**Who Were the 12 Disciples and What Should We Know about Them?**

*It was at this time that 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)*

Twelve men responded to the call. They were Jews, uneducated commoners, and simple men of faith who gave up everything to be followers of Christ. Jesus spent three years training these men to be leaders. Jesus’ plan was to eventually have the disciples take over and carry on the work He had started.

**Jesus Chose Ordinary Men**

What we know to be true about Jesus is that He chose ordinary and unrefined men. They were the commonest of the common. They were from rural areas, farmers, and fisherman. Christ purposely passed over the elite, aristocratic, and influential men of society and chose mostly the men from the dregs of society. That’s how it has always been in God’s economy. He exalts the [humble](https://www.amazon.com/Twelve-Ordinary-Men-Disciples-Greatness/dp/0785288244) and lays low those who are proud.

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Eleven apostles are all great encouragements to us because they exemplify how common people with typical failings can be used by God in uncommon, remarkable ways. One apostle betrayed Jesus.

**The Twelve Disciples (Apostles): Who Were They?**

*You didn’t choose me. I chose you. (*[*John 14:16*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+14:16)*)*

*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew (Nathanael); Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus*(James the Less)*, and Thaddaeus*(Judas, son of James)*; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. (*[*Matthew 10:2-4*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+10:2-4)*, emphasis added)*

**Peter and Andrew**

*And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (*[*Matthew 4:19*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+4:19)*)*

Peter and Andrew--Sons of John, were born in Bethsaida. They later settled in a home together in the town of Capernaum. They were fisherman and worked alongside James and John. They were companions and had probably known each other for years.

Peter and Andrew were early followers of [John the Baptist](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/6-powerful-truths-from-the-life-of-john-the-baptist-that-offer-hope-for-today.html). It was Andrew who first introduced his older brother Peter to Jesus when they were in the wilderness with John. *(*[*John 1:40-42*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+1:40-42)*)* It is thought that they became spiritual followers of Jesus at this time. Once Peter was introduced to Jesus they left John and became followers of Christ.

**1. Peter**

Also known as Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas (Rock), Peter was a gregarious, natural leader, and an obvious spokesperson for the twelve. Peter’s name is mentioned far more in the New Testament than any other of the disciples. He was the older of the two brothers and the only married disciple. *(*[*Luke 4:38*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=lu+4:38)*)* His wife was known to travel with him when he was on mission. *(*[*1 Cor. 9:5*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=1co+9:5)*)* His assignment was to bring the Gospel to the circumcised. *(*[*Gal. 2:7*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=ga+2:7)*)*

Peter is well known for denying Christ three times after Christ was arrested. After his own arrest many years later he requested to be crucified with his head down. He didn’t believe he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. He died a martyr’s death in Rome during the reign of Nero. Some speculate around the same time as Paul was being beheaded.

**2. Andrew**

An early disciple of [John the Baptist](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/women/6-powerful-truths-from-the-life-of-john-the-baptist-that-offer-hope-for-today.html), Andrew, and John, the Son of Zebedee were present when John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!”  Andrew was the first to follow Jesus and his enthusiasm was evident as his desire to introduce his older brother to Jesus revealed what was already in his heart—a deep love for God.

He was not a dominant person next to his outspoken brother. He was a passionate preacher and shared the gospel boldly and was a significant contributor to the early church.

Andrew died a martyr’s death. He faced crucifixion with boldness and courage. He [said](https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Christian-Martyrs-World-John/dp/1557484562), “Oh, cross most welcome and longed for! With a willing mind, joyfully and desirously, I come to you, being a scholar of Him which did hang on you, because I have always been your servant and yearn to embrace you.”

He went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what is now the Soviet Union. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

**James and John—Sons of Zebedee**

Zebedee was thought to be a man of affluence and able enough to hire servants to help with his fishing business. *(Mark* *1:20).* In Scripture, James is the elder brother of John, yet he is part of Jesus’ inner three. During the three years of training with Christ John is much more in the forefront of what is happening. Jesus nicknamed James and John the Sons of Thunder because they were known for being men of intense passion and fervor. *(*[*Mark 3:17*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+3:17)*)*

**3. James**

James was the rather quiet part of the team of disciples. We don’t read much about him in Scripture. As part of Jesus’ “inner three” he was permitted to be present along with Peter and John when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead *(*[*Mark 5:37*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+5:37)*)*, he witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration on the Mount of Olives *(*[*Matthew 17:1*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+17:1)*),* and he was in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. *(*[*Mark 14:33*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+14:33)*)*

James was the first disciple to be martyred (he was beheaded) and the only disciple to have their martyrdom recorded in Scripture. *(*[*Acts 12:1-3*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=ac+12:1-3)*)*

**4. John**

John was known as the “disciple Jesus loved,” he was also a part of the inner three. *(*[*John 3:23*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+3:23)*)*He wrote a large portion of the New Testament—The book of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. He wrote more about love than any other New Testament author. From his close proximity to Jesus, John learned much about love.

He was [exiled](https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Christian-Martyrs-World-John/dp/1557484562)to the island of Patmos under Domitian, After the death of Domitian, John was allowed to return to Ephesus where he governed churches in Asia until his death at about  A.D. 100.

John was the only one of the apostles generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the church in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary the mother of Jesus in his home. John was credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation when exiled at Patmos. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil at Rome.

**5. Philip**

*“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, Follow Me.” (*[*John 1:43*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+1:43)*)*

We know almost nothing about Philip. He was a Jew and we only know him by his Greek name, Philip. He had a heart for evangelism. He was anxious to tell Nathanael that the One foretold by Moses and the prophets had been found. *(*[*John 1:45*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+1:45)*)* They were close companions and possibly studied the Old Testament together.

### It is possible that Philip had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. Tradition says In retaliation the Roman proconsul in Hierapolis, Phrygia had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death by ordering that be stoned and [crucified](https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Christian-Martyrs-World-John/dp/1557484562)

**6. Nathanael,** also known as Bartholomew

Also known as Bartholomew, Nathanael came from Cana in Galilee. *(*[*John 21:2*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+21:2)*)* He expressed some local prejudice about Nazareth. *(*[*John 1:46*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+1:46)*)* Jesus recognized how sincerely his love for God was from the beginning when He said, *“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” (*[*John 1:47*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+1:47)*)*

Bartholomew (Nathanael) may have preached in [India](https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Christian-Martyrs-World-John/dp/1557484562) and translated the book of Matthew into their language. He was beaten, crucified, and beheaded. He died as a martyr while serving the people of Albinopolis, Armenia.

Bartholomew 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.

**7. Matthew**

*As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, Follow Me! And he got up and followed Him. (*[*Matthew 9:9*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+9:9)*)*

Levi, the Son of Alphaeus, known as Matthew was a tax collector--the most despised people in all of Israel. They were known for taking extra money from the people of Israel to pay off the Romans and to pad their own pockets.

*Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisee’s saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, Why is he eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners? And hearing this, Jesus said to them, It is not those who are healthy that need a physician, but those who* are sick; I did not come to call the [righteous](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/what-does-it-mean-to-be-righteous.html), but sinners. ([Mark 2:16](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+2:16))

Matthew was the transformed tax collector and writer of a Gospel ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say Hircanus the king had him killed with a [spear](https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Christian-Martyrs-World-John/dp/1557484562).

**8. Thomas**

Usually nicknamed “Doubting Thomas," Thomas was also called Didymus, meaning The Twin (although a twin brother or sister is never mentioned in the [Bible](https://www.biblestudytools.com/).) He was an outspoken skeptic to the point of being known as a pessimist. No details are given about Thomas in the first three Gospels other than the mention of his name. John’s first mention of Thomas is in [John 11:16](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+11:16). Lazarus had died and the disciples feared for the life of Jesus and themselves if they were to go back to Bethany. Thomas speaks up. *Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. (*[*John 11:16*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+11:16) *KJV)* Here we see the character quality of courage and loyalty to Christ, a quality not often attributed to Thomas.

His devotion to Christ is further displayed when Jesus told the disciples that He was going to go away and prepare a place for them. ***4****And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.* ***5****Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? (*[*John 14:4-5*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+14:4-5) *KJV)*

Thomas didn’t want to be left behind. And then Thomas’ love for Jesus and his desire to see and touch before he believed and then his declarat*ion, “My Lord and My God!” (*[*John 20:28*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+20:28)*)*

Tradition strongly suggests that Thomas started the Christian church in India. He was probably most active in the area east of Syria. 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.

**9. James the Less**

He is the son of Alphaeus *(*[*Luke 6:15*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=lu+6:15)*).* His mother’s name is Mary ([Mark 15:40](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+15:40)) and he has a brother named Joseph *(*[*Matthew 27:56*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+27:56)*).*  There are a few details about his family, but there is nothing more mentioned about him in Scripture.  [*Mark 15:40*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mr+15:40). What is important to remember is that James was chosen by Jesus to be one of the [twelve disciples](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/who-were-the-12-disciples-and-what-should-we-know-about-them.html). He was trained and used by Christ in a powerful way to further the Kingdom of God. He was a valuable team member.

Tradition says he was crucified in Sinai or possibly stoned to death in Jerusalem.

**10. Simon the Zealot**

Simon was probably a political activist in his younger years. Why would Jesus choose someone with Simon’s background? He was probably a political activist in his younger years. “It is amazing that Jesus would select a man like Simon to be an apostle. Simon was a man of fierce loyalties, amazing passion, courage, and zeal. Simon had believed the truth and embraced Christ as his Lord**.** His fiery enthusiasm that he once had for Israel was now expressed in his devotion to Christ.”

There is some speculation about what happened to Simon. Tradition says that after preaching on the west coast of Africa, Simon went to England where he ended up being crucified in 74 AD. Another story is that he ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

**11. Judas, son of James also known as Jude**

The eleventh name on the list of disciples is Judas. Also known as Jude, Thaddeus, and [Lebbaeus](https://www.biblestudytools.com/nkjv/matthew/passage/?q=matthew+10:2-4), Judas lived in obscurity as one of the Twelve. He did ask Jesus a question in [*John 14:22*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+14:22) *KJV* , ***22****Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*  Judas seemed overly concerned with this question. Christ responded by saying He would reveal Himself to anyone who loved Him.

According to most early tradition Judas, the son of James, took the gospel north to Edessa. This was a few years after Pentecost. There he healed the King of Edessa. Abgar. Eusebius the historian said the archives at Edessa contained the visit of Judas and the healing of Abgar (the records have now been destroyed). The traditional [symbol](https://www.amazon.com/Twelve-Ordinary-Men-Disciples-Greatness/dp/0785288244) of Judas is a club and tradition says he was clubbed to death for his [faith](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/).

**12. Judas Iscariot**

***70****Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* ***71****He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve. (*[*John 6:70-71*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=joh+6:70-71) *KJV)*

The Traitor. Nothing is known about Judas’ background. His encounter and call by Jesus is not recorded in Scripture. He was not from Galilee--that much is known. He obviously became a follower and stayed with Jesus for three years. He certainly didn’t give Christ his heart but he gave Christ three years of his life and Jesus knew this. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. *(*[*Matthew 26:15*](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=mt+26:15)*)*

Judas Iscariot died by hanging himself.

Judas, stands as a warning about the evil potential of hardness of the heart, spiritual carelessness, squandered opportunity, sinful lusts. In Judas we see a man who drew as close to the Savior as it is humanly possible to be and he enjoyed every privilege that Christ affords. Judas was intimately familiar with everything Jesus taught, but he remained in unbelief and went into a hopeless eternity.

**Matthais**

The apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.