

**The Twelve That Jesus Called to be
His Disciples, later His Apostles**

Jesus chose twelve men to discipleship and later Apostleship (Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19 and Luke 6:13-16). They would become his closest companions throughout His earthly ministry and assigned the task to carry the gospel throughout the world, having the authority of heaven as witnesses to His resurrection. Three of these men became the foundation of the church ("Pillars of the Church," Gal 2:9). I think it would be enlightening to consider them.



- A. The word disciple" means a "learner," one willing to listen, a pupil. It does not necessarily carry the notion of a deep religious commitment. On one occasion we learn that a group of disciples abruptly left him when His teaching was not grasped (John 6:66), though one did remain. Judas Iscariot is also called a disciple though he had no religious affiliation with Jesus that was enduring. What we can learn is the truth that "many are called, and few are chosen."
- B. The word "apostle" or "sent one" is used in Scripture in a technical and nontechnical sense. In a nontechnical sense we are all "sent ones;" in the technical sense it refers to those who witnessed the resurrection of

the Lord and are the foundation of the Jews and the Gentiles as one church. The command to the eleven is to “make disciples” and the methods they were to employ are going, gospel preaching, and teaching (Matt. 28:18-19). In Acts 1:15 the disciples included about 120 people.

“He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named apostles (Luke 6:12-13).”

“You did not choose me. I chose you (John 15:16).”

I. As to the names of the twelve.

We have three lists of their names, though there are some discrepancies (Matt. 10, Mark 3, Luke 6). John presents no list.

- A. Simon Peter (Cephas)
- B. Andrew
- C. James, the son of Zebedee.
- D. John, the son of Zebedee, brother of James.
- E. Philip
- F. Bartholomew (also called Nathaniel)
- G. Thomas (called Didymus in John)
- H. Matthew (not mentioned in John’s Gospel)
- I. James the son of Alphaeus (also called James the Less), not mentioned in John’s Gospel.
- J. Thaddeus (Judas, son of James, in John)
- K. Simon the Zealot (also called Simon the Canaanite and Simon the Cananaean)
- L. Judas Iscariot (John refers to him as Judas, son of Simon Iscariot).

II. As to the prior identities of the twelve, we know this much of a biographical nature.

- A. Four of the disciples were fishermen by trade (Peter, Andrew, James, and John).
- B. Peter and Andrew hailed from Bethsaida, a town near the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. It seems that Peter and Andrew moved to Capernaum because they repaired their nets there when Jesus called them. Peter’s mother-in-law resided there with Peter and was healed by Jesus. (He is the only apostle that is specifically noted that he was married though it was not prohibited).

Andrew was the first follower of Jesus and brought his brother to Jesus.

- C. James and John seem to have resided in Capernaum working for their father, Zebedee, as fishermen. The Zebedee family had close connections with the high priest, Josphe Caiaphas, because John had access to the interrogations of Jesus in his residence. It seems that they may have been people of some wealth because their father owned a fishing business and had servants beside his sons.

James was the first to be martyred among them (Acts 12:1).

Andrew and John were followers of John the Baptist. It was John who said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:35)."

Peter, James, and John were within an inner circle of His disciples (only they were present in the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), witnessed the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1), and were close to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).

- D. Philip, also from Bethsaida ("the house of the fisherman"), may have worked in the same trade with Peter, Andrew, James, and John. He told Nathaniel about Jesus (John 1:45).
- E. Matthew, before his calling, was in the employ of the Roman government as a tax collector, a despised profession by the Jews.
- F. Simon, being "the Zealot," was a radical Jewish patriot who resented Roman hegemony over his country and favored its elimination through violence. On the other hand, Matthew was employed by the oppressors to derive taxes from the oppressed (Matt. 27:56).
- G. Nathaniel (Bartholomew) was from Cana of Galilee (John 21:2). Jesus took note of his love for God (John 1:47).
- H. Thomas was the skeptic in the group and so is commonly known as "Doubting Thomas." He had a twin since he is identified as "Didymus." The activities of Thomas are only noted in John's Gospel (11:16 [the Lazarus episode], 14:4-5 [Jesus' departure], 20:28 [a post resurrection appearance]).
- I. James the Less or son of Alphaeus had a brother, Joseph (Matt 27:56) and his mother was a Mary (Mark 15:40 [mentioned at the Garden Tomb with several other ladies]). He may have derived his name from his stature or in difference to the son of Zebedee.
- J. Bartholomew (Thaddeus, or Judas son of James) asked only one question that has been recorded. "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us and not to the world at large (John 14:22)?" He seemed overly concerned with this question. Christ responded by saying He would reveal Himself to anyone who loved Him.

- K. Judas Iscariot was the only disciple not a Galilean by birth; He was Judean which explains, perhaps, his access of the religious leaders.

Judas Iscariot's profession is a matter of conjecture. That he oversaw the group's finances indicates he had training in the financial realm. Eleven were from the Galilee, one from Judea (Judas Iscariot). Also, we know that Judeans looked down upon Galileans as less educated.

We have two accounts of his suicide (Matt. 27:3-10, Acts 1:18-19).

1. Unlike rabbis of his day, even the Greek educators before Him (Aristotle, Plato, Seneca), Jesus chose those on his team from among the inquisitive called disciples; they did not choose Him. We are His children by His mercies, not our volunteerism. How did He do that?
2. Among Jesus' choices were neither the religious nor financial aristocracy or the highly learned. They were perceived as uneducated, "backwoods" people, a Judean viewpoint. He chose us! He made them and us His servants and empowered us through the Spirit to serve His ends. Two would leave us accounts of Jesus' life, claims, and accomplishments (Matthew and John). Peter informed John Mark who gave us another. Jesus uses average people like us!! What a privilege? What a joy?
3. The ones he chose reveals the possibility of enormous interpersonal conflict. Would we call it a misjudgment or that God knows what He is doing, and we do not? Simon was a religious/political radical that despised Roman imposition and yet another worked for the Romans in the Galilee as a collector of taxes. The ten, not sure of Judas Iscariot, would have despised Matthew also (not only did he collect taxes, but he also collected his salary from the taxes).

Sadly, Jesus chose His own betrayer to walk with Him for three years, hear the things the others heard, see the wonders the others witnessed, even sent out on a mission journey (Matt. 10:5).

4. Is there some insight to be gained from Jesus' methodology of dealing with the disciples? While there were twelve, he chose three to be in an inner circle. There are some things you can do with three that you cannot do with twelve (or, was it because of others' tasks they will perform?). Why Peter and not Andrew? Does it not tell us that God has a purpose for each of us that fits the personalities that He made?