BIBLE TOPICS · NEW TESTAMENT

The 12 Apostles

Chosen, Taught, Restored and Sent

12 Apostles
Chosen after prayer

4 Lists
In the New Testament

3 Closest
Peter, James and John

Matthias
Took Judas' place

C. A.D. 27–30 AND BEYOND

From Fishermen to Foundations

The story of the Twelve moves in eight stages.

1

The First Followers

Andrew brings Peter; Philip brings Nathanael.

JOHN 1:35–51

2

Called from Nets

Fishermen leave their boats; Matthew leaves his booth.

MATTHEW 4:18–22

3

Chosen as the Twelve

After a night of prayer, twelve are named apostles.

LUKE 6:12–16

4

Sent Two by Two

They preach and heal on their first mission.

MATTHEW 10

5

Learning Who He Is

Peter's confession and hard lessons about greatness.

MATTHEW 16:13–28

6

The Last Night

Feet washed, a betrayal, a denial, a scattering.

JOHN 13

7

Witnesses of the Risen Lord

Thomas believes, Peter is restored, Matthias chosen.

JOHN 20–21

8

Foundations of the Church

Pentecost, bold preaching, and the first martyr of the Twelve.

ACTS 2–12

KEY VERSE

"And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach."

Mark 3:14 (KJV)

Meet the Twelve Chart

BIBLE TOPICS · NEW TESTAMENT

Meet the Twelve Apostles

Chosen to be with Him and sent to preach

In the order of Matthew 10:2–4 · three groups of four

Group 1 · The Fishermen

1 Simon Peter
Fisherman; confessed Jesus as the Christ
MATTHEW 16:16

2 Andrew
Peter's brother; brought people to Jesus
JOHN 1:41

3 James son of Zebedee
A son of thunder; first of the Twelve martyred
ACTS 12:2

4 John son of Zebedee
The disciple whom Jesus loved
JOHN 19:26

Group 2

5 Philip
Of Bethsaida; Lord, shew us the Father
JOHN 14:8

6 Bartholomew (Nathanael)
An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile
JOHN 1:47

7 Thomas
Called Didymus; My Lord and my God
JOHN 20:28

8 Matthew (Levi)
Tax collector; wrote the first Gospel
MATTHEW 9:9

Group 3

9 James son of Alphaeus
Called James the less
MARK 15:40

10 Thaddaeus (Judas of James)
Judas, not Iscariot
JOHN 14:22

11 Simon the Zealot
Simon called Zelotes
LUKE 6:15

12 Judas Iscariot
Kept the bag; betrayed Jesus
MATTHEW 26:15

Chosen to Replace Judas

13 Matthias
A witness from John's baptism; the lot fell upon Matthias
ACTS 1:26

KEY VERSE

"And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach."

MARK 3:14 (KJV)

BibleStudyForAll.com · Scripture quotations from the King James Version

The Four Fishermen

MATTHEW 10:2

The Four Fishermen

The first four in every list. Peter, James and John were Jesus' inner circle.

1 CEPHAS · A STONE

Simon Peter

A fisherman from Bethsaida, always named first. He walked on the water, confessed Jesus as the Christ, denied Him three times, and was restored: "Feed My sheep." He preached at Pentecost and wrote two letters. Tradition: crucified in Rome under Nero, about A.D. 64–68.

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

MATTHEW 16:16

2 PETER'S BROTHER

Andrew

First a disciple of John the Baptist, he brought his brother to Jesus, then the boy with five loaves (John 6:8–9) and the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (John 12:20–22). Tradition: preached in Greece and died at Patras.

"We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ."

JOHN 1:41

3 A SON OF THUNDER

James son of Zebedee

Called from mending nets in his father's boat. With Peter and John he saw Jairus' daughter raised, the transfiguration and Gethsemane. Herod killed him with the sword about A.D. 44, the first of the Twelve to die for Christ.

"And he killed James the brother of John with the sword."

ACTS 12:2

4 THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

John son of Zebedee

He leaned on Jesus at supper, stood at the cross and was given Mary to care for. He wrote the Gospel of John, three letters and Revelation. Tradition: lived to old age in Ephesus after exile on Patmos.

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you"

1 JOHN 1:3

Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew

MATTHEW 10:3

Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew

The second group of four, led by Philip in every list.

5 OF BETHSAIDA

Philip

Jesus found him and said, “Follow Me”; Philip at once found Nathanael. At the Last Supper his request drew Jesus’ answer, “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Tradition: ministered and died at Hierapolis in Asia Minor.

“Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”

JOHN 14:8

6 ALSO CALLED NATHANAEL

Bartholomew

Always paired with Philip in the lists; John calls him Nathanael. He doubted that any good thing could come out of Nazareth, but Jesus called him “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Tradition: preached in India and was martyred in Armenia.

“Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.”

JOHN 1:49

7 DIDYMUS · THE TWIN

Thomas

Brave enough to say, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (John 11:16), honest enough to ask the way, and slow to believe until he saw the nail prints. Then he made one of the clearest confessions in the Gospels. Tradition: took the gospel to Parthia and India.

“My Lord and my God.”

JOHN 20:28

8 LEVI · THE PUBLICAN

Matthew

A tax collector in Capernaum who left everything to follow Jesus and threw a feast for his friends. Jesus said, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). He wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

“Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him.”

MATTHEW 9:9

James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas and Matthias

MATTHEW 10:3–4 · ACTS 1:26

James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas and Matthias

The least known group, led by James son of Alphaeus. Judas Iscariot is always named last, and Matthias took his place.

9 JAMES THE LESS

James son of Alphaeus

Named ninth in every list, with no words of his recorded. He is a different man from James son of Zebedee and from James the Lord's brother, who led the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19).

"Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses"

MARK 15:40

10 JUDAS THE BROTHER OF JAMES

Thaddaeus

Matthew and Mark call him Thaddaeus (Lebbaeus); Luke and Acts call him "Judas the brother of James." John marks him off from the betrayer. Tradition: preached in Edessa and Persia.

"Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

JOHN 14:22

11 SIMON THE CANAANITE

Simon the Zealot

The KJV's "Canaanite" comes from the Aramaic word for zealous. Jesus put a zealous man like Simon in the same band as Matthew, who had worked for Rome. Tradition: preached in Persia.

"Simon called Zelotes"

LUKE 6:15

12 WHICH ALSO WAS THE TRAITOR

Judas Iscariot

He kept the money bag and stole from it (John 12:6). He sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and betrayed Him with a kiss. Filled with remorse, he hanged himself before the resurrection (Matthew 27:3–5).

"What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?"

MATTHEW 26:15

13 CHOSEN TO REPLACE JUDAS

Matthias

A follower of Jesus from John's baptism, a witness of the resurrection. The believers prayed and cast lots, and he was numbered with the eleven. Tradition: preached in Judæa.

"and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

ACTS 1:26

\+ CALLED LATER

Paul

The risen Jesus called Paul on the Damascus road to carry His name "before the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15). Paul called himself "the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9). See The Apostle Paul.

The Four Lists and Where They Went

MATTHEW 10 · MARK 3 · LUKE 6 · ACTS 1

The Four Lists and the Inner Circle

The New Testament names the Twelve four times. The names fall into the same three groups of four every time, and each group always begins with the same man: Peter, Philip, and James son of Alphaeus.

GROUP 1 · LED BY PETER

Peter, Andrew, James, John

The four fishermen, the first called.

MATTHEW 10:2

GROUP 2 · LED BY PHILIP

Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew

The order changes inside the group, but these four always stand fifth to eighth.

MATTHEW 10:3

GROUP 3 · LED BY JAMES

James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas

Judas Iscariot is always last, with a note that he betrayed Jesus.

MATTHEW 10:3–4

The Inner Circle

MARK 5:37

Jairus' Daughter

Only Peter, James and John go in when Jesus raises the girl.

MATTHEW 17:1–2

The Transfiguration

The three see His face "shine as the sun."

MARK 13:3

The Mount of Olives

Peter, James, John and Andrew ask about the end.

MARK 14:33

Gethsemane

The three are taken further in as Jesus prays.

AFTER THE BOOK OF ACTS

Where Did the Apostles Go?

The Bible records the deaths of only two of the Twelve: Judas (Matthew 27:5) and James son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2). For the rest we rely on early church writers such as Clement of Rome and Eusebius. This is history from tradition, not Scripture.

PETER

Rome

Crucified under Nero, about A.D. 64–68 (see John 21:18–19).

ANDREW

Greece

Preached around the Black Sea and Greece; died at Patras.

JAMES

Jerusalem

Killed by Herod about A.D. 44.

ACTS 12:2

JOHN

Patmos and Ephesus

Exiled to Patmos; died in old age at Ephesus.

REVELATION 1:9

PHILIP

Hierapolis

Ministered and died in Asia Minor.

BARTHOLOMEW

India and Armenia

Preached in India; martyred in Armenia.

THOMAS

Parthia and India

The Christians of south India trace their church to him.

MATTHEW

The First Gospel

Wrote his Gospel and preached in the east.

THADDAEUS AND SIMON

Edessa and Persia

Preached together in the east.

The Twelve and Jesus

THE HEART OF THE STORY

The Twelve and Jesus

The story of the apostles is really the story of their Teacher. Jesus chose them, taught them, prayed for them, forgave them and sent them out.

Chosen as Friends

“Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit”

JOHN 15:16

The Servant King

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

MARK 10:45

He Prays for Them

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

LUKE 22:32

He Prays for Us

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word”

JOHN 17:20

He Sends Them Out

“and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

MATTHEW 28:20

Apostles of the Lamb

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

REVELATION 21:14

FOR TODAY

Five Things to Remember

The apostles doubted, argued, boasted and ran away, and Jesus kept teaching them. Here is what their story teaches us.

1

Twelve, for a Reason

Chosen after a night of prayer, like the twelve tribes of a renewed Israel.

LUKE 6:12–13

2

With Him, Then Sent

First called to be with Jesus, then sent out.

MARK 3:14

3

An Unlikely Team

Fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, a doubter and a betrayer, chosen on purpose.

MATTHEW 10:2–4

4

Restored, Not Replaced

All failed on the last night, and Jesus restored them; Matthias took only Judas’ place.

JOHN 21:15–17

5

Eyewitnesses Who Changed the World

Their testimony to the risen Jesus is the foundation of the church.

EPHESIANS 2:20

6

Bring Someone

Andrew’s first act was to bring his brother.

“Come and see.”

JOHN 1:46

THINK ABOUT IT

Questions for Reflection

Andrew’s first act as a follower of Jesus was to bring his brother: who could you invite to “come and see”? Jesus asked, “But whom say ye that I am?” How would you answer Him today? Jesus washed the feet of the man who would deny Him and the man who would betray Him: whom might God be asking you to serve? Jesus asked Peter, “lovest thou Me?” before He gave him work to do. What is your honest answer?

Six Themes of the Apostles

KEY THEMES

Six Themes of the Apostles

These six truths run through the whole story of the Twelve.

1

Jesus Chooses Ordinary People

Working men, known for having been with Jesus.

"they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

ACTS 4:13

2

Following Comes First

Chosen first to be with Him, then sent.

"that they should be with Him"

MARK 3:14

3

Greatness Means Serving

The first must be servant of all.

"If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."

MARK 9:35

4

Failure Is Not the End

All fled; the risen Jesus restored them.

"Feed My sheep."

JOHN 21:17

5

Witnesses of the Resurrection

Their message rested on what they had seen.

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

ACTS 4:20

6

Sent to the Whole World

From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations"

MATTHEW 28:19