



The Investigator's Gospel

An Eyewitness Journey Through Luke

Session 6 – Chapter 6 – The Apostles

The following material was edited and adapted from the Overview Bible: “Who Were the 12 Apostles? The Complete Guide”

The 12 apostles, also referred to as the 12 disciples or simply “the Twelve,” were Jesus Christ’s 12 closest followers. Each of them were major leaders in the movement which became Christianity and helped spread the gospel throughout the world.

The names of Jesus’ 12 main disciples are:

- Peter (also known as Simon)
- Andrew (Peter’s brother)
- James son of Zebedee
- John (James’ brother)
- Philip
- Bartholomew
- Thomas (the Twin)
- Matthew the tax collector
- James son of Alphaeus
- Jude (also known as Thaddeus)
- Simon the Zealot
- Judas Iscariot
- Matthias the apostle is technically also one of the Twelve, but usually not included in lists for a couple reasons: He was appointed after the death of Judas Iscariot; He wasn’t called into the group by Jesus

Four passages in the Bible list the names of all 12 apostles (technically the last one only lists 11, because Judas Iscariot was dead). Some of the apostles play key roles in well-known Bible stories. Others are only mentioned in the lists of apostles, or they have a single line of dialogue in the gospels.

A few of the apostles were known by multiple names, which can make these lists and other references to them confusing. In some cases, disciples with common names have been mistakenly identified with other biblical figures who had the same name.

Much of what we “know” about the apostles comes from church tradition. Unfortunately, tradition often embraced legends alongside facts, and it’s often difficult to discern details about where the disciples went, what they did, and how they died without assuming the legends surrounding them are rooted in truth. This is especially true for the more obscure disciples.

The 4 lists of the 12 apostles - Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:13-16, Acts 1:13.

While the order the names appear in is generally about the same, these lists don't actually include all the same names, and some of them provide details the others don't. In some cases, early Christians and modern scholars have assumed this meant some of these apostles went by multiple names—such as Judas son of James, who may be listed by the nickname Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark to avoid confusing him with Judas Iscariot, the infamous traitor.

The lists found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) appear when Jesus calls these 12 disciples aside for a special purpose and officially appoints them as apostles. The list in Acts occurs after Jesus ascends to heaven, and the believers decide to replace Judas Iscariot while waiting for the Holy Spirit.

The apostles are generally listed in order of importance and paired according to their associations.

Jesus' inner circle

Jesus had a lot of followers. At times, thousands of people gathered to hear him teach and see what he would do. The 12 apostles were some of his closest disciples. But three members of the Twelve were closer than anyone else: Peter, James, and John. Together, they witnessed miracles and moments the other apostles weren't privy to, including:

- The time Jesus raised a girl from the dead (Mark 5:35–43)
- The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–13)
- Jesus' moment of weakness in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46)

Peter

Peter, also known as Simon, Simon Peter, and Cephas, was one of Jesus' three main disciples (along with James and John). Like many of the apostles, Peter was a fisherman by trade, but he grew into one of the most prominent leaders of the early church after the resurrection. According to Catholic tradition, he was also the first pope.

Peter was originally known as Simon, but Jesus gave him the nickname Cephas (John 1:42), which translates to Peter, meaning “rock.” In the New Testament, Peter is most known for:

- Walking on water (Matthew 14:28-33)
- Disowning Jesus to avoid persecution (Luke 22:54-62)
- Addressing the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41)
- Envisioning a church that included Jews and Gentiles together (Acts 10:9-48)
- Being a “pillar” of the church (Galatians 2:9)

Tradition holds that the Gospel of Mark records Peter's account of Jesus' ministry through his companion and secretary, Mark the Evangelist, who's widely believed to be the same person as John Mark. Two books of the Bible claim to be written by Peter (1 Peter and 2 Peter), but some scholars debate about whether he wrote them himself or dictated them to a secretary, if at all. Numerous apocryphal texts claimed to be written about (or even by) Peter, but the church rejected them as inauthentic, though some of them recorded important information.

According to tradition, Peter was crucified by Emperor Nero around 64 AD, around the time of the Great Fire of Rome, which Nero blamed on Christians. The Acts of Peter claims he asked to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy of dying the same death as Jesus.

James

James son of Zebedee (also known as James the Greater) was another one of Jesus' three main disciples, along with his brother John and Peter. Like many of the disciples, James was a fisherman before Jesus called him. James son of Zebedee is one of at least three important New Testament figures named James. In fact, there's even another disciple named James. This, plus the fact that the Bible tells us so little about any of these Jameses, has led to a lot of confusion about their identities over the centuries.

This James is often referred to as James the Greater to distinguish him from James son of Alphaeus, James the Less (who may be the same person as James son of Alphaeus), and James the brother of Jesus. "Greater" here could refer to height, age, or importance.

Mark tells us that Jesus nicknamed James and John "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us what the nickname means or where it comes from. This has led many to assume it referred to their speech, temperaments, or ambition.

In the Bible, James son of Zebedee is most known for:

- Asking Jesus if he and John should call down fire from heaven to destroy a village which failed to show them hospitality (Luke 9:54)
- Asking Jesus if he and John can sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven, and unwittingly promising to follow Jesus into martyrdom (Mark 10:35–40)
- Being martyred by Herod in Acts 12:2

James is the only disciple whose martyrdom is recorded in the Bible (Acts 12:2). Herod had him killed by sword, and he was likely beheaded. (Judas Iscariot's death is recorded as well, but it was under very different circumstances.)

Tradition claims James son of Zebedee was a missionary to Spain and that his body was buried there, but since his death took place in Jerusalem very early in the history of the church, there are numerous challenges with this tradition. Nonetheless, the Camino de Santiago—a pilgrimage to the church where James is allegedly buried—was one of the most popular Christian pilgrimages for centuries, and Santiago de Compostela (the shrine dedicated to Saint James) is still a destination for more than 300,000 people every year.

John

John son of Zebedee was the third disciple considered to be part of Jesus' "inner circle" with his brother James and Peter. Like James, Peter, and several other disciples, John was a fisherman.

In the Bible, John is most known for:

- Asking Jesus if he and James should call down fire from heaven to destroy a village which failed to show them hospitality (Luke 9:54)
- Asking Jesus if he and James can sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven, and unwittingly promising to follow Jesus into martyrdom (Mark 10:35–40)
- Taking care of Jesus' mother, Mary (John 19:26–27)
- Beating Peter in a race to Jesus' empty tomb (John 20:2–9)
- Being a “pillar” of the church (Galatians 2:9)

Five books of the New Testament are attributed to someone named “John.” According to tradition, the Apostle John wrote all of them (more than any other member of the Twelve):

- The Gospel of John claims to have been written by the “Beloved Disciple.” Many early Christians assumed this was John, the son of Zebedee—so much so that the book was named after him.
- 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John simply claim “the elder” (or “the presbyter”) as their author. Early Christians believed this elder's name was John, and many assumed it was the same John who was part of the Twelve.
- Revelation was written by John on the isle of Patmos. Christians have commonly assumed John of Patmos and John the son of Zebedee were the same person.

Tradition says that John is “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” in the Gospel of John. John is never mentioned by name in this gospel, and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” appears to be one of the most prominent disciples (he sits next to Jesus at the Passover meal, and Peter often defers to him). At the end of the gospel, the author makes it clear that he is “the disciple whom Jesus loved”: “*This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.*” —John 21:24

Tradition holds that he preached in Ephesus, was exiled to the island of Patmos (where he wrote Revelation), returned to Ephesus, and died of old age after 98 AD, a rare (and possibly unique) feat among the apostles, most of whom were martyred.

Some important early Christian writers claimed to learn directly from John himself, including Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch.

Andrew

Andrew was Simon Peter's brother. Like his brother, he was a fisherman. According to the Gospel of John, Andrew was the first disciple Jesus called, and while Peter gets all the credit for recognizing Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:13–20), Andrew not only brought Peter to Jesus, but he told him Jesus was the Messiah. In John's gospel, it's pretty clear where Peter first got the idea that Jesus was the Messiah: “*The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.*” —John 1:41–42

Before he was called by Jesus Christ, Andrew was actually a disciple of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist: “*The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ ...When the two disciples heard him say this,*

they followed Jesus... Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus." —John 1:35–40

In John's account of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1–15), Andrew is the disciple who finds the boy with five loaves of bread and two fish. Later, when a group of Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they came to Philip, and for whatever reason, Philip deferred the decision to Andrew: "*Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.*" —John 12:20–22

Tradition claims Andrew was crucified in the Greek city of Patras around 60 AD, and that like Peter, he didn't consider himself worthy of dying the same way as Jesus. Instead, he was bound to an X shaped cross, which became a symbol known as Saint Andrew's Cross.

Philip

Philip the Apostle is only mentioned eight times in the New Testament, four of which are the lists of apostles. However, there are three other people named Philip in the New Testament, too. Two are sons of King Herod, and the other is Philip the Evangelist, originally a deacon.

Like Peter and Andrew, he comes from Bethsaida, a town near the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). Philip's most notable moment in the gospels is his role in bringing Nathanael to Jesus. Nathanael is only mentioned in the Gospel of John, but many assume this is another name for Bartholomew because John appears to consider him one of the Twelve (John 21:2).

Philip and Bartholomew are almost always listed together, and they're closely associated in church tradition. Nathanael follows Jesus as a result of Philip's invitation to "come and see" him, (John 1:45–46). The only other mentions of Philip in the Bible occur in John:

- Jesus tests Philip by asking him where they should buy bread to feed the crowd of 5,000 people (John 6:5–7).
- Philip asks Jesus to show them God the Father, and Jesus responds by saying "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:6–10).

Philip likely died in the first century, possibly around 80 AD, but traditions vary widely as to how he died—at least partially due to the confusion with Philip the Evangelist. One tradition says he died of natural causes. But others suggest he was stoned to death, beheaded, or crucified upside down.

Bartholomew

Bartholomew is one of the most obscure apostles. His name only appears in the four lists of Jesus' 12 main disciples, and he's never listed with any titles or descriptions. All we really know is his name, and that he's closely associated with Philip. He is widely considered to be the same person as Nathanael.

When Philip first tells Nathanael about Jesus, he's skeptical: "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?*" (John 1:46) But after seeing Jesus demonstrate his divinity, he says: "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel*" (John 1:49)

Like most of the apostles, Bartholomew was probably martyred. But there are several explanations of his death. Accounts suggest he was: Beaten and then crucified; Crucified upside down; Crucified and taken down before he died, then flayed and beheaded; Just

beheaded; Beaten unconscious and tossed in the sea to drown. No one claims he died of old age or natural causes, though.

Matthew

Matthew, also known as Levi, was a tax collector—one of the most reviled professions in first-century Judaism. As a tax collector (or publican), Matthew collected taxes for Rome from his fellow Jews in Capernaum.

That in itself would be enough to make him feel like a political traitor—his profession was a symbol of Israel’s Roman occupation. But to make matters worse, tax collectors made their money by saying people owed Caesar more than they did and then skimming the extra off the top—and there was nothing anyone could do about it. As a result, tax collectors were right up there with prostitutes for the go-to example of the worst sinners.

So it was a big deal that Jesus asked Matthew to follow him and be one of his disciples. Matthew’s inclusion among the Twelve presents a powerful picture of how God partners with all kinds of people—even those you’d least expect—to accomplish his purposes. And despite the fact that Matthew would have been considered a religious outsider, Jesus brought him into the inner circle.

Immediately after calling Matthew to follow him, Jesus has dinner at Matthew’s house, and “many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.” The Pharisees were pretty bothered by this. But Jesus was eating with them to demonstrate God’s mercy and to mend the brokenness that came with being treated like religious outsiders. By including Matthew among his disciples, Jesus showed that no one—not even those society considered irredeemable—would be excluded from God’s table.

Traditions disagree on how and where Matthew died. Various accounts say he was beheaded, stoned, burned, or stabbed. One even suggests he died of old age, like John. Most scholars believe he was probably martyred, though.

Thomas

Thomas, perhaps better-known as “Doubting Thomas,” famously doubted the resurrection of Jesus and told the other disciples, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*” (John 20:25). Jesus then appeared and offered to let him do just that. Thomas’ moment of skepticism earned him the nickname “Doubting Thomas,” which evolved into a term for anyone who needs proof before they believe something.

Thomas is only mentioned eight times in the entire New Testament, and four of those times are just lists of the twelve apostles. And while throughout church history people have been happy to fill in the details of his life, few of those details are reliable. (For example, one ancient text even claimed he was Jesus’ twin brother . . . what?!) This is because Thomas wasn’t actually given a name in the original manuscripts. “Thomas” comes from the Aramaic word *tē’omâ*, which means “twin.” To help clarify who we’re talking about though, most manuscripts include the description, “called Didymus” or “called the Twin.”

An early church calendar reads: “3 July, St. Thomas who was pierced with a lance in Mylapore, India.” No other tradition exists about Thomas’ death.

James son of Alphaeus

James son of Alphaeus is only mentioned in the four lists of apostles. So all we can say for sure about him is that he had a really common name and he was the son of someone named Alphaeus. In tradition, he is sometimes confused with the other “James” figures in the New Testament, including James, brother of Jesus.

Tradition says James son of Alphaeus was crucified in Egypt, where he was preaching. Another just says he was stoned to death in Jerusalem. However he died, odds are pretty good he was martyred.

Jude

Jude the apostle is also known as Jude of James, Judas of James, Thaddeus, Judas Thaddeus, and Lebbaeus. Some identify him with Jesus’ brother Jude, the traditional author of the Epistle of Jude, but the Bible doesn’t tell us these Judes are the same people.

In two of the lists of apostles, Jude appears to be referred to as Thaddeus (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19). Since these two names appear in about the same place in the lists, and the other names are consistent, church tradition (and most modern scholars) have always assumed Thaddeus was a nickname for Jude of James.

Most traditions assume Jude the apostle wrote the Epistle of Jude because they assume he’s the same person as Jesus’ brother Jude. But unfortunately, Jude was a common name, and this relies on assumptions. Today’s scholars have mixed opinions on Jude’s authorship.

Simon the Zealot

Simon the Zealot is only mentioned by name in lists of the apostles. Simon the Zealot may have belonged to a Jewish sect known as the Zealots, who were bent on revolution and looking for a Messiah to violently overthrow Rome. Or he may have simply been zealous for the Mosaic Law, or for Jesus and his teachings.

Later tradition claims he preached in Egypt, then partnered with Judas, the brother of Jesus. There are numerous accounts of Simon the Zealot’s death, but the earliest records came centuries after his death. Like many of the apostles, it’s hard to conclude exactly which tradition (if any) can be trusted.

Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot is one of the most widely known disciples. He infamously betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, which led to Jesus’ death on the cross. Today, “Judas” is virtually synonymous with “traitor.”

Judas Iscariot may have been considered “good with money” or trustworthy, because somehow he wound up being the designated treasurer for Jesus and his disciples. Ironically, the first passage that tells that he was in charge of the group’s money also tells us that he was

completely untrustworthy. (Granted, Judas was long dead after this was written, so maybe this is John's hindsight talking.)

“But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” —John 12:4–6

Judas Iscariot's death was unique among the disciples. While James son of Zebedee was the only apostle to be martyred in the Bible (Acts 12:2), Judas Iscariot was the first to die. The Gospel of Matthew says he hung himself: *“So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.”* —Matthew 27:5.

Bonus: Matthias

Matthias wasn't one of the original members of the Twelve who were personally called by Jesus. Instead, he was appointed by the apostles to replace Judas Iscariot. All we really know about Matthias is that he met Peter's requirements for selecting a new member of the Twelve (Acts 1:21–22): He'd followed Jesus since his baptism by John the Baptist; and he witnessed Jesus' ascension to heaven.

While the Bible doesn't explicitly say this, the fact that Matthias was clearly following Jesus early on and he was significant enough to be selected makes it possible that he was among the Seventy" who Jesus sent out ahead of him in Luke 10:1–24.

To choose someone to replace Judas, about 120 believers nominated two people (Matthias and Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus), and then they cast lots. "Casting lots" could've just meant voting, drawing a name from a jar, or something else—but the principle of casting lots goes back to the Old Testament. It was a process the Israelites used to discern God's will, seek his wisdom, or learn the truth.

Before they cast lots in Acts 1, the disciples pray: *“Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs”* (Acts 1:24–25).

What about Paul?

Paul was not one of the Original 12, nor was he originally a follower of Jesus, unlike "Replacement Apostle" Matthias. Paul's self-titled "Apostleship" derived from being personally called by Jesus in a vision, or revelation, or appearance, some 3-5 years after the Resurrection.

Luke records the event several times (Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26). In the third account, Paul recounts Jesus as saying, *“I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen and will see of me.”* In Galatians 1:1 Paul writes, *“Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.”* He mocks his own questionable standing in 2 Corinthians 12:11: *“I am not in the least inferior to the ‘super-apostles,’ even though I am nothing.”* Paul's title as Apostle was strengthened by the effectiveness of his wide-spread ministry, particularly among the Gentiles.