

Biblical Topics

Apostles

Among those who came to hear Jesus was a group who regularly followed him and were committed to his teachings. At least 72 men were included, since this many disciples were sent out on an evangelistic campaign (10:1, 17). Later, 120 believers waited and worshiped in Jerusalem following the ascension (Ac 1:15). From such disciples Jesus at this time chose 12 to be his apostles, meaning “ones sent with a special commission” (CSB - Luke 6:13 Note)

Jesus, having selected the Twelve through prayerful dialog with the Father during the night, in the morning summoned only these twelve disciples and also (at that time or later) called them apostles. (CC - Luke)

Acts 1:21–22 gives us the qualifications for an apostle, as Matthias is chosen to replace Judas. An apostle must have been (1) present with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry and (2) an eyewitness of the resurrection. The hearer knows from the prologue of Acts that an apostle is sent to proclaim the Good News, to deliver the traditions of Jesus to the church (cf. Lk 9:1–6; 10:1–12). An apostle is an official representative who speaks and acts for the one who sent him in the matter for which he was commissioned. (CC - Luke)

Lists of the apostles appear also in Mt 10:2–4; Mk 3:16–19; Ac 1:13. Although the order of the names varies, Peter is always first and Judas Iscariot last. In each of these lists the first, second and third groups of four names are the same, as are the first, fifth and ninth names. Such similar arrangements may indicate that the Twelve “hung around” in three groups, with Peter, Philip and James son of Alphaeus being the leaders, respectively, of each group. (CSB - Luke 6:14-16 Notes)

There is probably no great theological reason for the order of the names except for the obvious ones: placing Peter first, since he is the “first among equals” and the most prominent of the Twelve in Luke-Acts, and placing Judas last because he is the betrayer. They are the best known of the Twelve, and in many ways the most important apostles. There is some sense in placing them in three groups of four: Simon/Peter and his brother Andrew, then James and John the sons of Zebedee comprise the first tier. Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas are the next tier. James the son of Alphaeus; Simon, the one called zealot; Judas son of James; and Judas Iscariot make up the final group. This makes three groups. The prominent leaders come first (Peter, Andrew, James, and John). The moderately well-known ones are next. Of these four, only Matthew/Levi and Philip are mentioned in Luke-Acts outside the lists here and in Acts 1:13, but Philip, Bartholomew/Nathanael, and Thomas all are prominent in John’s gospel. The least known (except for Judas) are listed last. In the last group, each one receives a qualification after his name that helps identify these least-known apostles (son of Alphaeus, zealot, son of James, Iscariot). (CC - Luke)

All twelve, with the exception of Judas Iscariot (South Judah), were from Galilee. That whole region was predominately rural, consisting of small towns and villages. Its people were not elite. They were not known for their education. They were the commonest of the common. They were fishermen and farmers.

Simon/Peter and his brother Andrew, then James and John the sons of Zebedee comprise the first tier:

Peter:

- Andrew, his brother, first brought Peter to meet Jesus. (John 1:41-42)
- Jesus renamed to Peter (meaning rock). (John 1:42)
- His original name was Simon bar Jonah.
- Peter was a fisherman from the Bethsaida (house of fish) "of Galilee."
- Peter was known for his bold and often misguided speaking out.
- Peter denied Jesus three (3) times during holy week.
- He was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ. – In Rome AD 64.

James:

- James was a son of Zebedee and brother of John, and was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry.
- James – Was beheaded in AD 44, first of the Twelve to die (since the addition of Matthias). He died in Jerusalem.
- Jesus gave James and John the name of "Sons of Thunder." (Mark 3:17) In Luke 9:54 they ask Jesus about sending down fire from heaven to destroy some unbelieving Samaritans.
- James and John also asked to be seated at Jesus left and right when Jesus came into His kingdom. (Mark 10:35-37)

John:

- John was a son of Zebedee and brother of James, and was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry.
- John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge Basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison Island of Patmos.
- John wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Andrew:

- Andrew was the brother of Simon/Peter, a Bethsaida fisherman, and a former disciple of John the Baptist. (John 1:40)
- Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led

toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." Andrew continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas are the next tier.

Philip:

- Philip was a fisherman From the Bethsaida of Galilee.
- Philip brought his brother Bartholomew/Nathanael to Jesus. (John 1:45)
- He was also known as a witness and bean counter.
- Philip was crucified in AD 54.

Bartholomew/Nathanael:

- He was fisherman and called guileless in John 1:47.
- He was flayed alive (skinned) and then beheaded; some sources locate his death at Derbend on the Caspian Sea.

Matthew:

- Jesus called in Matthew 9:9. He was tax collector.
- Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.

Thomas:

- Thomas was a fisherman.
- He is known as a skeptic because of doubting his fellow disciples story about Jesus' appearance. (John 20:24-25)
- Thomas is Aramaic *T'oma'* = *twin*, and Greek *Didymos* = *twin*.
- Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church on the sub-continent. AD 72

James the son of Alphaeus; Simon, the one called zealot; Judas son of James; and Judas Iscariot make up the final group.

James (Alphaeus):

- He was known as James the less – Little.
- Stoned at age 90 then clubbed to death.

Simon – The Zealot:

- Some have identified him with Simeon of Jerusalem.
- A Was sawn in half in AD 74.
- Zealots were Jewish nationalist insurrectionists who especially hated tax collectors who were seen as traitors.

Thaddaeus:

- He was also known as Judas (Son of James)

- In some manuscripts of Matthew, the name "Lebbaeus" occurs in this place.
- Thaddeus is traditionally identified with Jude.
- Was clubbed to death then beheaded.

Judas:

- Judas will forever be known as a traitor.
- He was a young Zealot.
- His name means "Jehovah Leads."
- He was replaced by Matthias as an apostle shortly after Jesus' resurrection. (Acts 1:23-26)
- Mathias, Judas' replacement, was stoned and beheaded.

In his writings, Paul, originally named Saul, though not one of the original twelve, described himself as an *apostle*, one "born out of due time" (e.g., Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 15:8 and other letters). He was called by the resurrected Jesus himself during his Road to Damascus vision and given the name "Paul."^[Acts 9:1-9] With Barnabas, he was allotted the role of apostle in the church.^[Acts 13:2] He referred to himself as the *apostle of the Gentiles*.^[Rom 11:13]