

The Apostles

Twelve plus



(Orthodox icon of the original twelve)

By:

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A Christian!

The Apostles – Twelve plus

The word **apostle** comes from the Greek word “*apostolos*,” which means “**sent forth**,” “**ambassador**”. The twelve apostles chosen by our Lord were to be ambassadors sent forth into the world. They were especially chosen and commissioned by Christ thusly,

*“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message; The kingdom of heaven has come near. **Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.** Freely you have received, freely give.’” (Matthew 10:5-8)*

Later we discover that our Lord commissioned the apostles to go into **all of the world**,

*“Then Jesus came to them [the apostles] and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

*“He said to them, ‘**Go into all the world** and preach the gospel to all creation.’” (Mark 16:15)*

*“ . . . repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **You are witnesses** of these things.” (Luke 24:47-48)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)*

The above passages are a record of our Lord’s parting words to his disciples.

When Saul met the Lord on his way to imprison followers of Jesus **his life was changed**. He came into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and following intensive equipping and training by the Spirit of God he commenced to share the Gospel. We read his words of challenge,

*“**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentiles.**” (Romans 1:16)*

Paul was added to the original band of apostles after *Matthias* replaced *Judas*. It was unto the apostle Paul that “**the church**,” which had been a **mystery**, was revealed. He became **the revealer** of this truth. Prior to Paul’s conversion the followers of Jesus had been largely a rag-tag group of Messianic Jews who were labeled “**Nazarenes**” because they were followers of “**the Nazarene**.” **See** – Matthew 2:23 and Acts 24:5. As the base of operations for the believers **moved from Jerusalem to Antioch** they became known as “**Christians**.” **See** – Acts 11:26. The make up of the rapidly growing band of disciples changed from Messianic Jews to **include** Gentiles who had come into believing and accepting this One whom was “the Christ” [Messiah]. **See** – Acts 26:28. Throughout **the Book of Acts** we follow this transition from a mainly small Jewish sect to the worldwide faith that Christianity is today.

It is largely due to the apostle Paul that the early Gentile disciples no longer had to become Jews. **See** – **Acts chapter 15**. The Gentile believers were no longer compelled to observe the various Jewish practices such as what they ate, circumcision, observing the seventh-day Sabbath, etc. In fact the new Gentile disciples met largely on the first day of each week honoring Christ’s resurrection. They met nearly always in homes as there were no separate church structures. In their meetings these early believers **devoted themselves** to study, praising God, encouraging one another, challenging each other on in the faith, breaking bread (eating together remembering the Lord in the bread and wine), prayed together, etc. **See** – Hebrews 10:23-25; 13:15-16; Acts 2:42; 4:31; 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2.

Fact and Fiction?

The apostles took our Lord at his word and **tradition says** that they went throughout the then known world sharing the Good News of the Gospel: that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose from the grave. They also looked for his return in Blessed Hope. **See – 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Tit. 2:13.**

There are a few things that we do know about the first apostles, however most of what we are told is either **hearsay or tradition** about each one. Here is a very brief look at the twelve:

Andrew had been a fisherman and was a brother of Simon Peter. We do know that Andrew was the one who introduced his brothers to the Messiah (John 1:35-43). Tradition says that he preached the Gospel in Macedonia, Greece, Scythia, Asia Minor [modern day Turkey], Russia and other countries in that locale. It is said that he was crucified in Greece in AD 60.

Bartholomew is probably the one named Nathanael in John 1:45, 47. It is claimed that he preached the Gospel in a number of areas including India and Armenia. It is said that he was beaten, then crucified and beheaded in Albanopolis, Armenia.

James the Son of Alphaeus – Little is known about this James. Some believe that he was the brother of Levi or Matthew while others believe that he is that “James the less” whose mother Mary was present at Jesus’ death (Mark 15:40). Tradition says that he preached in Persia (modern day Iran) and that he was beaten and stoned to death at age 94 or that he was crucified in Persia.

James the Son of Zebedee was the brother of John (Matthew 4:21-22; Mark 1:19-20). He may have been the son of Salome who was Mary’s (Jesus’ mother) sister. So he and Jesus would have been cousins (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). This may have been the James spoken of in the Bible as the one together with Peter and John who was very close to our Lord (Mark 5:37; 9:2-9; Matthew 17:1-9; Luke 9:28-36; Mark 14:32-42 and Matthew 26:36-46). Many believe that he was the first apostle to have been martyred. He is also said to have ministered in Spain.

John – This was the disciple who was especially close to Jesus (John 13:23). He was the brother of James and the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19-20). He and James were also fishing partners with Peter and Andrew (Luke 5:10). Jesus called him and his brother James “*the sons of thunder*” (Mark 3:17). Once when John got *ticked-off* because one of the villages in Samaria would not receive Jesus into its midst it was John with James who wanted to call “*fire down from heaven to destroy them.*” But our Lord rebuked them for this threat. The account of this incident is found in Luke 9:51-56.

John was a close peer with Peter. They both, with James, witnessed our Lord’s transfiguration, the raising from the dead of Jairus’ daughter and his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus was arrested it was John and Peter who followed our Lord to the palace of the high priest. The Bible reveals that John was the only apostle standing at the foot of the cross when our Lord was being crucified. It was unto him that Jesus committed his mother to his care (John 19:26-27).

Mary Magdalene told John and Peter that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb where the body of Jesus had been placed and that he was not in the tomb. Both Peter and he ran to the tomb to see it for themselves.

The Book of Acts reveals that he and Peter traveled together preaching and healing the sick. They were both put in jail for this activity. John along with Peter and James are spoken of as “*pillars*” and “*gave me [Paul] and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.*” (Galatians 2:9-10).

In addition to writing the Gospel it was John who also wrote **three letters** as well as the **Book of Revelation**.

Tradition says that John preached and ministered in what is today Palestine and Asia Minor. He was eventually released from his being captive on the Island of Patmos and probably lived out his life to the ripe old age of 100 in Ephesus.

Judas (Not Iscariot) – Very little is known about this Judas other than he is mentioned in John 14:22; Matthew 10:3 and Luke 6:16. It is claimed that he preached in Mesopotamia and Persia. One tradition says that magicians killed him with clubs and stones in Persia. Another tradition says that he was crucified in Edessa, Turkey in 72 AD.

Matthew is also known as Levi in the Gospels (Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27-29). It is not known whether his original name of Levi indicated that he belonged to the priestly tribe of Levi or was simply a popular name of the day. We do know that he was a publican working for the Roman government, collecting taxes or tolls along the road side that people traveled upon. As such he was despised along with the tax collectors of that day. They were viewed as traitors to their own people collecting funds for the despised Roman occupiers. The practice of the tax collectors was to also pocket funds for themselves.

Jesus called him to leave his tax table and to follow him. This he did. He was renamed Matthew. **See** – Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32. The “ultra-religious” scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus the following question:

“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:11b-13).

It is claimed that Matthew preached in Egypt and Ethiopia. He was said to have been speared to death in Ethiopia. The Coptic churches claim him as their founder.

Philip – the account of his coming to Christ is recorded in John 1:43-46. Jesus tested Philip’s faith in John 6:1-13 and Matthew 14:13-21. During the Last Supper Philip asked a question that many have asked through the ages. This question to Jesus is recorded in John 14:8-12. *What is your response to this?*

Tradition says that this Philip took the Gospel to France, southern Russia and Asia Minor and was martyred in Hierapolis, Turkey.

Simon Peter is the one apostle who needs no introduction. In some respects he was the “loud” mouth of the group sometimes putting his foot into his mouth. He testified thusly: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:15).* It was upon this declaration of faith, not Peter himself, that the Church is being built. Peter with James and John were the inner circle of disciples who worked especially close with Jesus.

Peter was a simple, illiterate (Acts 4:13) Galilean fisherman. He worked together with his brother, Andrew. He was married (Mark 1:29-31). He was evidently short-tempered and somewhat impetuous. He wrote two letters that we have in the New Testament. Tradition says that he was martyred in Rome under the Roman emperor Nero. It is claimed that Peter was crucified head downwards at his request, considering himself to be unworthy to be crucified the same way that Christ was. *Eusebius*, an ancient church historian, wrote that Peter preached the Gospel in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia.

Simon Zelotes had been a member of the fanatic sect of Zealots who opposed the Roman occupation of the land. The members of this sect were also staunch supporters of Jewish law. He is mentioned in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13. He is also mentioned in Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18.

Tradition says that he preached in Egypt, Mauritania in Africa, Libya and in Britain where he was crucified in 74 AD.

Thomas also called Didymus (John 11:16; 20:24) in Greek and means “twin.” Thomas often gets a “bad rap” from Christians being continually referred to as *“the doubting Thomas.”* He was a devoted follower of the Lord. It is he who is the one whom Jesus declared **the Way of salvation.** **See** – **John 14:1-7.** There is a large sect in India that claims Thomas as their founder. He is said to have preached the Gospel in India as well as to Parthians, Medes, Persians and other peoples. It is also said that he was martyred with a spear in India and is buried in Mylapore near Madras.

Matthias was chosen to fill the vacant spot left by Judas when he betrayed our Lord. It is claimed that he was stoned to death and then beheaded in Jerusalem.

THE PLUS

The New Testament indicates that there were other people designated as apostles beyond the original company one of which was a **woman** named **Junia**. Whether or not there are apostles today is open to debate. At this point may I warn believers to be very careful of those individuals who make the claim of being modern-day apostles. It is not for me to say just who is and who is not indeed an apostle. However, I am leery of the many **self-proclaimed** "apostles" and "prophets" appearing on the church scene in our day. Just be careful! **See – 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 and Revelation 2:2.**

Some have wondered as to how the Gospel was spread so rapidly throughout the Roman Empire when the original apostles had limited time. Most of them died well before the close of the first century yet the Gospel rapidly spread in spite of the numerous waves of persecution that took place. Among the reasons for its spread:

1. The early believers took the "Great Commission" given by Jesus seriously. They did not accept the unbiblical concept that it is only the "preachers" and so-called "professional clergy" who can share the Gospel.
2. They understood that to not share the Gospel causes others to be held in the clutches of spiritual darkness – 2 Corinthians 4:3.
3. They took the biblical concept of mutual ministry to heart. **See – Acts 8:1, 4.**

How about us? Are we taking the commission (command) of our Lord seriously by sharing the Good News of the Gospel with those about us? How about you?

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