

# The Twelve Apostles of Christ

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**A supplement to the Luke 6 lesson**

Jesus died in our place. No one else in the universe could do that. However, He turned the responsibility for announcing His death and resurrection over to others, primarily His Twelve Apostles. This is because when Jesus became a man, He surrendered His ability to be everywhere at once, so He could not take the story of the resurrection everywhere. This became the work of the Twelve empowered by the Holy Spirit. They took the story to the world in pyramid style, with new disciples making others into disciples.

When they were picked by Jesus for special training, not one of them had an idea where this would be leading. They were ordinary men without special theological training, but they would become the spokesmen for the Lord of all of the universe.

<b>FOUR LISTS OF APOSTLES OF CHRIST</b> in the order listed by the writers				
<b>Matthew 10:2-4</b>		<b>Mark 3:16-19</b>	<b>Luke 6:12-19</b>	<b>Acts 1:13</b>
Simon	brothers	Simon	Simon	Peter
Andrew		James	Andrew	James
James	brothers	John	James	John
John		Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip		Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew		Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas		Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew		Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James son of Alphaeus		James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus	James son of Alphaeus
Thaddaeus		Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Cananaean		Simon the Cananaean	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
Judas Iscariot		Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

It is clear that the writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) did not copy from each other because their lists are not in the same order, except for the team leaders.

After examining this table, certain truths about the twelve emerge:

1. There were three teams of four men each.
  2. The team leaders were Peter, Philip and James son of Alphaeus.
  3. Team one, the inner circle, was composed of entrepreneurs only. As fishermen, they were businessmen.
  4. The men in the first team were also the first men called according to the John record.
  5. The known government worker, Matthew, was on team two.
  6. Simon the Zealot and Thaddaeus are the same person.
  7. All three writers list Judas Iscariot last.
- A **disciple** is a *learner*. An **apostle** is *one sent with a commission*. Jesus would give them each His power-of-attorney. They were ***Apostles of Christ***.

## Team #1

These men were the inner circle of Jesus. When He wanted a smaller group to deal with, He picked them. These four quotations make the point.

**Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone.** Matthew 17:1

**Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn't let anyone go with Him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). Mark 5:37**

**“Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to Him privately and asked Him . . .”  
Mark 13:3**

**He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and He became anguished and distressed.  
Matthew 26:37**

**Peter.** Peter was named *Simon* by his parents. John 1:42 describes Jesus' first face-to-face meeting with Simon Peter:

**“Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephass” (which means “Peter”). NLT**

Those were apparently the first words Jesus ever spoke to Peter. Peter became the leader of the Twelve. In all four lists, his name appears first. In addition, Matthew clearly says,

**“Here are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (also called *Peter*), then Andrew (Peter's brother), James (son of Zebedee), John (James's brother) . . .” NLT**

Every translation that we consulted was the same. This does not make Peter a special authority, but it does speak of the orderliness of the Twelve.

The nickname Peter (Rock) was significant, and the Lord had a specific reason for choosing it. By nature Simon was brash, vacillating, and undependable. He tended to make great promises he couldn't follow through with. He was one of those people who appears to lunge wholeheartedly into something but then bails out before finishing. He petered out.

Peter's name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter, and no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. No disciple is so frequently rebuked by the Lord as Peter; and no disciple ever rebukes the Lord except Peter (Matthew 16:22). No one else confessed Christ more boldly or acknowledged His lordship more explicitly; yet no other disciple ever verbally denied Christ as forcefully or as publicly as Peter did. No one is praised and blessed by Christ the way Peter was; yet Peter was also the only one Christ ever addressed as Satan. The Lord had harsher things to say to Peter than He ever said to any of the others.

When it was time to open the gates of the Kingdom on earth, it was Peter, reinforced by the Holy Spirit, that preached the inaugural sermon in Acts 2.

Tradition says that Peter was crucified in Rome in A.D. 66. He was crucified upside down at his request, since he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

**Andrew.** Peter's brother is the least-known of the four disciples in the lead group. Although he was a member of that dominant foursome, Andrew is left very much in the background. He was not included in several of the important events where we see Peter, James, and John together with Christ (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33).

At other key times, however, he was featured as part of the inner circle (cf. Mark 1:29; 13:3).

Andrew was the first of all the disciples to be called to follow Jesus (John 1:35-40). He was responsible for introducing his more dominant brother, Peter, to Christ (verses 41-42). His eagerness to follow Christ, combined with his zeal for introducing others to Him, fairly typifies Andrew's character. He is mentioned nine times in the New Testament.

In later years, he went to what is now Russia. He also preached in Asia Minor and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

**James.** James is the least familiar to us of the leading four. The biblical account is practically devoid of any explicit details about his life and character. He never appears as a stand-alone character in the Gospel accounts, but he is always paired with his younger and better-known brother, John. The only time he is mentioned by himself is in the book of Acts, where his martyrdom is recorded.

Jesus gave James and John a nickname: Boanerges—"Sons of Thunder." That defines James' personality in very vivid terms. He was zealous, thunderous, passionate, and fervent. But by God's grace, he was transformed into a man of God.

No sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the Christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. The death of James is recorded in Acts 12:2. This was A.D. 44.

**John.** He was the human author of a Gospel and three letters that bear his name, as well as the book of Revelation. Aside from Luke and the Apostle Paul, John wrote more of the New Testament than any other human author.

Everything we observed about the personality and character of James is also true of John, the younger half of the Boanerges Brothers' duo. The two men had similar temperaments. John was right there with James, eager to call down fire from heaven against the Samaritans. He was also in the thick of the debates about who was the greatest. His zeal and ambition mirrored that of his elder brother.

But John aged well. Under the control of the Holy Spirit, all his liabilities were exchanged for assets. Compare the young disciple John with the aged patriarch John and you'll see that as he matured, his areas of greatest weakness all developed into his greatest strengths. He's an amazing example of what should happen to us as we grow in Christ—allowing the Lord's strength to be made perfect in our weakness.

John has often been nicknamed "the apostle of love." Indeed, he wrote more than any other New Testament author about the importance of love—laying particular stress on the Christian's love for Christ, Christ's love for His church, and the love for one another that is to be the hallmark of true believers. The theme of love flows through his writings. John is the only person of the Twelve who is believed to have died a natural death.

## Team #2

While team #1 was the closest to the Lord, members of team #2 were in charge of making arrangements. Here is a case where Philip was involved.

**Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for Him. Turning to Philip, He asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" He was testing Philip, for He already knew what He was going to do. Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"** John 6:5-7

**Philip.** He possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

Philip suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54.

**Thomas.** Tradition has him preaching as far east as India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

**Bartholomew.** Philip's closest companion, Nathanael, is listed as Bartholomew in all four lists of the Twelve. In the Gospel of John he is called Nathanael.

One striking fact about Nathanael is obvious from how Philip announced to him that he had found the Messiah: "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote'" (John 1:45). Obviously, the truth of Scripture was something that mattered to Nathanael. Philip knew Nathanael, so he knew Nathanael would be intrigued by the news that Jesus was the One prophesied by Moses and the prophets in Scripture. This probably indicates that Nathanael and Philip were students of the Old Testament together. In all likelihood, they had come to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist together. They had a shared interest in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Philip obviously knew the news of Jesus would excite Nathanael.

Philip had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

**Matthew.** This former Roman government employee made a great contribution to the development of the Kingdom when he wrote his gospel. His target group was Jewish males, so they had to look past their disdain of his tax-collecting job in

order to read his collection of evidence that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd (pole weapon) in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60.

## Team #3

**James, son of Alphaeus.** The ninth name in Luke's list of the apostles (Luke 6:14-16) is "James the son of Alphaeus" (v. 15). The only thing Scripture tells us about this man is his name. If he ever wrote anything, it is lost to history. If he ever asked Jesus any questions or did anything to stand out from the group, Scripture does not record it. He never attained any degree of fame or notoriety. He was utterly obscure.

Practically all we know about the James is that he was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). In Mark 15:40, we learn that James's mother was named Mary. She is also one of the women who came to prepare Jesus' body for burial (Mark 16:1).

His lack of prominence is even reflected in his nickname. In Mark 15:40 he is referred to as "James the Less." NLT translates this as "James the younger".

James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. At the age of ninety-four he was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a club.

**Judas, the Son of James.** He was also called **Thaddaeus** and **Lebbaeus**, probably nicknames indicating that he was a tender person. It is interesting to think of such a gentle soul hanging around in the same group of four apostles as Simon the Zealot. But the Lord can use both kinds. Zealots make great preachers. But so do tender-hearted, compassionate, gentle, sweet-spirited souls like Lebbaeus Thaddaeus. Together, they contribute to a very complex and intriguing

group of twelve apostles. There's at least one of every imaginable personality.

**Simon the Zealot.** In Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18, he is called "Simon the Cananite." That is not a reference to the land of Canaan or the village of Cana. It comes from the Hebrew root *qanna*, which means "to be zealous."

Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the *Zealots*. The fact that he bore the title all his life may also suggest that he had a fiery, zealous temperament. But that term in Jesus' day signified a well-known and widely feared outlaw political sect, and Of course, as one of the Twelve, Simon also had to associate with Matthew, who was at the opposite end of the political spectrum, collecting taxes for the Roman government. In the end, they became spiritual brethren, working side by side for the same cause—the spread of the gospel—and worshipping the same Lord.

Simon is said to have ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

**Judas Iscariot.** Judas was the only one of the Twelve who was not from Galilee. He hailed from the community of Kerioth, in Judea. He seemed trustworthy to the other men and may have had some bookkeeping experience, because they made him their treasurer. Judas went out to preach about the coming Kingdom and worked miracles along with the other eleven. It is remarkable that there is no record of Judas speaking of Jesus as *Lord*.

His death is recorded in Acts 1:17-18.

## **There are Two More Apostles of Christ**

**The case of Matthias.** This man appears in Scripture only in Acts 1. He was selected by the other apostles, guided by the Lord, to replace Judas after he hanged himself. This returns the count of Apostles to 12.

Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.

**The case of Paul.** Many years passed between the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and his transformation into the Apostle Paul. He had been an understudy of Barnabas in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). The Holy Spirit sent the two men on a preaching tour. They appeared before the Roman governor Sergius Paulus to preach the gospel and a local man tried to interfere. Saul spoke up, challenging the naysayer and bringing him temporary blindness. This was his first recorded miracle and his name was changed to Paul (Acts 13:9). From this point forward, he was the leader of the team. This returns the count of Apostles to 12 again, the Apostle James having been beheaded in Acts 12:2.

**Other apostles.** Other men were spoken of as apostles too, because there were sent with some specific commission. But they did not have the same authority as the Twelve.

**Jesus Empowered His Twelve.** At the Last Supper Jesus told His men of the power they were to receive. John 14:26

**But when the Father sends the Advocate as My representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.**

Their memories of the three years with Jesus would be put on power recall. They would be able to teach as He had taught. They would also know the future.

John 16:13 NLT:

**When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future.**

The Twelve Apostles will now be empowered to speak the truth by the Holy Spirit. What they teach is with the authority of God. This is how they became rulers. Luke 22:29-30 NLT

**And just as My Father has granted Me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right to eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

Jesus, in fact, had given the Apostles His power-of-attorney. They could speak authoritatively on His behalf. They would be the spokesmen for Christ and in that way rule.

When the kingdom was opened for people to enter in Acts chapter 2, Peter was speaking for God. What he said was what Christ would have said. The Apostles were in charge. Acts 2:42-43:

**All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.**

The Apostles were beginning to rule! All public teaching of the new believers was only by the Apostles of Christ until Acts 6.

**God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by His Spirit He has revealed it to His holy apostles and prophets.** Ephesians 3:5

Jude 17: **But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said.**

Jude was a prophet, but deferred to the authority of the Apostles of the Lord. By the time the Twelve passed off the earthly scene, their Spirit-inspired word was encapsulated in letters (epistles) and distributed among the churches.

The church understood their authority. They remain authorities in the church because their written word is the foundation of our beliefs.

**Together, we are His house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself.** Ephesians 2:20

God used all of the apostles and prophets to *speak* His Word. He used the Apostles Matthew, Peter, and John to *write* the message also. He used prophets Mark, Luke, James and Jude to write the rest of the Word.

These men were not replaced by others. Their work was for their own generation and funneled into Scripture that will last until the Judgment Day.

*The Catholic Church* teaches apostolic succession. The idea is that following generations of leaders down to the present have *inherited* the office of an apostle. Such a claim is without foundation in Scripture.

*The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints* (aka Mormons) has apostles. They cannot meet the qualifications set forth in Acts 1:21-22.

There are numerous religious groups who claim apostolic succession. For further reading, see the *Apostolic Succession* article on Wikipedia.

**Jesus warned that false apostles were in circulation:**

Revelation 2:2: **"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars.**

**Paul warned that false apostles were coming.**

2 Corinthians 11:13: **These people are false apostles.  
They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as  
apostles of Christ.**