

THE TWELVE APOSTLES: THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

I. Introduction

- A. They are the foundation of the Church. Eph. 2:19,20.
- B. According to Acts 1: 21ff., there seems to have been three qualifications to be one of The Twelve:
 - 1. To have been with Jesus during his whole time of ministry.
 - 2. To have been baptized by John.
 - 3. A witness of the resurrection.
- C. They were chosen only after Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. Lk. 6:12,13.
- D. They spent three years in training with Jesus.
- E. Four lists of The Twelve are given in the NT. They are found in Matt. 10:2ff., Mark 3:16ff., Luke 6:14ff., and Acts 1:13ff. The Twelve are arranged in three groups of 4 each.

II. The Twelve

- A. **Peter:** He is the most prominent of the 12. He is always listed first in the lists. We also know more about Peter than the other 12. His Aramaic name was Simeon (Acts 15:14 and in IIPet. 1:1 this is what he calls himself. Simon is the gentile form). Jesus later gave him the name *Peter* (the Greek form) or *Cephas* (the Aramaic) meaning *Rock*. Peter was brought to Christ by his brother, Andrew, who also became one of the 12. His father was John (Jn. 1:42.) The family was in the fish business. Tradition says they marketed sun-dried fish in Jerusalem. Peter was from Bethsaida, but also lived in Capernaum. He was married and took his wife with him on missionary journeys (ICor. 9:5). He wrote the two Epistles which bare his name, and may have had much input into Mark's gospel, as he was a close friend to John Mark. (Note: If his name means *Rock* and his father's name was *John* then in English, Peter's full name was *Rock Johnson!!*).

Ministry: He was the spokesman for the 12, and one of the inner circle. Peter is the first Apostle to associate with the gentile mission, though he was largely an apostle to his own people. He was imprisoned for his faith, and upon his release he traveled outside of Palestine. Where exactly is difficult to determine.

According to the epistle of I Clement, Peter died in Rome with Paul during the Neronian persecution. A 2nd Century source says he was crucified upside down.

- B. **Andrew**: His name is Greek. We are unaware of any Hebrew name. He is Peter's brother, and by trade a fisherman from Galilee. From Mark (2:29), we learn that he lived with Peter. According to John's account, he was the first to follow Jesus (Jn. 1:35ff.).

Ministry: With only one or two exceptions, every time Andrew is mentioned in Scripture he is bringing someone to Jesus. On one occasion he brought some Greeks to Jesus (Jn. 12) (I must not fail to mention that there is a strong tradition that these were Armenians who were emissaries of their King (Abgar) who was ill and wished to be healed by Jesus. It was not uncommon to call gentiles *greeks*. According to tradition he preached to the Scythians, who inhabited the land north of the Black Sea. To the ancients, the Scythians were the most barbarous people on the face of the earth! That land today is modern Russia. Needless to say, Andrew is the patron saint of the Russian Orthodox Church. Tradition also says Andrew preached in Achaia where he was arrested and crucified on an x-shaped cross.

- C. **James**: He is possibly the older brother of John since in three of the lists he is mentioned first. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome. His Hebrew name is Jacob (I'm not sure where the English *James* comes from). He was by trade a fisherman from Galilee, and from an apparently prosperous family since they had servants (Mk. 1:19,20). There is a compelling tradition that Zebedee had a branch office in Jerusalem as he supplied, among others, the high priest and his family with fish. As one of The Twelve, James was one of the "inner circle" along with his brother John and Peter. Jesus gave he and his brother the nickname *Boanerges* (Mk. 3:17) which means in Aramaic *Sons of Thunder*. This may have to do with them being high-spirited Galileans. One occasion they requested to be able call fire down on the Samaritans who refused hospitality to Jesus and his disciples (Lk. 9:51-56). According to Luke, James and John were business partners with Peter (Lk. 5:10). *It is also a possibility that Jesus was related (first cousins) to James and John through his mother Mary.* At the cross John mentions that Mary's sister was with her. The other gospels identify her as Salome. Salome may have been the first "Yuppie" as she appeals to Jesus that her sons have a prominent place when he inaugurates His kingdom (Matt.

20:20ff.)! She may have made this appeal based on their blood-relationship and the fact that she provided financial support (Mk.15:41).

Ministry: James is the first of The Twelve to be martyred (about A.D.44). Luke says he was killed by Herod's sword (Acts 12:2). Jesus apparently alluded to his future martyrdom (Mk.10:38).

- D. **John:** He was the *Son of Thunder* who became known as the *Apostle of love*. It was to this disciple that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother (Jn.19:26,27). He was the first disciple to visit the tomb on Easter morning. According to Eusebius, John was of the priestly family. This could possibly identify John with the unknown disciple accompanying Peter during the trials who knew the high priest (Jn. 18:15). Anyone who reads John's Apocalypse must conclude that he had more than the usual knowledge of temple ritual. For other information about John's family, see above.

Ministry: In Acts, he is closely associated with Peter, and for some time was a leader in the church in Jerusalem. Later, he and Peter laid hands on the Samaritans (whom he wanted to destroy as a disciple!). When John left Jerusalem is unknown, but he probably did not leave until Mary's death. There are many legends and traditions about John. Most of these put him in Asia Minor ministering at Ephesus where he died of old age. He wrote the sublime gospel which bears his name as well as 3 epistles. He wrote the book of Revelation while banished to the Isle of Patmos. There is more and more evidence he wrote all five of these books before A.D. 70!

- E. **Philip:** His name is Greek and means *lover of horses*. He was from Bethsaida of Galilee, the village of Peter and Andrew. Since the primary industry of this village was fishing it is likely Philip was also a fisherman. He is reputed to be of the tribe of Zebulun.

Ministry: He is only mentioned in John's gospel. He was the one who wondered how the 5000 could be fed, whether or not to bring the Greeks to Jesus, and what was the nature of the Father (*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*) It was also Philip who brought Nathanael to Jesus. The earliest tradition has him preaching the gospel and being martyred in Hieropolis of Phrygia. Tradition has it that he had four daughters who also ministered with him. He is not to be confused with the deacon Philip in the book of Acts.

- F. **Bartholomew:** Bartholomew means *son of Tolmai*. It is therefore, not his name. Most scholars believe Nathanael is to be identified as Bartholomew. Jerome

believes he was of royal lineage descended from the line of David. His evidence is the name which is a family name in David's line. If he is Nathanael, he was from Cana of Galilee. When he was told that Jesus was from Nazareth he replied: “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*”

Ministry: Except for his appearance in the lists, he is never mentioned in the gospels or Acts. If he is to be identified as Nathanael, he was brought to Jesus by Philip (Jn. 1:45-51). He is said to have preached in India, Armenia, and with Philip, preached in Phrygia. He is said to have been martyred in Albana in modern Azerbaijan.

- G. **Thomas**: His name is Aramaic meaning *twin*. John uses the Greek rendering *Didymus* which means the same thing. Because of his name it is assumed that he had a twin brother or sister. For all of time at least, he is known as *Doubting Thomas* because of the incident in the upper room.

Ministry: Tradition says he preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Carmanians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, Magians, and finally in India where he died. I went to seminary with a fellow from the church Martoma which claimed Thomas as its founder. The tradition is very old. We know that there were Christians in India in the 4th century.

- H. **Matthew**: Luke gives his name as *Levi*. The name Matthew (Matthias) means *gift of God* and may be the name given him by the Lord as he did other disciples. He was the son of Alphaeus. The name Levi could mean he was of the tribe of Levi. By profession he worked for the Romans as a tax-collector. This of course means he was hated by the people. His home was Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee.

Ministry: Matthew's first act after conversion was to invite Jesus to a feast at his house with his only friends, other tax-collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:10). The traditions about Matthew seem fanciful. It does seem that he ministered somewhere in Asia, i.e. Persia. He is author of the first Gospel. Jerome (4th and 5th Cent.) says it was originally written in Aramaic then translated into Greek. He says the Aramaic version still existed in his day.

- I. **James**: He is known as the Son of Alphaeus and James, the Less (Mk. 15:40). He may have been called *the Less* (Grk. *mikros*) because he was small, or because he was young. He is the Apostle we know the least about. If James the son of Alphaeus is to be identified with James the Less from the Mark passage, we then know his mother was Mary and that he had a brother named Josés

(Joseph). If his father, Alphaeus, was the same as the man who is the father of Levi (Matthew) then it is possible that James and Matthew are brothers. He too, was from Capernaum and a Galilean. Barclay presents an interesting thesis about James. Since the last four Apostles are lumped together they must have had something in common. He believes they were all members of the Zealot Party, a group wanting to establish autonomy from Rome. This presents an interesting scenario. Here we have Matthew, a tax-collector, working for the Romans and his brother, James, a Zealot! The only way this could happen is by the reconciliation provided by the Lord!

Ministry: The best tradition has it that he preached in Syria.

- J. **Thaddeus**: He is called *Thaddeus* by Matthew and Mark. Luke calls him *Judas*, son of James. In late manuscripts, (see KJV) in Matthew's account, he is called *Lebbaeus, who is surnamed Thaddeus*. We are not sure of the identity of the James said to be his father. Some early historians identify Thaddeus as the son of James the elder, the son of Zebedee. So, they are saying there was a father-son combination among The Twelve. This however, is only conjecture. The only time he is mentioned is at the Last Supper when he asks Jesus a question. He is referred to as *Judas, not Iscariot*. One latin manuscript calls him a Zealot. Eusebius says he was one of the seventy (Lk.10:1ff., due to a textual problem it is unclear whether or not the number is 70 or 72.).

Ministry: According to legend he preached in Northern Mesopotamia and Armenia, where he was finally killed with arrows at the foot of Mt. Ararat! Seriously!

- K. **Simon**: He is called *Simon the Zealot* and *Simon the Cananean*. *Cananean* is the Aramaic rendering of *Zealot*. From Josephus and archaeology we now know of a political party known as the Zealots. It was this radical group that ultimately caused the invasion of the Roman armies in A.D. 70. He may have joined Jesus' group because he saw Jesus as a possible political leader who would lead in a revolt against Rome. It is significant to note that Simon was still with The Twelve after the resurrection.

Ministry: Not much is known. He was supposed to have gone to Egypt, Africa and Britain.

- L. **Judas**: *The Betrayer, The Traitor, The Son of Perdition*. Jesus said of him that “*it would have been better if he had never been born.*” He may have been named for a well-known Jewish hero at that time--Judas Maccabeus. He was

probably from the tribe of Judah and the only disciple from Judea. His father was Simon from the village of Kerioth. *One of the most important things to note about Judas is that no one ever suspected that he was a phony.* In fact, they trusted him so much he was the treasurer of the Twelve. At the last Passover, he had the position of honor at the *table*.

- M. **Matthias:** He was chosen to take the place of Judas by the OT method of drawing lots. Earlier tradition says he was one of the 70 (72).

Ministry: One tradition has him ministering to cannibals. Another says he was martyred in Judea.

Sources:

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