be fulfilled. What it says came from the Holy Spirit who spoke to us using the words of King David. What David said applies to Judas who became a guide to help those men who arrested Jesus. We must listen to the prophet David, because what Judas has done is utterly unacceptable.

The problem is that Judas was one of us. He had a part in this work and ministry that the Lord Jesus has given us. So what are we going to do about this? We must follow the guidance that the Bible gives us.

Judas bought a field with the dirty money he got for betraying Jesus. And there he committed suicide. He died horribly. His stomach burst open and all his insides came out.

This became known to all the people living in Jerusalem. They know that God punished him. That field has even been called, in their own language, “The field of blood.”

Now this is written, by David, in the book of Psalms: ***His house must be left empty. No one must live in it anymore.*** (Psalm 69) It also says in the book of Psalms: ***Let someone else take over his work.*** (Psalm 109) That means that God is guiding us that Judas must no longer be regarded as one of us.

1:21-22 HOW THEY SHOULD REPLACE JUDAS

So Peter said: Because of what happened, it's important that we now get someone to replace Judas. That person will have to be one of the men who knew the Lord Jesus well. He has to be someone who was with us men all the time that we were there when Jesus was teaching and working.

He must have been with us from the time of the baptism of John, right until the day when Jesus was taken from us up to heaven. It's important that one of these men has to become a witness with us of the resurrection of Jesus.

1:23-26 HOW THE APOSTLES DID REPLACE JUDAS

So they suggested or proposed two men. One was a man called Joseph Barsabbas [**bar-sab-bas**], which means ‘Son of the Sabbath.’ That was his Jewish name. He also

had a Roman name, which was Justus. Justus means just or fair. So he was a good man, a religious or godly man. He was just the sort of man the apostles and the other believers wanted. The other man they suggested or proposed was Matthias [m'tigh-is].

Then they prayed to God: Lord, you know everybody's heart. You know what someone is really like deep inside. Please show us which one of these two men you choose to take on this ministry as an apostle, because Judas did what was very bad and has died.

Judas has gone, and must take full responsibility for what he has done. He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry. He has now gone to meet his end.

So they left the decision for the Lord to take by casting lots. The lot went to Matthias. So he was then regarded as an apostle along with the other eleven.



NOW YOU CAN READ ACTS 1 IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

Acts 1

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapters you read in section 01. Interesting things like why Luke wrote the book of Acts, and how the apostles began the work that Jesus gave them to do.



Luke was either a teenager or a young man in the time of Jesus.

So he was more or less the same age as Mark who was the first to write a gospel about Jesus. Luke became a doctor when he grew up. He also became a good friend of the apostle Paul, and travelled with Paul on some of his journeys. Another friend of Luke was an important Roman called Theo or Theophilus [thee-o-f'lis]. Theo was interested in Jesus and Christianity and Luke wrote to him to tell him all about it.

Luke wrote two whole books about Jesus and Christianity to Theo. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer. So, in the Bible we get more information about Christianity from Luke than from any other writer of the Bible. We are therefore very thankful that Theo was so interested in what Luke had to say.

Luke is the only person to have written reliably about what happened in the first thirty five years after Jesus had finished his work in Palestine. After Luke's history of the Acts of the Apostles, the history of the Christian church is unknown for many years. We know that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans soon after Luke wrote his book of Acts. The Romans attacked Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. But from then until the next century we have no reliable Christian history. The next thirty to fifty years after Luke's book are just a blank to us. Only after that time did people start to write useful Christian church history.

Luke wrote two books. One was about Jesus' life, called a gospel. There were three other gospels written by Mark, Matthew and John. The other book that Luke wrote was about the work that Jesus' apostles did after he went back to heaven. This was a unique book, the only one of its kind. Actually, what Luke wrote was all one long

book. But somewhere around the end of the first century the Christian church decided to separate Luke's writing into two books. His gospel was placed third in the New Testament and his book of Acts was placed fifth, after John's gospel. Luke's Gospel is the longest book in the New Testament, and his book on the Acts of the Apostles is the second longest book in the New Testament. We owe a lot to Luke. Matthew has more chapters than Luke, but Luke's chapters are longer than Matthew's. So Luke has more pages than Matthew.

Luke's gospel is the easiest of the four gospels to read. People who begin to read the Bible could therefore start with Luke's Gospel.

Luke was trained as a doctor. He lived a healthy life and died when he was well over eighty years old. He never married, so he never had any children. The fact that he was a doctor meant that he knew how to listen carefully to what people had to say, in order to find out what the truth was. When Luke started to write the book of Acts there were other people who were also writing about Jesus. But there was a very important difference. Luke had decided that he was going to concentrate on the truth. That was what Theo wanted. He had heard about Christianity. Now he wanted to know whether what he had heard was true or not. So Luke decided that he would be very careful to make sure that every single thing that he wrote was the truth. He would not tell Theophilus what he thought or liked. He would not even try to impress Theophilus or persuade him about anything. Luke would just tell him the truth. He took trouble to make sure that he had not said anything that was not absolutely true. He checked everything that he found out, the way a doctor checks a patient carefully before deciding what is wrong with him.

Luke's gospel is the easiest of the four gospels to read. People who begin to read the Bible could therefore start with Luke's Gospel.

When Christianity spread into the world it contained some amazing stories. People talked about the miracles that Jesus performed. As these stories spread some people began to make up even more stories. Some stories were made up by people who believed in Jesus. They wanted to impress others and get them to believe. But there were also many stories made up by people who did not believe. They told people stories to put them off believing in Jesus and the preaching of the apostles. So anyone who wanted to believe in Jesus was sometimes not sure what was true and what was not. Someone like Theo did not want to believe stories that other people had just made up. He also did not want to be put off by false news. He just wanted to know what was true.

What happened next took time. Over the years Christians read what Luke had written, and they also read what other writers had written. In time they discovered that the other writers had made some mistakes. They had got some of their facts wrong. They had misunderstood some things, or had even made some things up. It all came out in time. But no one ever found anything wrong with Luke's writing. Whoever questioned what Luke had said, or investigated what he had written, always came up with the same conclusion: that what Luke said was right. It was correct and true. It was completely reliable. That was why the Christian church eventually decided, two or three hundred years later, that only Luke's Acts should be part of the New Testament of the Bible. No one could find any mistakes or faults or any kind of misunderstandings in Luke's writings about the work of the apostles. So God's people all came to believe that God had guided Luke to write this book. All the other writers were interesting, but Luke's writings were the truth. What Luke had written was God's truth.

Luke begins the book of Acts by telling us how Jesus went back to heaven. Then he tells us how Jesus' disciples got ready to do what he had told them to do. They were to do what Jesus had trained them to do. They were to carry on with Jesus' work. Jesus got many people to believe by doing great miracles and by teaching good news. He gave the apostles the power and ability to do miracles also. As the gospel spread Jews and Gentiles saw marvellous miracles performed. These helped many people from many nations to believe in Jesus.

Jesus got many people to believe by doing great miracles and by teaching good news. He gave the apostles the power and ability to do miracles also.

Like Jesus, the apostles came up against a lot of opposition. There were many people who wanted to stop them preaching. A number of the apostles were eventually put to death. But God's power was with them, and through them Christianity grew and spread through the world. Once again it was found, in time, that what Luke wrote about was accurate. What he said was true and reliable.

There is another thing to remember about the book of Acts. The apostle Paul had a deep longing or burden to get the gospel of Christ to the Romans. Luke was a friend of Paul and even went with him to Rome. Theo was a Roman, and an important man. If Luke could explain to Theo the gospel that Jesus had taught the apostles, it would help to get the Word of God to the Romans. So Acts is written to get people in the whole Roman Empire to believe in Jesus and in the message that the apostles took with them all over the empire.

Let's go back to the gospels. Each gospel was written for a purpose:

MARK was the disciple of the Apostle Peter. He was the first person to write a gospel. He wanted people to know that Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for, for centuries. What was surprising about the Messiah was that he was the Son of God. The important thing about the Son of God, that no one would have guessed, was that he had come from heaven to take away our sin.

MATTHEW was one of the twelve apostles. He got to know Jesus very well. He wrote his gospel in order to persuade Jewish people that Jesus was their Messiah. Matthew keeps showing the Jews how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament that they believed in. Matthew's gospel is like Mark's gospel in some ways, so it supports much of what Mark wrote.

LUKE is a bit different. Luke was writing to someone who was not a Jew. Theophilus was a Roman. He was someone quite important, a leader of some sort. Luke did a lot of research to find out what he could about Jesus. He asked a lot of people a lot of questions. He found out the facts. He came to realise that Jesus was not just the Messiah for the Jews but also the Saviour for all the nations in the world. Because Jesus lived and worked among the Jews, Luke needed to explain to Theo the truth about Jesus so that we could understand what Jesus meant to the Jews and also to the whole world. Luke explained Jesus to the non-Jews, the Gentiles.

Luke also decided to tell Theo about what the apostles did after Jesus had gone back to heaven. Read the Acts of the Apostles as if Luke is talking to you.

JOHN wrote the last gospel many years after the other three. Towards the end of the first century some strange ideas were beginning to be taught about Jesus. People trained at universities had problems believing in Jesus. Some of them thought that Jesus, who was a carpenter and was put to death, could not possibly have been God. Others, who believed in him as God, thought that he could not have been a real man or human being like us. They could not see how God can possibly become a real man. John knew Jesus very well, and was a very close friend of his. So he decided to write a gospel to make clear to everyone that Jesus was precisely what the apostles said about him: Jesus was a real man, and Jesus was truly God.

Acts is written to get people in the whole Roman Empire to believe in Jesus and in the message that the apostles took with them all over the empire.

THE APOSTLES TAKE OVER THE WORK OF JESUS

The Book of Acts begins with how Jesus went back to heaven. His work as a man, and his suffering, was finished. As he left them, Jesus told his friends, his disciples, to take over his work. Jesus' work had been to teach people about God. They must now carry on doing what he had been doing.

The first thing that they did was to get together to pray.

The second thing that they did was to organise their leadership properly. Twelve disciples were to lead the Christian work as apostles.

**An APOSTLE was an expert
on the life and teachings and work
of JESUS CHRIST.**

The apostles became the leaders of the Christians. They began their work or ministry roughly somewhere around the date 30 AD. It seems that Jesus died and rose from the dead a few years before 30 AD. The apostles began their work a few months later. Jesus went back to heaven when he was roughly 33 years old. No one is sure about the exact dates.

Long ago it was decided to use the birth of Christ as the dating system for the world. So the date of his birth was taken as the year zero. Any date before the year zero was called BC (**b**efore **C**hrist). The dates after the year zero are called AD (**A**nno **D**omini, which is Latin for “In the year (**A**nno) [an-noh] of the Lord (**d**omini) [dom-minee].”) Nowadays many people use the letters CE, which means the Christian Era.

People who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and our Lord, prefer to use CE. They also prefer to say BCE (**B**efore the **C**hristian **E**ra) than to use BC.

A problem emerged a number of years ago when experts found out that the original calculations had a mistake. Jesus was not born in the year zero. He was born somewhere between the years 5 BC and 2 BC. But the dating system stayed the same because it is impossible to change all the dates in history, and also because we do not know exactly when the real year zero actually was.

**Long ago it was
decided to use the
birth of Christ as
the dating system
for the world.**

Christianity is based on two important things:

First,

**Christianity is about the life, the teachings and the work of
Jesus Christ
the Son of God,
the Saviour of the world,
the Lord of all the nations on earth.**

That is what Christianity means. That is what Christianity is about.

Secondly,

Christianity is based on the **truth about **Christ**
as the **apostles** of Jesus have explained that truth to us.**

The New Testament of the Bible was written by the apostles, or by men who got their information from the apostles. The importance of the apostles is that they knew Jesus. They had been taught by him. They had witnessed the things that he did. They had dedicated their lives to him. They were experts or authorities on what Jesus was like. They understood him, and knew what they were talking about.

The Book of Acts is about how the apostles spread the news about Christ through many countries.

**When you read the book of Acts the most important question is this:
Do **YOU** believe what the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ said?**

Those who do believe the apostles can be called Christians.

So you can see what an important work the apostles did.

In the book of Acts you can read about their work and teaching.

Acts 1

A Bible study on our passage



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Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about, and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



1:1-5 JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES WHAT TO DO

Dear Theo, In the first part of my book I wrote about all the things that Jesus began to do, as well as to teach.

When the time came for him to go, he gave instructions to his ¹apostles, the men whom he had chosen and trained. He gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could do what he told them to. Then he was taken up to heaven.

After he had suffered and died, Jesus proved to them that he was alive. ²He did this for forty days, in many ways that were absolutely convincing. He let them see him, and he talked to them about the kingdom of God.

When Jesus met together with his apostles, he gave them orders not to leave Jerusalem, even though that was a dangerous place to be for anyone who believed in Jesus. They were to wait there for the promise given by God the Father. Jesus said: You heard me tell you about that promise.

That promise was given in the time of John the Baptist, because ³John baptised only with water. But in a few days' time you are going ⁴to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

(This would happen in ten days' time.)

¹**apostles:** These were the twelve men whom Jesus used to continue with the work that he had been doing. Jesus had chosen and trained twelve men, but Judas Iscariot [joo-dis is-karry-it], who betrayed him, had died. These men had been with

Jesus since he was baptised by John and started his ministry. They had followed him all the time until he went back to heaven. They could teach people what he had been teaching, and they were also able to do some of the miracles that he had been performing. They were the experts who knew the truth about Jesus.

²He did this for forty days: Forty days is mentioned a number of times in the Bible. It means that something very important was happening:

- The rain in Noah's flood [noh-a] lasted 40 days.
- After the ark reached ground again it took another 40 days for the level of the flood to start to drop.
- The funeral arrangements in Egypt for Joseph's father Jacob took 40 days. This was called embalming [em-bar-ming].
- Moses was with the Lord on top of Mount Sinai [sigh-nigh] for 40 days.
- The men Moses sent to inspect the land of Canaan [kay-nin] took 40 days to spy out the country.
- For 40 days Goliath [g'ligh-ith] challenged the Israelites to find a soldier to fight him.
- Elijah [ee-ligh-ja] travelled for 40 days through the desert in his great struggle against the wicked queen Jezebel [je-z'bel] and the wicked king Ahab [ay-hab].
- Jonah [joh-na] warned the evil city of Nineveh [nin-a-va] that they had 40 days in which to repent or else God would destroy them.
- After he was baptised, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert for 40 days.
- After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his followers for 40 days to prove that he was really alive, and to train them to take over his work.
- This is one of the ways in which we can see how clearly Jesus is connected to the Bible in the Old Testament. Only Noah and Moses appear twice in that list of 40 days. So does Jesus. God saved the whole human race through Noah, and God saves the whole human race through Jesus. Noah was used by God because he was a righteous man. God used Jesus because he was a perfectly righteous man. God gave Moses the law for the world, while Jesus has been given to us by God to make it possible for us to keep God's laws for mankind. Moses was a very godly man. Jesus was God living among his people.

³John baptised only with water: Like John the Baptist, the Christian church baptises people with water. Water means two things:

First, we use it to wash and clean ourselves. To be baptised means that we want to live a good, clean life. We want to be Christians. We want God to forgive us and make us good. As Christians we are to live with a clear conscience. We want to go to heaven. We need God to do this for us.

Secondly, water is for drinking, especially when we are thirsty. The most important kind of thirst is thirsting for God. That means longing to find God, and longing to be God's friend. It means wanting God in one's life, the same sort of way that married couples want children. Baptism is the way the Christian church welcomes people who want to become part of God's family.

4to be baptised with the Holy Spirit: Being baptised with water means that we want to belong to God. We want to be Christians and live Christian lives. The church helps us to see that this is what we need. But to be baptised with the Holy Spirit means that God takes over in our lives. He comes into our lives.

When God's Spirit lives in us it means that we have been forgiven, and that we ARE acceptable to God. His Spirit makes us truly clean. He makes our conscience clean. He gets us a clear conscience. Nothing is as important to us in this life as a clear conscience. God makes us what we want to be. He turns us into true Christians.

- Baptism with water is the sign that we show people that we want God.
- Baptism with the Holy Spirit means that people can see that we actually are God's friends.

1:6-8 JESUS TELLS THE APOSTLES WHAT WILL HAPPEN

So then, when the apostles got together with Jesus at the end of these forty days, they asked him: Lord, are you going to bring back the kingdom of Israel for us, as it used to be in the good old days of King David?

But Jesus answered them: It is not your business to know when God is going to carry out his plans for the future, or how he is going to do this. God has made that his own private business.

But you will get special power when the Holy Spirit comes into you. Then you will have authority to tell people about me. Tell the people in ¹Jerusalem. Tell people in ²Judea and Samaria as well. Then go ³everywhere in the world, even to the furthest countries, and tell them about me.

¹**Jerusalem:** It would be difficult to tell the people in Jerusalem that Jesus is the Son of God. It was the Jerusalem crowd that put pressure on Pilate to crucify Jesus. He was sentenced to death by the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem because he claimed to be the Son of God.

Nevertheless, Jesus told his apostles that this is what they must do. God's Holy Spirit would help them do it.

Jerusalem had a big advantage though. That is also where Jesus had risen from the dead. There could have been as many as a million people, or more, there at the time. All the people there knew that he had been crucified. All of them had been talking about him. They all heard rumours that he had risen from the dead. Many people there actually saw Jesus for themselves, after he had come back to life. With so much interest in what had happened to Jesus, and the talk about his coming back to life, it would not have been difficult to tell people what one knew about Jesus.

But it IS difficult to tell people about Jesus Christ and God if they are against God and against Christ. However, if people are interested in God and Jesus it is NOT difficult to talk to them. In fact, it is very interesting and even exciting.

²**Judea and Samaria:** Judea was the homeland of the Jews. Jerusalem was the capital of Judea. Samaria [s'maree-a] was the country next to Judea, just to the north. In the old days, after King David and King Solomon's time, Samaria used to be Israel, which had broken away from Judea and Jerusalem. But those rebellious Israelites had all been conquered and taken away by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had then put the Samaritans there where the Israelites used to be. Over the years the Jews and the Samaritans became enemies. They argued about religion.

Yet Jesus told his apostles to tell both the Jews and the Samaritans about him. The Holy Spirit would help them to do this. Many Jews and Samaritans did become believers in Jesus Christ. Jews were the first people to believe that Jesus died for our sins, and that he rose again from the dead, and that he is the Son of God.

³**everywhere in the world:** This is the amazing vision or goal of the apostles and of the Christian church. The Lord Jesus Christ has ordered that the whole world must be told about him.

There are so many complications and problems to doing this. We still have many problems and difficulties today. But with the help of the Holy Spirit the apostles started this work, and the Holy Spirit has kept it going until now. Christianity has been planted in many countries in the world. But there still are countries where most people have never heard of Jesus Christ. There are also countries where people are not allowed to believe in him. They may not worship God through Christ.

Missionaries and ministers are continuing the work the apostles began. They are working throughout the world to tell people about the Lord Jesus, who is Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, who saves us from sin. Many of them work in very difficult, and even dangerous, circumstances. Most people don't want to obey God or accept Christ Jesus. Many governments are strongly against religion and believing in God. They think that faith in God is a foolish and harmful idea. This causes Christians a lot of trouble and sadness. But it is really just a challenge to be faithful to our God, and to people who need to hear the very, very good news that Jesus Christ has brought us from God who created us all.

1:9-12 JESUS GOES BACK TO HEAVEN

When Jesus had said this, ¹he was taken up to heaven as his apostles watched. Then Jesus disappeared from their view behind a cloud.

They were watching, fascinated, as he went up to heaven. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes stood there next to them. They were angels.

They said: You men from Galilee, why are you standing here staring like this into the sky? This man Jesus has been taken away from you, up into heaven. But he will come back the same way you saw him going to heaven.

With that the apostles left that place, called ²the Mount of Olives, and went back to Jerusalem. That hill is quite near to Jerusalem. One can walk that distance even on ³the Sabbath day.

¹He was taken up to heaven: From then on Jesus no longer came to visit his disciples as he had done for the last month or so. The apostles had now seen Jesus go away for good. Before that he had been coming and going, appearing and disappearing mysteriously, a number of times. He had visited them in Galilee and also in Jerusalem and Judea, for forty days.

²the Mount of Olives: The Mount of Olives is a hill near to Jerusalem, on the way down to Jericho. Many olive trees grew there. It was like a park, and was a favourite place for Jesus. The Mount of Olives was opposite the Temple in Jerusalem, on the other side of the valley.

Today that hill is still there, but the temple does not exist. It was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 AD. The temple has been replaced by a huge Muslim mosque called the Dome of the Rock. The mosque was built just before the year 700, more than a thousand years before the Jews took over Israel in 1948.

The one thing that was there in the time of Jesus and is still there today is what is called The Wailing Wall. It was the huge, high wall on the western side of the temple. It is called the Wailing Wall because that is where the Jews like to go to pray to God. They prayed at the wall, especially whenever they were desperate or in great need. Today they still like to pray there and write out prayers on paper that they stick into cracks in the wall.

³the Sabbath day: The Jews had a rule that one was not allowed to travel on the Sabbath day. The problem was that people had to go to worship God, either at the temple or at a synagogue. So the religious experts decided how far one was allowed to walk to get to worship. One was not allowed to walk further than that. It was called “The Limit of the Sabbath.” The distance was 3,000 feet (**actually, exactly 2,000 cubits**) or just under a kilometre (**or just over half a mile.**) That was the distance the apostles had to walk back to Jerusalem. So Jesus went up into heaven nearly a kilometre from Jerusalem as it was in those days.

(A cubit is the distance between a man’s elbow and the tip of his longest finger, the middle finger. That is about 18 inches.)

PART TWO:

The apostles replace Judas with another apostle.

1:13-14 THE APOSTLES WAIT AND PRAY

When they got back to Jerusalem, the apostles went to the upper room. An upper room, upstairs, meant a more private place. There they stayed put, as Jesus had told them to. Peter was there, as well as John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew [b'thol-a'mew] and Matthew, ¹another James, the son of Alpheus [al-fee-is], and another ²Simon, the Zealot [zeh-lit], and another Judas, the son of someone else called James (who was well-known in those days, but nowadays we don't know who he was.)

They all spent their time in prayer. They kept on praying, and they prayed together. They were completely united in the way they felt and believed. They prayed with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus. They also prayed with ³the brothers of Jesus who had not believed in him until he died and rose from the dead.

¹another James: Among the twelve disciples, there were two men called James, two Simons and two Judases. Six of Jesus' twelve disciples had the same name as another disciple.

- There was James the son of Zebedee [Zeb-a-dee] and the brother of John (who wrote John's gospel), and there was another James, the son of Alpheus [al-fee-is] (Jesus also had a brother called James, who wrote the book of James.)
- There was Simon who was called Peter by Jesus, and there was another Simon called the Zealot by his friends.
- Then there was Judas who betrayed Jesus, who was from the town of Iscariot [Iss-carry-it]. There was also another Judas, who was sometimes called Thaddeus [Tad-dee-is].

Among the Jews of those times, two very popular names were Jesus and Judas.

- Jesus was a popular name because it was the Greek translation of the famous Hebrew name of Joshua. Joshua was the man who led the people of God into the Promised Land.

- Judas was a popular name because it was the Greek translation of the famous Hebrew name of Judah. Judah was the greatest of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the tribe of the great King David.

But as Christianity spread, people stopped naming their babies Jesus or Judas. Jesus became too good a name, while Judas became too bad a name.

²**Simon the Zealot:** A zealot is a person with zeal, someone who is very keen or enthusiastic. Today we would call him a political person or an activist. In those days the Zealots were a political party. It is possible that they began with a man called Judas who rebelled against the Romans to get independence for Judea and the Jews. His rebellion was when Jesus was a boy, about ten years old. The Romans crushed the rebellion, but the zealots were those Jews who continued to hope that they could get political independence. The Jews wanted to be independent so that they could live by the laws of Moses and the teachings of the Prophets. They hated being ruled and controlled by the heathen Romans. They wanted Palestine to belong to the Jews.

Eventually they rebelled again, in a war against the Romans that lasted four terrible years. They were utterly crushed in the year 70, which was about 40 years after Jesus went back to heaven.

³**the brothers of Jesus:** During Jesus' life, his five brothers did not believe in him. But when he died and rose from the dead, his brothers became firm believers in him. The oldest brother, James, became the head of the Christian church at Jerusalem. He wrote the book of James, which comes after the book of Hebrews. He was not one of the twelve apostles.

The apostle James was the brother of the apostle John. This James was murdered by King Herod III, Herod Junior, grandson of the terrible Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby.

Another brother of Jesus was Judas, who wrote the book of Jude that comes just before the book of Revelation. Jude has only one chapter. This third Judas, or Jude, was also not an apostle like the other two Judases.

Some of Jesus' disciples wrote books in the New Testament. Matthew wrote the gospel at the beginning of the New Testament. John wrote the fourth gospel. He also wrote three letters: 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. On top of that he wrote the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible. Peter wrote two books: 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

1:15-20 PETER SPEAKS ABOUT JUDAS AND THE BIBLE

In those days, after Jesus had gone back to heaven, Peter took the lead among the Christians. The believers were a big group. There were, all together, about a hundred and twenty of them.

Peter spoke to them: ¹Men, brothers, The Bible had to come true. It had to be fulfilled. What it says came from the Holy Spirit who spoke to us using the words of King David. What David said applies to Judas who became a guide to help those men who arrested Jesus. We must listen to the prophet David, because what Judas has done is utterly unacceptable.

The problem is that Judas was one of us. He had a part in this work and ministry that the Lord Jesus has given us. So what are we going to do about this? We must follow the guidance that the Bible gives us.

²Judas bought a field with the dirty money he got for betraying Jesus. And there he committed suicide. He died horribly. His stomach burst open and all his insides came out.

This became known to all the people living in Jerusalem. They know that God punished him. That field has even been called, in ³their own language, “The field of blood.”

Now listen to what is written by David in the book of Psalms:

His house must be left empty. No one must live in it anymore. (Psalm 69)

It also says in the book of Psalms: Let someone else take over his work.

(Psalm 109) *That means that God is guiding us that Judas must no longer be regarded as one of us.*

¹Men, brothers: This was the usual way that someone spoke to a large meeting. Today we say, “Ladies and Gentlemen”. “Men, brothers” actually included women, in the same way that our word “mankind” includes all males and females, or “guys” can mean both boys and girls. However, most of the people, by far, who were there were men.

¹Judas bought a field: Here Luke says that Judas bought the field. But in Matthew 27 we read that Judas threw the money back at the priests in the temple, and that they used it to buy the potter’s field as a cemetery or burial place for foreigners.

Some people say that this is the biggest contradiction in the Bible because Luke is saying something completely different from what Matthew wrote.

- *** Matthew** was writing for the Jews who would have been interested in what the priests in the temple did with the money.
- **Luke** is writing to Theo who would be interested in what happened to Judas.
- *** Matthew** wanted the Jews to know that even Judas realised that he had made a terrible mistake, and that Jesus was innocent.
- **Luke** wanted Theo to know that what Judas had done was so bad that he was severely punished for his crime.
- *** Matthew** wanted Jews to know that the religious leaders had paid a cheap price to get Jesus arrested and killed.
- **Luke** wanted Theo to know that the money Judas earned by betraying Jesus led to his own awful death. He did not profit at all.

When people have got a different reason for telling others about something, they say it in different ways. Sometimes this may even look as though they are disagreeing with one another. But what actually happened is that both of them told the truth in different ways. Remember that both Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels many years after these things happened. That meant that they had both had many years to talk these things over and think these things through. So they both had a better understanding of the complications of all that had happened in the time of Jesus.

Matthew knew that Jews were more interested in certain details, while Luke knew that Gentiles were interested in other kinds of information. By writing so many years later, the authors of the gospels were not only more clear about what they were saying, but also more clear about why they were writing.

Matthew was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Luke was a first-class writer of history, who got his information by listening to people who knew Jesus.

What actually happened was that the priests bought the plot of land with Judas' money.

3their own language: The language that those people spoke was Aramaic [a-ra-may-ik]. Aramaic means Syrian. Aram [a'rahm] means Syria. That language is very much like Hebrew. In Aramaic the word for 'Field of Blood' is 'Akeldama' [a-kel-dah-ma]. 'Dam' [pronounced dahm] means blood in Hebrew. The name Akeldama would remind the local people of what Judas had done for many years to come.

When the Greek king Alexander the Great conquered Syria, about 300 years before Christ, it resulted in the Greek language being spoken by everyone. Because all people could understand Greek, the New Testament was written in that language, even though

Jesus had spoken in Aramaic or Hebrew. Of course, Jesus could also speak Greek, and did teach in Greek. But his home language was Aramaic. When he was dying on the cross he spoke Aramaic.

1:21-22 HOW THE APOSTLES REPLACED JUDAS

So Peter said: Because of what happened, it's important that we now get someone to replace Judas. That person will have to be one of the men who knew the Lord Jesus well. He has to be someone who was with us men all the time that we were there when Jesus was teaching and working.

He must have been with us from the time of the baptism of John, right until the day when Jesus was taken from us up to heaven. It's important that one of these men has to become a witness with us of ¹the resurrection of Jesus.

¹the resurrection of Jesus: The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a most important truth for Christianity.

First, it is so important because it is true. It really happened: Jesus died, and then came back to life again on the third day after his death. On top of that, he is still alive today, and will live forever. Jesus did not come back to life just as a spirit. He came back as a man, with a body. He could be touched. He ate food.

Secondly, this shows us clearly that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the only person in history who has died, and come back to life again, and lives forever. That shows that he is both man and God.

Thirdly, the fact that God raised him from the dead shows that God had a purpose in allowing Jesus to be killed. Jesus was sent by God to die for our sins. When Jesus was crucified, his people's sins were wiped out. The resurrection from the dead proves that this is true and real for us.

God raised Jesus from the dead because he had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. The resurrection was Jesus' reward for his crucifixion. His reward was from God. Jesus died as a man and he came back to life again as man and God. He died to take away all our sins, and he rose from the dead to give us all eternal life.

Fourthly, God has promised us that just as he brought Jesus back to life, so he is going to resurrect us from death too. We are going to get a new body after death. God has made it clear to us that he has given us this great and marvellous hope. There is a life after death for us, if we listen to God and believe Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a vital truth that everyone must believe in. This is what God wants. Once we believe this we can have the hope that we shall live forever.

1:23-26 HOW THE APOSTLES DID REPLACE JUDAS

So they suggested or proposed two men. One was a man called Joseph Barsabbas [bar-sab-bas], which means ‘Son of the Sabbath.’ That was his Jewish name. He also had a Roman name, which was Justus. Justus means just or fair. So he was a good man, a religious or godly man. He was just the sort of man the apostles and the other believers wanted. The other man they suggested or proposed was Matthias [m’tigh-is].

Then they prayed to God: Lord, you know everybody’s heart. You know what someone is really like deep inside. Please show us which one of these two men you choose to take on this ministry as an apostle, because Judas did what was very bad and has died.

*Judas has gone, and must take full responsibility for what he has done.
²He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry. He has now gone to meet his end.*

So they left the decision for the Lord to take by ³casting lots. The lot went to Matthias. So he was then regarded as an apostle along with the other eleven.

¹Son of the Sabbath: This is a Jewish saying or expression. It could mean that he was born on the Sabbath day. Or, more likely, it could mean that he was a very religious man.

²He now has nothing more to do with this apostolic ministry: What Peter actually said, in Greek, was:

Someone must take the place of this ministry and apostleship

from which Judas fell away to go to his very own place.

Because Judas betrayed Jesus to his enemies two things happened to him:

- The one was that he lost his life. He died a miserable man, and he died in a horrid way. That is what is meant by **to go to his very own place**. “His own place or fate” meant a wretched death. He had met his end and got what he deserved. That was the result of his treachery. The only hint that we have in the gospels as to why Judas did this is that he betrayed Jesus for some money. He got paid a bribe. It was not really a lot of money, about two or three months’ salary for an ordinary working person. In those days it was what anyone would pay to buy a slave.
- But once Judas realised that the leaders were going to get Jesus killed, he was horrified. We know that Judas deeply regretted what he had done. He tried to undo what he had done, and give the money back, but was not able to. He found himself utterly helpless, and rejected both by Jesus’ enemies and by Jesus’ friends. He felt so bad about what he had done that he took his own life. His death was a horrible and ugly one. As Jesus had warned about him:

It would have been better if he had never been born.

³**casting lots**: This was rather like throwing a dice or spinning a coin. That was the method often used in that culture to decide difficult matters or to choose someone. They would put two stones in a vase, one for each person. Then they would pray. Someone would then shake the vase, and the first stone to fall out would be the chosen one.

Today we normally decide by voting. The problem with voting is that not everyone who votes truly knows the real character or the future behaviour of the person he or she votes for. The other problem with voting is that sometimes people change their minds after they have voted. Yet another problem is that some of the people who were outvoted could be unhappy with the way the voting went. The biggest problem with voting is this: What if the majority who win the vote are wrong? What if those who lose the vote turn out to be right?

When people in those days did not clearly know what to do, they would ask God to decide by praying and casting lots. That was their normal custom.

Today, when everyone agrees at the beginning to use a coin, they always accept the result that comes from spinning it, if that is done properly.

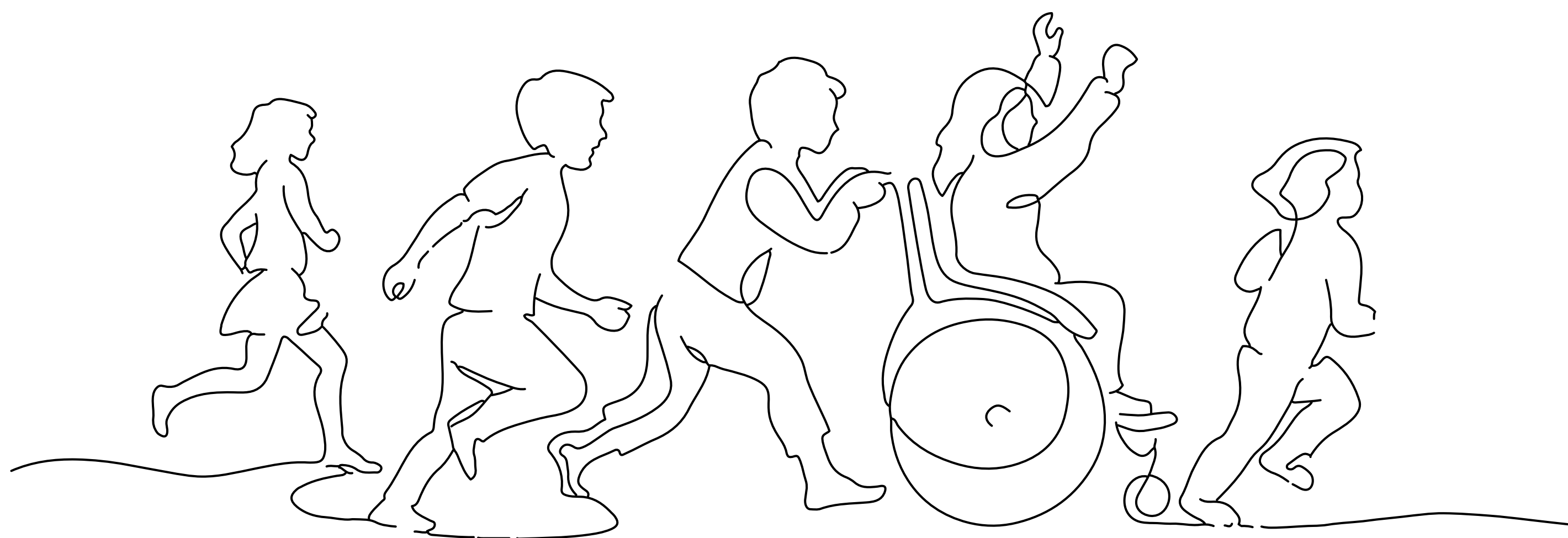
One gets the feeling that if they had voted, Joseph Barsabbas might have been voted in as the twelfth apostle. He was highly respected as a follower of Jesus. But God controlled the lot, and God knew what was deep down in each man's character, as well as what would happen in the future.

We never hear anything more about either of these two men. All that is important is that there were once again twelve apostles, chosen by the Lord.

This also shows us that it was not only the apostles who were godly people. It does not even mean that the apostles were the most godly people. But it does show us that

the apostles were the men whom Jesus had taught and trained very well.

We can thank God that Luke has given us the Acts of the Apostles. Nobody else, in those times, wrote a reliable account of what happened when the apostles of Jesus took over his work. There was quite a lot written about Jesus, but just this one account about the apostles. God used Doctor Luke to tell us the truth about some of the things that the Christian apostles did. God used Luke because he was careful and reliable.





Lord, you know everybody's heart.

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