

What Do We Know About the Apostles?

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus chose twelve men to be His followers. They became His students, His assistants, His confidants, and His friends. They also became the inheritors of His earthly ministry as well as some of the supernatural powers He chose to use to benefit, impress and educate the people. Beyond that, He chose three of them, Peter, Matthew and John, to participate in writing several of the books that are part of the New Testament. Some scholars believe that it was Peter through the prompting of the Holy Spirit who directed Luke in his penning of the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts, and also the Gospel According to Mark. Although not an Apostle, some believe that Mark, the Gospel writer, was the rich young man who sought from Jesus the way to salvation. {Mark 10:17, 18) At first Mark didn't measure up to Paul's requirements as an adequately equipped partner to accompany him on his missionary journeys. Paul started out with Silas. When Silas insisted on bringing Mark along, the two went there separate ways with Mark accompanying Silas. Later as Mark "grew", he became a treasured asset to Paul.

Paul was also a bonifide Apostle, but not one of the original twelve. If we admit that Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews, we see that this special Apostle actually is responsible for half of the twenty-eight books of the New Testament. Paul's apostleship was unique and as such is worthy of individual and lengthy attention. Because he was not one of the twelve he is not included in this study. Without the legacy left to us by the works of the Apostles and their writings, Christianity would have been but just another temporary cult religion. Of course, this would have been contrary to God's divine plan and therefore did not happen.

As we examine what Scripture tells us about these chosen ones, we recognize that each had qualities and characteristics both natural and divinely infused, specific to the purpose for which they were called. We know very little more than the names of several, yet we may be assured that their service, including that of Judas was precisely as God intended it

to be, even though He chose not to share all of that information with us. What we do know is that every one of them, except Judas, eventually understood at some point, that Jesus was God incarnate, and irrevocably committed their whole lives to His service and in spreading the Gospel of salvation. Tradition has it that all eleven of them except John were martyred for their faith. What follows is a brief summary of what God chose to reveal to us concerning their lives and service, and to the extent He has allowed me to report on it.

1. Peter (Petrus – rock or stone) sometimes called Simon Peter. Simon (hearing). Peter was a fisherman from Bethsaida meaning “house of fish.” His father’s name was Jonah, who with his sons, Peter and Andrew, were fishermen on the Lake of Galilee. They were partners with Zebedee and his sons, the Apostles James and John. This colorful many-faceted character Peter deserves a book unto himself if all of his exploits were to be fully recorded.

Peter first met Jesus at Bethany on the east side of the Jordan where John the Baptist was ministering. Both he and Andrew were disciples of the Baptist. Therefore through the teachings of this John, they already had some idea of how special Jesus was, even though they were far from being able to recognize the full extent of that specialness. As we examine Peter’s character, we find its many facets expressed in the following verses: He was naturally impulsive (Matthew 14:28, John 21:7); tender-hearted and affectionate (Matthew 26:75, John 13:9, 21:15-17); gifted with spiritual insight (John 6:68); yet sometimes slow to apprehend deeper truths (Matthew 15:15, 16); courageous in his confession of faith in Christ, yet guilty of a most cowardly denial (Matthew 16:16, John 6:69, Mark 14:67-71); self-sacrificing yet inclined toward self-seeking (Matthew 19:27); presumptuous (Matthew 16:22, John 13:8, 18:10); and immovable in his conviction (Acts 4:19,20, 5:28,29,40,42).

He was the leader of the inner circle consisting of Peter, James and John who witnessed the raising of Jairus daughter, the Transfiguration, and our Lord’s

agony in the Garden. Peter was also the leader of the twelve, and was the first to make what is believed a Holy Spirit prompted confession of the Lord's deity. It's likely that this relates to why Jesus then gave him alone the keys that opened the door of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

While all of the Apostles abandoned Jesus at the garden when the soldiers and priests took him away, Peter was the only one recorded to have publically deny him, and did so three times. For that, he lost his apostolic commission as is strongly implied in Mark 16:7. There we find the angel at the tomb telling the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus, to tell the disciples, and Peter, that He had risen and was going to Galilee. Disciples suggest a broader category of followers than does Apostles. Scripture seems to indicate that those who responded to the message were the Apostles and women believers. The "and Peter" indicates that he, at that time, due to his three denials of Jesus, was not considered to be one of the disciples. However, Jesus restores his Apostleship on the seashore when He asks him three times (due to the three denials) if he loves Him, and after each response Jesus directs him to feed His sheep, thereby expressing the restoration of His Apostolic mandate to Peter.

After Pentecost, Peter's ministry appears in four stages:

- A. Activities in Jerusalem, 29-35AD – where he used the keys to salvation and opened the door to the Jews.
- B. His Palestinian Mission 35-44AD - That is when he was called to Caesarea and the house of Cornelius to use the keys to open the door of salvation to the Gentiles.
- C. His Syrian mission, mostly in Antioch 44-61AD during which his wife was with him, and where he conceded to Paul regarding the "legalism" issue.
- D. Rome 61 AD where a few years later it is said that he suffered martyrdom on an upside-down cross.

Through most of his service as he walked with Jesus, Peter was an impulsive, bumbling, stumbling, foot-in-the-mouth-afflicted fisherman, characterized by a “ready, fire, aim” approach to most situations. Later, as evidenced by his two epistles, he became a very stable, articulate, and fruitful spokesman and Apostle of our Lord.

2. Andrew (Manliness) brother of Peter.

Here is a Bible trivia question: Who was the first missionary for Christ? Answer: Andrew. He brought his brother Peter to the newly found Messiah (John 1:41, 42). Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and it was there when he was baptizing with water that John pointed out Jesus as the Son of God. After that, Peter and Andrew left John the Baptist and followed Jesus. They were the first of the twelve Apostles to follow Him. Andrew was a faithful follower of Christ from even before Jesus began His ministry, and on to the very end. While Andrew was not of the “inner circle” three, that is Peter, James and John, we can say that he was within the next hierarchal level with Peter James and John in terms of being singled out to participate in certain of Jesus’ activities, (Mark 13:3,4).

3. James (supplanter) James is the Graecized Iakob, or Jacob

James was the son of Zebedee and older brother of the Apostle John. This was not James the epistle writer and half brother of Jesus. Zebedee was a Galilean fisherman and quite wealthy, given that he had servants that managed his boats, and had a house in Jerusalem, a long ways away from Galilee. He is also known to have been a friend of the High Priest, Caiaphas, thus he had a high social position among those who hated and feared Jesus. Salome was the mother of James and John and tradition says she was a sister of Mary, our Lord’s mother. Thus John and James would have been cousins of Jesus “after the flesh.” The

brothers were partners in the fishing business with their father and other brothers. James was busy with the boats and nets when Jesus called him. Jesus called the two brothers “sons of thunder.” James was martyred by Herod Agrippa fourteen years after Jesus ascended to heaven. Scripture speaks of him as being the second Christian martyr, after Stephen. It appears that James never sought fame or power, and never wrote a biblically recorded word.

4. John (Jehovah hath been gracious)

As we’ve seen, John was the younger brother of James. He was the youngest Apostle, probably in his early teens, when he became a follower of Christ. He has the distinction of having been called “*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*” He too was called by Jesus, while tending his boats and nets. His mother, Salome followed Christ, ministered to Him, was at the Cross, and among those who went to anoint the body of Christ with spices. John was a member of Jesus’ “inner circle.” Jesus named him and his brother James as sons of Boanerges, which means sons of commotion or thunder because of their zeal and resolve to witness for Christ.

He was treated with greater familiarity than the others enjoyed, perhaps because of his zeal, youth and “kinship.” Jesus honored him with a place next to Him at the last supper. Then, while on the cross, he was given the privilege of all privileges, the trusted care of Jesus’ mother. It is interesting that He chose John rather than placing her care in the hands of any of His half-brothers. Many, as I do, believe that the “elect lady” to whom 2John was written was Mary, Jesus’ mother who was then living in Ephesus and for whom he was guardian. It suggests that he had been away for a while, perhaps during his missionary works. His letter expresses his concern for her, and chose in the letter to advice her regarding several things with which he was concerned. John wrote three epistles and the Book of Revelation.

Scripture offers us much about John's character. We learn of his natural energy (Mark 3:17); his intolerance (Mark 9:38); his vindictiveness (Luke 9:54); his ambition (Mark 10:35-37); his eagerness to learn (John 13:23, 24 1John 2:9); his sympathy (John 19:26, 27); and his love (1John 4:7-21). He died when he was almost one hundred years of age, probably the only Apostle to die a natural death! What a blessed and privileged life this man lived!

5. Philip (warrior or lover of horses)

Philip was also from Bethsaida in Galilee. Tradition has it that he was the one who requested of Jesus that he might first go and bury his father (Matthew 8:21, 22). He was a timid, retiring type, who waited for Jesus to call him. Philip is a Greek name even though he was a Jew. He probably had a Jewish name as well, one which has not been mentioned. In three lists, Philips is associated with Nathanael, a fellow Galilean, as a companion and fellow worker. It's interesting and impressive that as soon as Jesus said to him, "Follow me" (John 1:43), Philip was ready both to follow and to do so in faith. He was a real soul winner. "Come and see", he said to Nathanael, and thus was instrumental in leading his friend to the faith and to the apostleship. We see Philip as having been tested by Jesus when he was singled out and asked where they could obtain bread enough to feed the five thousand. (John 6:5-7)

Philip's response was to calculate the amount of money it would take, and to point out that the two hundred pennyworths they had was insufficient, even if they could find that amount of food. He failed the test by viewing the problem strictly from the earthly prospective and not recognizing that this was only possible, and could only be done by supernatural means which our Lord had the power to provide. Scripture never again speaks of Philip after Pentecost. Tradition tells us that Philip died a martyr at Heirapolis. However, there was another Philip called "the evangelist", about whom we read as being active after Pentecost. Absent careful study, one can easily conclude that they were one and the same person.

Even though I had previously understood the difference, I fell into this mistake when I first wrote this. However God blessed me by leading a dear brother in Christ to edit this paper and thereby set me straight, thus preventing this error from reaching your eyes.

6. Nathanael (The gift of God)

Nathanael was a native of Cana in Galilee, and the one whom Jesus called an Israelite in whom there was no guile. (John 1:45-49, 21:2). It's generally believed that Nathanael and Bartholomew were the same person. The name Nathanael occurs only in the Gospel of John, and in none of the other three Gospels. He is introduced in the beginning and at the close of Jesus' ministry, having been one of the seven to whom the risen Lord revealed Himself at the Sea of Galilee. Some credence to his double name is offered by the fact that while John never mentions Bartholomew, the other Gospel writers refer to Bartholomew, but never mention Nathanael. Philip brought him to Jesus. Some suggest that it may have been his marriage at Cana. There is no scriptural evidence to suggest this. The apostle list in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:10-19, and Luke 6:13-16 all refer to the apostle as Bartholomew. He is also named as being in the upper room when the resurrected Jesus appeared. That is all we hear of this Apostle under the name of Bartholomew. In John 1:49 at his very first meeting with Jesus he confessed that he realized that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and King of Israel. This of course, preceded Peter's pronouncement to the fact. However, it seems to have been an impulsive emotional reaction to the situation, rather than one of spiritual discernment, in the minds of some biblical scholars. This view seems to find its validity in Jesus' somewhat less than complementary and confirming response. (John 1:49)

7. Matthew (Gift of God)

Matthew is known as the man who left all to follow Christ. He too, had two names, Levi and Matthew. As Levi, which means, “joined,” he was joined to the world and its crooked extortionist money-worshipping ways as a tax collector for the hated Romans. Each collector was a one-man IRS with the full power and authority of Rome to enforce the collection of taxes. The word publican is from the Latin word publicanus and means collector of Roman taxes. This position was given out to minor officials willing to undertake this despised vocation among their countrymen. The benefit of the position and the cause of their being hated was that one could extort as much as the people would tolerate, and keep to themselves what was collected over and above what the Romans demanded. Thus they were justly viewed with great distain because of their general willingness and authority to legally indulge their covetous desires at the people’s expense.

This call by Jesus came as Levi was sitting in his place of taxes collection at Capernaum (Matthew 9:9, Luke 5:27). This town was on the great west trade route extending from Damascus toward the Far East and also to the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus as Man, probably already knew Levi, for he and His mother no doubt had passed by that location many times. It is interesting that in the Gospel according to Matthew, Levi is not mentioned. He is identified as Matthew from the beginning of his calling. In Mark he is called Levi when called (Mark 26:14), and after, in Mark 3:18, where all 12 are listed, he is simply called Matthew with no indication of how the name changed. Luke 5:27 tells us simply that Levi was called, and later in Luke 6:15, where all twelve are listed, he is again called Matthew, with never a mention of Levi. It seems to follow that most likely that it was Jesus who renamed Levi, Matthew. To celebrate his surrender to Christ, Matthew then provided a feast where many of Matthew’s fellow publicans and other sinners gathered together with Jesus (Matthew 9:10).

This feast was not only to celebrate his conversion but also to share with his fellow sinners, that Jesus did not despise, but was there to save them. No doubt many came who would never have gone to the Temple to hear Jesus, so this may

have been a very fruitful introduction to the faith for many otherwise lost souls. As we find Matthew called in verse 9 of the 9th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we realize that he was not called at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus first did many things prior to this, as recorded in the previous chapters. Perhaps, having heard of all these things before his calling, can explain why, when Jesus called, he immediately, without hesitation abandoned his profession and followed our Lord.

He had already seen the light and jumped at the opportunity to be more than a disciple! Matthew was not only an Apostle but also the writer of the first listed Gospel. All he took with him from his former life was his pen and ink, and what a blessing it is for us that he did! His is the only Gospel that records the Parables of the Kingdom of heaven, and also Jesus' description of the period just before and during the great end time Tribulation. (Matthew 24:15-26) Many equate Luke 21:20-24 with the end time prophecy, but it isn't. The Luke version speaks of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. I believe that Matthew's conversion provides us all with a valuable lesson. Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, "Many are called (invited), but few are chosen".

When Levi was called he dropped everything; he ended his worldly pursuits. He immediately became a follower, a disciple of Jesus, and thereby did forsake the earthly pursuits and pleasures that could in any way compromise his commitment to Jesus. All of the other Apostles did likewise in their due times and ways. That is how the "called", in this particular case become the "chosen". Contrary to a growing opinion within the "Christian" community, accepting Jesus in terms of simply believing that He is the Savior, is not enough. He must be our Lord as well. "Believing", as it should be biblically interpreted, must include knowing and responding to that knowing in the manner that Scripture makes abundantly clear in many related verses. This requires a permanently changed life and changed priorities. No one is of the chosen who hasn't made obedience to our Lord Jesus the foremost and permanent priority of life!

8. Thomas (Twin) also called Didymus

Sadly, Thomas has become a by-word for doubter, pessimist, and skeptic. He was not in the upper room when, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared there in the flesh. When he heard of the miracle, he couldn't believe it and claimed that he wouldn't unless he could actually see for himself and feel the wounds. I believe that to see Thomas in a diminished stature because of this doubt is being hypocritical. Of the other 10, which ones would have not had the same reaction? I dare say very few, if any. I certainly cannot say that I would have not doubted this truth of what they said about Jesus' appearance, based on what was known at that time. Of course, Jesus had told them several times about how He must die, and that He would return. They surely comprehended what He said, but who could have ever imagined that He would now be able to instantly manifest in the flesh, in a closed room, and then simply disappear again. To have believed that they would see Him again in the Spirit some day was understandable. However, seeing Him as solid flesh, wounds and all, and appearing from nowhere, in a fully secured room was beyond any understanding. We can sit smug in our knowledge of this truth because we have the Book, that says so, and those of the faith believe the Book. What did they have? Where would you have been in this matter had you had nothing more to work with than they had? I believe that this little episode is given to us to simply point out what a mature faith has to be like, as Jesus did in John 20:29. (See Christina Musings study called The Vindication of Thomas)

This reminds me of a similar event with a similar message. That is when the priests and soldiers came to get Jesus, and what followed. As they took Jesus away, every one of the Apostles fled in a panic. Only Peter built up enough courage to come back and follow the crowd to see what happened. When recognized, he lied three times, and even cursed in his denial of having been with Jesus. For this there was a stern punishment, for he temporarily lost his

Apostleship. Given the level of his faith and knowledge of who Jesus was, just dealing with his conscience was likely to have been extremely painful. Yet again, “there but for the grace of God go I.” The others failed to go even as far as Peter did. How many of them, being faced with what Peter faced when he denied having been one of those with Jesus, would have done otherwise? I dare say very few, if any.

Again it is God’s choosing a person and a situation through which to teach us how weak and fragile our faith may be, and how even the bravest and strongest, as was Peter, are willing to forsake and run, and even lie when things get uncomfortable. Overcoming these weaknesses comes only from growing and maturing in the faith through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is expressed by how the Apostles conducted their lives subsequent to Jesus’ resurrection, even unto martyr’s deaths. Some scholars suggest that Thomas’ name may have been Judas, but was renamed “the twin” to distinguish him from Judas the son of James and from Judas Iscariot. Thus, Thomas, or the twin may be an epithet rather than any official name.

Tradition credits him with the authorship of a Gospel that is included only in apocryphal literature. Thomas was brave, faithful and resolute as expressed in John 11:16 where he urged the whole group of the Apostles to follow Christ to Jerusalem even though it would likely be going to a certain death. Always, when he knew what he should do, all he wanted to know was how to get at it and do it. This we learn in John 14:5. Certainly Thomas was vindicated and received proper reward in heaven for his life, even though his reputation will remain as the “doubting” Thomas.

9. James (supplanter) The son of Alphaeus

This James was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). We don’t know much more about this Apostle James than his name.

However, it is possible that he was the brother of Matthew (Levi) in as much his father's name was the same as Matthew's. Tradition says he had been a tax collector. If true, it would strengthen that possibility. There seems to be a riddle, or the makings of one in this name Alphaeus. It appears that his father was also called Cleophas, also spelled and pronounced Clopas. It may be that this is the Clopas who walked with Jesus of the road toward Emmaus. (Luke 24:18) This could make him the husband of the "other" Mary, the sister of Jesus' mother Mary. (John 19:25). Thus this James could be another "cousin" of our Lord and so perhaps could Matthew. Chasing their names around the concordance and other sources seems to indicate that they are all interchangeable and each could therefore identify the same person. In some places this James is called "the smaller," suggesting that he was short in stature. Apparently he was also short in any achievements that the Holy Spirit deemed appropriate to record for us. Nevertheless, being among the chosen, it is evident that he accomplished all that Jesus intended. His fruitfulness is not recorded simply because it is unnecessary for our learning, which of course is the primary purpose of Scripture. James also had a brother Joses who was a believer (Mark 15:40).

10. Simon (hearing)

This Simon was also called Zelotes (Luke 6:15). This means zealous and indeed he was, in many ways. He belonged to a historical political party of that name whose members were zealous for the laws of God, for their land and for their independence, as well as for their hatred of the foreign domination. After Simon became a follower of Jesus he never lost his zeal, but then it was directed toward serving our Lord. May we all seek to be called zealous in this manner. (1Corinthians 14:12)

11. Lebbaeus or Thaddeus (Man of heart)

This Lebbaeus was also known as Judas, as well as Thaddeus, (John 14:22; Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). We know the least about this three-named Apostle. However, he seems to be a man who discovered that love is the secret of obedience, and that of blessedness. May we eat swallow and assimilate that same secret. The fact that Jesus chose him to be one of the most privileged of all men, and not for the sinister purpose of his namesake, is a wholly sufficient credential attesting to the fact that he must have served some divine purpose.

12. Judas (Praise of the Lord)

This Judas was from a town in Judea called Kerioth. Thus he was called Judas Iscariot, or man from Keroith.” He was the treasurer of the band of Apostles and the only one not from Galilee. Scripture doesn’t tell us when, where or directly why he was selected to be an apostle except “That the Scripture might be fulfilled” (Mark 26:56.) If it seems to be a mystery, as to why Jesus chose this man, one might consider it an even greater mystery as to why he chose you or me. However, the choice of Judas ceases to be a mystery when we consider the subsequent events and why Jesus came in the first place. We find that his crime was predicted in Psalms 109:5-8. In Acts 1:16 Peter speaks of it having been predicted by David, presumably in that Psalm. Of course, it was through God’s foreknowledge that this prediction was made.

Jesus came to the earth purposefully to suffer and to die on the cross for our sins. The foreknowledge of what Judas, by Satan’s implanted will, would choose to do, became what he was allowed to do by God’s permissive will. Judas’ action was programmed to fit into God’s plan, even before creation. God knew what he would do in order to facilitate the long predicted crucifixion of Jesus (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53). From the human perspective it was a heinous crime, a betrayal, seemingly difficult to understand, yet quite easily understood if we take into consideration the innate wickedness of the human heart and its “me first” philosophy. In Judas’ case it was not his own free will or volition, it was what

Satan caused him to do. Satan's use of Judas involved just this one act of betrayal. It appears that he was then released, cast aside by Satan, like He had no more use for him. We might consider this release as a unique form of exorcism, that is the removal of some evil internal demon possession. If so, then we should consider Judas in the same way we see that Jesus dealt with demon-possessed people after He had removed the demons. They were not doomed to damnation because of what they did while possessed. Jesus removed 7 demons from Mary Magdalene. Surely the rest of her life testifies to her salvation. Given this, may we not look at Judas similarly? I believe this his subsequent action speak favorably of him, except of course his suicide. This does not in itself void everything else.

So how can we expect that Judas, this purely carnal man, immediately and fully understand what he had done? Yet, after the removal of Satan's control he knew that he had shed innocent blood. He may had then recalled the sacredness of "innocent blood", and its significance in soul saving rituals throughout the ages. I suspect that, through that statement he was revealing his realization that Jesus was the predicted one. Of this be true, and I suspect that it is, an overwhelming guilt and grief must have come over him, emotions that he could not deal with. As they persisted, he concluded that only death could give him peace.

Anyone who has read but a few of my Christian Musings, or even skimmed through the titles must recognize my concern for the many that are called but not chosen to share heaven with Christ. Scripture is full of warnings about how in these end times a great many will fall victim to false or inadequate teaching through which they will fail to develop a saving faith. As I have pondered and delved into what Scripture has revealed about Judas, I believe that there is a very valuable message here that offers yet another perspective on the nature of this current tragic situation.

Here was a man who was among the twelve chosen by Jesus to be His Apostles, His special group of followers. As far as we are told, he shared equally the tasks, the beliefs

and the fruitfulness of the other eleven. There isn't even a hint of suspicion as to his inner character having been recognized by the others until they thought of him in retrospect after his betrayal. Even when Jesus revealed to them at the Last Supper, that one of them would betray Him, they did not suspect Judas. Even when Jesus then sent him off to do what he must do, they thought that as the keeper of their funds, he was merely being sent out to procure what was needed for the next day, "before the stores closed" for the Sabbath.(the first of two Sabbaths that occurred that week)

What does this tell us? I believe, for starters, that it reveals a "typical" man one who personified most clearly the truth of Jeremiah 17:9 "*...the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?*" Judas followed Jesus for 3½ years; it would seem as "faithfully" as did the other eleven Apostles. He must have performed and accomplished as well as the others did, all that Jesus had assigned them. Otherwise, there would have been at least a hint of suspicion of him. The fact that there wasn't, is expressed by the fact that he was given the position of special trust as their treasurer, the keeper of their meager funds that they used to sustain themselves. Only later, in retrospect, they suspected that he "dipped into the till" for personal gain. Was there any evidence of past theft or was it an unsupported supposition based only on how they would later come to assume the worst about him. I prefer to believe, based on the real evidence, that his was a true repentance and that his spirit is in heaven.