



Who Are The Apostles?

Week #8: The Final Three: James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Judas not Iscariot(Jude)

Apostle:

- Those who had witnessed the resurrected Christ.
- Those who were commissioned by Him to spread the gospel into the world.
- Those who had the Holy Spirit work miraculous power through them.

Apostles, symbols of

 In Christian art, symbols assigned to each of the apostles:

- **Andrew:** X-shaped cross because was crucified on one;
- **Bartholomew:** knife because he was flayed alive with one;
- **James the Greater:** scallop shell, pilgrim staff, or a gourd bottle because he is the patron saint of pilgrims;
- **James the Less:** fuller's pole because he was killed with one;
- **John:** cup with a winged serpent because he drank poison after making a sign of the cross;
- Judas Iscariot: bag because he kept money in it;
- **Jude:** club because he was martyred with it;
- **Matthew:** hatchet or halberd because he was killed with it;
- Matthias: battleaxe because he was beheaded with it;
- Paul: sword because he was beheaded with one;
- Peter: bunch of keys because Christ gave him the keys of the kingdom;
- **Simon:** a saw because he was sawn to death;
- **Phillip:** long staff surmounted with a cross because he suffered death by being suspended by the neck from a pillar;
- **Thomas:** lance with which he was pierced through at Mylapore, India.¹

Andrew bar-Jonas

Peter (Simon bar-Jonas)

James bar-Zebedee (“James the Greater”)

John bar-Zebedee (“the Beloved Disciple”)

Philip

Nathanael or **Bartholomew**

Thomas

Matthew or **Levi** (Son of Alphaeus. James the Less brother?)

James bar-Alphaeus (James the Less)

Thaddaeus or **Lebbaeus** or **Judas** bar-James (Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

The order of the list is significant. All the lists of the twelve break them into three groups of four (John does not list them, but tells of their calling in the same groupings). This is clearly consistent with their status within the group.

PATRONAGE:

- A patron was a person who, by their wealth and/or political power, was in a position to bestow favors, protection, and an umbrella of benevolence upon their clients.
- A client was one who received this benevolence and in return owed an obligation of service and loyalty to the patron.

¹ Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson's new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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Matthew 10:2-4

² The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and **Bartholomew**; **Thomas** and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:16-19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,^[a] ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 6:13-16

¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Acts 1:13-14

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and **Thomas**, **Bartholomew** and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

“See, we have left all and followed You” (Luke 18:28)

- Is this the story of Tier 3?

James bar-Alphaeus (James the Less)

Thaddaeus or **Lebbaeus** or **Judas** bar-James (Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

Who They Are:

#1: They are part of the Twelve

Luke 9:1-6 (Mk 6 & Mt 10)

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve Apostles

⁹ And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³ And he said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics.^[a] ⁴ And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵ And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.

Who They Are:

#2: They are part of the Foundation on which we stand

Ephesians 2:11-22

One in Christ

¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both



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*one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by^[e] the Spirit.*

Who They Are:

#3: They are the Dedicated men who STAYED with Jesus

They could have left when the rest of the disciples did in **John 6:41-71**

⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread^[c] the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus^[d] said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

The Words of Eternal Life

⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) ⁶⁵ And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.



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#1 of Tier 3 – JAMES, SON OF ALPHEAUS: James the Less

- The ninth name in Luke’s list of the apostles (Luke 6:14–16)
- The *only* thing Scripture tells us about this man is his name.
- Son of Alphaeus
- Brother of Matthew (Levi)? (**Mark 2:14**)
- Mother was one of the Mary’s, a devoted follower of Jesus.

Mark 15:40

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

James the Less and his brother Joseph were apparently well known to the readers of Mark’s Gospel; otherwise Mark would not have mentioned them by name or would have described them in more detail.²

Mark 16:1

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

- Even his name is so common he does not stand out: James the Less
 - The Greek word for “Less” is *mikros*. It literally means “little.” Its primary meaning is “small in stature,” so it could refer to his physical features. Perhaps he was a short or small-framed man.
 - The word can also speak of someone who is young in age. He might have been younger than James the son of Zebedee, so that this title would distinguish him as the younger of the two. In fact, even if this is not what his nickname mainly referred to, it is probably true that he was younger than the other James; otherwise he would more likely have been known as “James the Elder.”
 - **But the name most likely refers to his influence.** As we have already seen, James the son of Zebedee was a man of prominence. His family was known to the high priest (John 18:15–16). He was part of the Lord’s most intimate inner circle. He was the better-known of the two Jameses. Therefore, James the son of Alphaeus was known as “James the Less.” *Mikros*. “**Little James.**”

It may well be that all these things were true of James, so that he was a small, young, quiet person who stayed mostly in the background. That would all be consistent with the low profile he had among the Twelve. **We might say his distinguishing mark was his obscurity.** That in itself is a significant fact. Apparently he sought no recognition. He displayed no great leadership. He asked no critical questions. He demonstrated no unusual insight. Only his name remains, while his life and his labors are immersed in obscurity.

End Of Life:

- Nothing more is known about him, but tradition says that he was martyred by being beaten to death with a fuller’s club.³
 - **James the Less:** fuller’s pole because he was killed with one;

² Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 186–187). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

³ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 186–187). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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#2 of Tier 3 – SIMON THE ZEALOT

- **Common** Greek name, a transliteration of the Hebrew name Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן, *shim'on*).
- The next name given in **Luke 6:15** is “Simon called the Zealot.”
- In Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18, he is called “Simon the Cananite.” That is not a reference to the land of Canaan or the village of Cana. It comes from the Hebrew root *qanna*, which means “to be zealous.”
- The Scripture does not indicate when Simon Zelotes was invited to join the apostles. Tradition says that Jesus called him at the same time that He called Andrew and Peter, James and John, Judas Iscariot and Thaddeus (cf. Matt. 4:18–22).
- Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the Zealots.
- The fact that he bore the title all his life may also suggest that he had a fiery, zealous temperament.
- But that term in Jesus’ day signified a **well-known and widely feared outlaw political sect**, and Simon had apparently been a member of that sect.

The historian Josephus described four basic parties among the Jews of that time:

The Pharisees

- were fastidious about the Law; they were the religious fundamentalists of their time.

The Sadducees

- were religious liberals; they denied the supernatural. They were also rich, aristocratic, and powerful. They were in charge of the temple.

The Essenes

- are not mentioned in Scripture at all, but both Josephus and Philo describe them as ascetics and celibates who lived in the desert and devoted their lives to the study of the Law.

The fourth group, the Zealots

- were more politically minded than any group besides the Herodians.
- The Zealots hated the Romans, and their goal was to overthrow the Roman occupation.
- They advanced their agenda primarily through terrorism and surreptitious acts of violence.
- The Zealots were extremists in every sense.
- Like the Pharisees, they interpreted the law literally.
- Unlike the Pharisees (who were willing to compromise for political reasons), the Zealots were militant, violent outlaws. They believed only God Himself had the right to rule over the Jews. **And therefore they believed they were doing God’s work by assassinating Roman soldiers, political leaders, and anyone else who opposed them.**
- The Zealots were hoping for a Messiah who would lead them in overthrowing the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel with its Solomonic glory.

Simon was one of them.

- Matthew and Mark list the Twelve, they list Simon just before Judas Iscariot.
- **When Jesus sent the disciples out two by two in Mark 6:7, it is likely that Simon and Judas Iscariot were a team.**



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- They probably both originally followed Christ for similar political reasons. But somewhere along the line, Simon became a genuine believer and was transformed. Judas Iscariot never really believed.
- When Jesus did not overthrow Rome, but instead talked of dying, some might have expected Simon to be the betrayer—a man of such deep passion, zeal, and political conviction that he would align himself with terrorists. **But that was before He met Jesus.**
- Simon also had to associate with Matthew, who was at the opposite end of the political spectrum, collecting taxes for the Roman government. At one point in his life, Simon would probably have gladly killed Matthew. In the end, they became spiritual brethren, working side by side for the same cause—the spread of the gospel—and worshiping the same Lord.

End Of Life:

Several early sources say that after the destruction of Jerusalem, Simon took the gospel north and preached in the British Isles.

- **Simon the Zealot in Noncanonical Sources**

In the noncanonical *Passion of Simon and Jude*, Simon the Zealot is recorded as traveling and preaching as far as Egypt, Persia, and various parts of the Near East and is martyred in Persia (James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 528–29).

- The Coptic church of Egypt says that he preached in Egypt, Africa, Great Britain, and Persia; other early sources agree that he ministered in the British Isles ~~but this is doubtful.~~ Nicephorus of Constantinople wrote: “Simeon born in Cana of Galilee who ... was surnamed Zelotes, having received the Holy Ghost from above, traveled through Egypt and Africa, then Mauretania and Libya, preaching the Gospel. And the same doctrine he taught to the Occidental Sea and the Isles called Britanniae.”
- Perhaps due to this work, in some church traditions Simon became closely identified with the Apostle Jude (who is his traveling companion in the work) and thus the two share the same veneration day in these same church traditions, October 28 (Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 222).
- **Simon:** a saw because he was sawn to death

William Steuart McBirnie suggests that the name Thaddeus was a diminutive form of *Theudas*, which comes from the Aramaic noun *tad*, meaning “breast.” Thus, Thaddeus may have been a nickname that literally meant “one close to the breast” or “one beloved.” McBirnie believes that the name Lebbeus may be derived from the Hebrew noun *leb*, which means “heart.”



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#3 of Tier 3 JUDAS, bar JAMES [Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus or Judas bar-James (Jude)]

- The last name on the list of faithful disciples is “Judas, the son of James.”
- *Judas* means “Jehovah leads.”
- When the apostle John mentions him, he calls him “Judas (not Iscariot)” (John 14:22). Judas Iscariot, Judas the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), and “Judas, not Iscariot.” Matthew refers to this man as Lebbaeus, “whose surname was Thaddeus” (Matt. 10:3). Mark refers to him simply as Thaddeus (Mark 3:18). Luke refers to him as “Judas the son of James” (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).
- We are not sure who Thaddeus’s father was. Some think he was James, the brother of Jesus—making Judas a nephew of Jesus. But this is not likely, for early church historians report that this James never married. Others think that his father was the apostle James, son of Zebedee. We cannot be certain.⁴
- Judas the son of James actually had three names.
 - (Jerome referred to him as “Trinomious”—the man with three names.)
 - In Matthew 10:3, he is called “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.”
 - *Judas* was probably the name given him at birth. *Lebbaeus* and *Thaddaeus* were essentially nicknames. *Thaddaeus* means “breast child”—evoking the idea of a nursing baby. It almost has a derisive sound, like “mamma’s boy.”
 - Perhaps he was the youngest in his family, and therefore the baby among several siblings—specially cherished by his mother. His other name, *Lebbaeus*, is similar. It is from a Hebrew root that refers to the heart—**literally, “heart child.”**
 - Both names suggest he had a tender, childlike heart.

John 14:15-31

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² **Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”** ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

⁴ Packer, J. I., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., Jr. (1997). *Nelson’s illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (pp. 538–539). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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- His question is full of gentleness and meekness and devoid of any sort of pride. He couldn't believe that Jesus would manifest Himself to this rag-tag group of eleven, and not to the whole world.
- Jesus gave him a marvelous tender answer: 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him' " (John 14:23). Christ would manifest Himself to anyone who loves Him.
- Was Jude still thinking in the political and material realm. "How come You haven't taken over the world yet? Why don't You just manifest Yourself to the world?"

End Of Life:

- Most of the early tradition regarding Lebbaeus Thaddaeus suggests that a few years after Pentecost, he took the gospel north, to Edessa, a royal city in Mesopotamia, in the region of Turkey today.
- There are numerous ancient accounts of how he healed the king of Edessa, a man named Abgar. In the fourth century, Eusebius the historian said the archives at Edessa (now destroyed) contained full records of Thaddaeus's visit and the healing of Abgar. According to this story, Judas went to Abgar after Jesus' ascension to heaven, and he remained to preach in several cities of Mesopotamia.
- The traditional apostolic symbol of Judas Lebbaeus Thaddaeus is a club, because tradition says he was clubbed to death for his faith. [murdered by magicians in the city of Suanir in Persia. It is said that they killed him with clubs and stones.]⁵
 - **Jude:** club because he was martyred with it;

Small Group Ask: What does it take to Embrace Obscurity?

Revelation 21:14

¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Matthew 19:27-29 (Luke 22:30)

²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" ²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Mark 10:29-31

²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

⁵ Packer, J. I., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., Jr. (1997). *Nelson's illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (pp. 538–539). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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NoTeS:

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JAMES—THE LESS; SIMON—THE ZEALOT; AND JUDAS (NOT ISCARIOT)—THE APOSTLE WITH THREE NAMES
James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James ...

—LUKE 6:15–16

The final group of four apostles is the least known to us, except for Judas Iscariot, who made himself notorious by selling Christ to be crucified. This group seems to have been less intimate with Christ than the other eight disciples. They are virtually silent in the Gospel narratives. Little is known about any of them, except the fact that they were appointed to be apostles. We'll deal with three of them in this chapter, and save Judas Iscariot, the traitor, for the final chapter.

It must be borne in mind that the apostles were men who gave up everything to follow Christ. Peter spoke for them all when he said, "See, we have left all and followed You" (Luke 18:28). They had left houses, jobs, lands, family, and friends to follow Christ. Their sacrifice was heroic. With the exception of Judas Iscariot, they all became valiant and intrepid witnesses.

We don't actually see much of their heroism in the Gospel records, because the Gospel writers—two of them apostles (Matthew and John) and the other two (Mark and Luke) close friends of apostles—honestly portrayed their weaknesses as well as their strengths. The apostles are not presented to us as mythic figures, but as real people. They are not depicted as prominent celebrities, but as ordinary men. That is why, as far as the Gospel accounts are concerned, the apostles give color and life to the descriptions of Jesus' life, but they are rarely in the foreground. They are never major role players.

When they do come to the foreground, it is often to manifest doubt, disbelief, or confusion. Sometimes we see them thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Sometimes they speak when they ought to remain silent and seem clueless about things they ought to have understood. Sometimes they exhibit more confidence in their own abilities and their own strengths than they should. So their shortcomings and weaknesses show up more often than their strengths. In that sense, the raw honesty of the Gospel accounts is amazing.

Meanwhile, there are very few manifestations of any great acts by the apostles. We are told that they were empowered to heal, raise the dead, and cast out demons, but even that is narrated in such a way as to highlight the apostles' imperfections (cf. Mark 9:14–29). The one place in all the Gospels where a specific apostle does something truly extraordinary is when Peter began to walk on water—but he immediately found himself sinking.

The Gospel records simply do not portray these men as heroes. Their heroism played out after Jesus went back to heaven, sent the Holy Spirit, and empowered them. Suddenly we begin to see them acting differently. They are strong and courageous. They perform great miracles. They preach with a newfound boldness. But even then, the biblical record is sparse. Primarily, all we see are Peter, John, and later the apostle Paul (who was added to their number as "one born out of due time"—1 Corinthians 15:8). The rest of them went on into obscurity.

The legacy of their true greatness is the church, a living, breathing organism which they helped found and of which they became the very foundation stones ("Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"—Ephesians 2:20). The church, now some two thousand years old, exists today because these men launched the expansion of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. And their heroism will be rewarded and commemorated throughout eternity in the New Jerusalem, where their names will be permanently etched into the foundation of that city.

The Gospels are the record of how Jesus trained them. Scripture deliberately records more about Jesus and His teaching than it does about the lives of these men. It all serves to remind us that the Lord loves to use weak and common people. If the faults and character flaws of the apostles seem like a mirror of your own weaknesses, take heart. These are the kinds of people the Lord delights to use.



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The one thing that set these men apart from others in the Gospel accounts was the durability of their faith. Nowhere does this come through more clearly than in John 6, shortly after the feeding of the five thousand, when crowds of people began to flock around Jesus, hoping for more free food. At that very point, Jesus began to preach a message that many found shocking and offensive. He described Himself as the true manna from heaven (v. 32). *That* was shocking enough, because by describing Himself as having come down from heaven (v. 41), He was claiming to be God. The Jewish leaders and the people understood this correctly as a claim of deity (v. 42). Jesus responded by saying again that He was the true bread of life (v. 48). He then added that He would give His flesh for the life of the world, and said, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (vv. 54–56). Obviously, He was not talking about literal cannibalism; He was using vivid imagery to speak of the absolute commitment He required of His followers.

John writes, “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’ ” (v. 60). The word “disciples” in that verse refers to the larger group of followers who followed Jesus, not the Twelve in particular. John goes on to say, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66). On that very day, many of the dozens of disciples who had sat under Jesus’ teaching and witnessed His miracles stopped following Him. His sayings were too hard and His demands too rigorous for them. But not the Twelve. They remained resolutely with Jesus.

And as the crowd dissipated in shock, Jesus looked around at the Twelve and said, “Do you also want to go away?” (v. 67). Now was the time to leave, if they were inclined to do so.

Peter spoke for the group when he answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). They were staying with Him no matter what. Except for Judas Iscariot, they were men of true faith.

Jesus knew all along that some of His disciples were not true believers, and He knew that Judas would betray Him. He told them, “ ‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him” (v. 64). In verse 70, He answers Peter, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” He knew their hearts. Except for Judas, they had made the break with their past permanently. They had given up everything to follow Jesus.

That is the single most heroic fact about them revealed in the Gospels. And Judas’s failure to make that commitment, while pretending that he had, was what made him so despicable.

As we examine this last group of apostles, we discover that although Scripture says very little about them, they nonetheless have their own distinctions.

JAMES, SON OF ALPHEUS

The ninth name in Luke’s list of the apostles (Luke 6:14–16) is “James the son of Alphaeus” (v. 15). The *only* thing Scripture tells us about this man is his name. If he ever wrote anything, it is lost to history. If he ever asked Jesus any questions or did anything to stand out from the group, Scripture does not record it. He never attained any degree of fame or notoriety. He was not the kind of person who stands out. He was utterly obscure. He even had a common name.

There are several men with the name *James* in the New Testament. We have already met James the son of Zebedee. There was another James, who was the son of Mary and Joseph and therefore a half brother of Christ (Galatians 1:19). The James who was Jesus’ half brother apparently became a leader in the Jerusalem church. He was the spokesman who delivered the ruling at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:13–21. He is also thought to be the same James who penned the New Testament epistle that bears his name. He is not the same James named as one of the apostles in the third band of four.

Practically all we know about the James with whom we are concerned is that he was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). In Mark 15:40, we learn that James’s mother was named Mary. That verse, together with Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:47 mention another of this



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woman's sons, Joses. Joses must have been well-known as a follower of the Lord (though not an apostle), because his name is mentioned repeatedly. Their mother, Mary, was obviously a devoted follower of Christ as well. She was an eyewitness to the crucifixion. She is also one of the women who came to prepare Jesus' body for burial (Mark 16:1).

Aside from those scant details that can be gleaned about his family, this James is utterly obscure. His lack of prominence is even reflected in his nickname. In Mark 15:40 he is referred to as "James the Less."

The Greek word for "Less" is *mikros*. It literally means "little." Its primary meaning is "small in stature," so it could refer to his physical features. Perhaps he was a short or small-framed man.

The word can also speak of someone who is young in age. He might have been younger than James the son of Zebedee, so that this title would distinguish him as the younger of the two. In fact, even if this is not what his nickname mainly referred to, it is probably true that he was younger than the other James; otherwise he would more likely have been known as "James the Elder."

But the name most likely refers to his influence. As we have already seen, James the son of Zebedee was a man of prominence. His family was known to the high priest (John 18:15–16). He was part of the Lord's most intimate inner circle. He was the better-known of the two Jameses. Therefore, James the son of Alphaeus was known as "James the Less." *Mikros*. "Little James."

It may well be that all these things were true of James, so that he was a small, young, quiet person who stayed mostly in the background. That would all be consistent with the low profile he had among the Twelve. We might say his distinguishing mark was his obscurity.

That in itself is a significant fact. Apparently he sought no recognition. He displayed no great leadership. He asked no critical questions. He demonstrated no unusual insight. Only his name remains, while his life and his labors are immersed in obscurity.

But he was one of the Twelve. The Lord selected him for a reason, trained and empowered him like the others, and sent him out as a witness. He reminds me of those unnamed people mentioned in Hebrews 11:33–38:

... who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

Eternity will reveal the names and the testimonies of these, like James the Less, whom this world barely remembers and knows nothing about.

Early church history is also mostly silent about this man named James. Some of the earliest legends about him confuse him with James the brother of the Lord. There is some evidence that James the Less took the gospel to Syria and Persia. Accounts of his death differ. Some say he was stoned; others say he was beaten to death; still others say he was crucified like his Lord.

In any case, we can be certain that he became a powerful preacher like the others. He surely performed "the signs of an apostle ... in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12). And His name will be inscribed on one of the gates of the heavenly city.

Here's an interesting thought about James, son of Alphaeus: You may recall that according to Mark 2:14, Levi (Matthew) was the son of a man named Alphaeus as well. It could be that this James was the brother of Matthew. After all, Peter and Andrew were brothers and James and John were brothers. Why not these two? There is no effort on the part of Scripture to distinguish between the two Alphaeuses. On



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the other hand, Matthew and James are nowhere identified as brothers. We simply don't know whether they were or not.

Another interesting question about James's lineage comes to light when we compare Mark 15:40 with John 19:25. Both verses mention two other Marys who were standing by the cross of Jesus with Mary the Lord's mother. Mark 15:40 mentions "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses." John 19:25 names "[Jesus'] mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." It is possible, perhaps even likely, that Jesus' mother's sister ("Mary the wife of Clopas") and "Mary the mother of James the less" are the same person. ("Clopas" may have been another name for Alphaeus, or James's mother might have remarried after his father died). That would have made James the Less Jesus' cousin.

Was James the cousin of our Lord? Was he the brother of Matthew? We don't know. Scripture doesn't expressly tell us. The disciples' importance did not stem from their pedigree. Had that been important, Scripture would have recorded it for us. What made these men important was the Lord whom they served and the message they proclaimed. If we lack details about the men themselves, that is OK. Heaven will reveal the full truth of who they were and what they were like. In the meantime, it is enough to know that they were chosen by the Lord, empowered by the Spirit, and used by God to carry the gospel to the world of their day.

All the men themselves more or less disappear from the biblical narrative within a few years after Pentecost. In no case does Scripture give us a full biography. That is because Scripture always keeps the focus on the power of Christ and the power of the Word, not the men who were merely instruments of that power. These men were filled with the Spirit and they preached the Word. That is all we really need to know. The vessel is not the issue; the Master is.

No one epitomizes that truth better than James the Less, son of Alphaeus. He may have been able to claim that he was Matthew's brother or Jesus' cousin, but he went quietly unnoticed through the entire Gospel narrative. This world remembers next to nothing about him. But in eternity, he will receive a full reward (Mark 10:29–31).

SIMON THE ZEALOT

The next name given in Luke 6:15 is "Simon called the Zealot." In Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18, he is called "Simon the Cananite." That is not a reference to the land of Canaan or the village of Cana. It comes from the Hebrew root *qanna*, which means "to be zealous."

Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the Zealots. The fact that he bore the title all his life may also suggest that he had a fiery, zealous temperament. But that term in Jesus' day signified a well-known and widely feared outlaw political sect, and Simon had apparently been a member of that sect.

The historian Josephus described four basic parties among the Jews of that time. The *Pharisees* were fastidious about the Law; they were the religious fundamentalists of their time. The *Sadducees* were religious liberals; they denied the supernatural. They were also rich, aristocratic, and powerful. They were in charge of the temple. The *Essenes* are not mentioned in Scripture at all, but both Josephus and Philo describe them as ascetics and celibates who lived in the desert and devoted their lives to the study of the Law. The fourth group, the *Zealots*, were more politically minded than any group besides the Herodians. The Zealots hated the Romans, and their goal was to overthrow the Roman occupation. They advanced their agenda primarily through terrorism and surreptitious acts of violence.

The Zealots were extremists in every sense. Like the Pharisees, they interpreted the law literally. Unlike the Pharisees (who were willing to compromise for political reasons), the Zealots were militant, violent outlaws. They believed only God Himself had the right to rule over the Jews. And therefore they believed they were doing God's work by assassinating Roman soldiers, political leaders, and anyone else who opposed them.



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The Zealots were hoping for a Messiah who would lead them in overthrowing the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel with its Solomonic glory. They were red-hot patriots, ready to die in an instant for what they believed in. Josephus wrote of them:

Of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord. And since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no further about that matter; nor am I afraid that any thing I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain. And it was in Gessius Florus's time that the nation began to grow mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans.

The revolt Josephus describes "in Gessius Florus's time" occurred in A.D. 6, when a group of Zealots waged a violent rebellion against a Roman census tax. The Zealots' leader and founder, also mentioned by Josephus, was Judas the Galilean, who is named in Acts 5:37.

The Zealots were convinced that paying tribute to a pagan king was an act of treason against God. That view found widespread acceptance among people who were already overburdened by Roman taxation. Judas the Galilean seized the opportunity, organized forces, and went on a rampage of murder, plunder, and destruction. From their headquarters in the Galilee region, Judas and his followers carried out guerilla-style warfare and terrorist acts against the Romans. Soon, however, the Romans crushed the rebellion, killed Judas of Galilee, and crucified his sons.

The Zealot party merely went underground. Their acts of terror became more selective and more secretive. As noted in chapter 2, they formed a party of secret assassins called *sicarii*—"dagger-men"—because of the deadly, curved daggers they carried in the folds of their robes. They would sneak up behind Roman soldiers and politicians and stab them in the back, between the ribs, expertly piercing the heart.

They liked to burn Roman targets in Judea, then retreat to the remote areas of Galilee to hide. As Josephus described them in the quotation cited above, their willingness to suffer any kind of death or endure any amount of pain—including the torture of their own kindred—was well known. The Romans might torture them and kill them, but they could not quench their passion.

Many historians believe that when the Romans sacked Jerusalem under Titus Vespasian in A.D. 70, that terrible holocaust was largely precipitated by the Zealots. During the siege of Rome, after the Roman army had already surrounded the city and cut off supplies, the Zealots actually began killing fellow Jews who wanted to negotiate with Rome to end the siege. They allowed no one to surrender who wanted to save his or her own life. When Titus saw how hopeless the situation was, he destroyed the city, massacring thousands of its inhabitants, and carried off the treasures of the temple. So the Zealots' blind hatred of Rome and everything Roman ultimately provoked the destruction of their own city. The spirit of their movement was an insane, and ultimately self-destructive, fanaticism.

Josephus suggests that the name *Zealots* was a misnomer, "as if they were zealous in good undertakings, and were not rather zealous in the worst actions, and extravagant in them beyond the example of others."

Simon was one of them. It is interesting that when Matthew and Mark list the Twelve, they list Simon just before Judas Iscariot. When Jesus sent the disciples out two by two in Mark 6:7, it is likely that Simon and Judas Iscariot were a team. They probably both originally followed Christ for similar political reasons. But somewhere along the line, Simon became a genuine believer and was transformed. Judas Iscariot never really believed.



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When Jesus did not overthrow Rome, but instead talked of dying, some might have expected Simon to be the betrayer—a man of such deep passion, zeal, and political conviction that he would align himself with terrorists. But that was before He met Jesus.

Of course, as one of the Twelve, Simon also had to associate with Matthew, who was at the opposite end of the political spectrum, collecting taxes for the Roman government. At one point in his life, Simon would probably have gladly killed Matthew. In the end, they became spiritual brethren, working side by side for the same cause—the spread of the gospel—and worshiping the same Lord.

It is amazing that Jesus would select a man like Simon to be an apostle. But he was a man of fierce loyalties, amazing passion, courage, and zeal. Simon had believed the truth and embraced Christ as his Lord. The fiery enthusiasm he once had for Israel was now expressed in his devotion to Christ.

Several early sources say that after the destruction of Jerusalem, Simon took the gospel north and preached in the British Isles. Like so many of the others, Simon simply disappears from the biblical record. There is no reliable record of what happened to him, but all accounts say he was killed for preaching the gospel. This man who was once willing to kill and be killed for a political agenda within the confines of Judea found a more fruitful cause for which to give his life—in the proclamation of salvation for sinners out of every nation, tongue, and tribe.

JUDAS, SON OF JAMES

The last name on the list of faithful disciples is “Judas, the son of James.” The name *Judas* in and of itself is a fine name. It means “Jehovah leads.” But because of the treachery of Judas Iscariot, the name *Judas* will forever bear a negative connotation. When the apostle John mentions him, he calls him “Judas (not Iscariot)” (John 14:22).

Judas the son of James actually had three names. (Jerome referred to him as “Trinomious”—the man with three names.) In Matthew 10:3, he is called “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.” *Judas* was probably the name given him at birth. *Lebbaeus* and *Thaddaeus* were essentially nicknames. *Thaddaeus* means “breast child”—evoking the idea of a nursing baby. It almost has a derisive sound, like “mamma’s boy.” Perhaps he was the youngest in his family, and therefore the baby among several siblings—specially cherished by his mother. His other name, *Lebbaeus*, is similar. It is from a Hebrew root that refers to the heart—literally, “heart child.”

Both names suggest he had a tender, childlike heart. It is interesting to think of such a gentle soul hanging around in the same group of four apostles as Simon the Zealot. But the Lord can use both kinds. Zealots make great preachers. But so do tender-hearted, compassionate, gentle, sweet-spirited souls like Lebbaeus Thaddaeus. Together, they contribute to a very complex and intriguing group of twelve apostles. There’s at least one of every imaginable personality.

Like the other three faithful members of the third apostolic group, Lebbaeus Thaddaeus is more or less shrouded in obscurity. But that obscurity should not cloud our respect for them. They all became mighty preachers.

The New Testament records one incident involving this Judas Lebbaeus Thaddaeus. To see it, we return to the apostle John’s description of Jesus’ Upper-Room Discourse. In John 14:21, Jesus says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

Then John adds, “Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’ ” (v. 22). Here we see the tender-hearted humility of this man. He doesn’t say anything brash or bold or overconfident. He doesn’t rebuke the Lord like Peter once did. His question is full of gentleness and meekness and devoid of any sort of pride. He couldn’t believe that Jesus would manifest Himself to this rag-tag group of eleven, and not to the whole world.

After all, Jesus was the Savior of the world. He was the rightful heir of the earth—King of kings and Lord of lords. They had always assumed that He came to set up His kingdom and subdue all things to



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Himself. The good news of forgiveness and salvation was certainly good news for all the world. And the disciples knew it well, but the rest of the world was still, by and large, clueless. So Lebbaeus Thaddaeus wanted to know, “Why are you going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the whole world?”

This was a pious, believing disciple. This was a man who loved his Lord and who felt the power of salvation in his own life. He was full of hope for the world, and in his own tender-hearted, childlike way he wanted to know why Jesus wasn’t going to make Himself known to everyone. He was obviously still hoping to see the kingdom come to earth. We certainly can’t fault him for that; that is how Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Luke 11:2).

Jesus gave him a marvelous answer, and the answer was as tender as the question. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him’ ” (John 14:23). Christ would manifest Himself to anyone who loves Him.

Judas Lebbaeus Thaddaeus was still thinking in the political and material realm. “How come You haven’t taken over the world yet? Why don’t You just manifest Yourself to the world?”

Jesus’ answer meant, “I’m not going to take over the world externally; I’m going to take over hearts, one at a time. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word. And if he keeps My Word, My Father and I will come to him and together we’ll set up the kingdom in his heart.”

Most of the early tradition regarding Lebbaeus Thaddaeus suggests that a few years after Pentecost, he took the gospel north, to Edessa, a royal city in Mesopotamia, in the region of Turkey today. There are numerous ancient accounts of how he healed the king of Edessa, a man named Abgar. In the fourth century, Eusebius the historian said the archives at Edessa (now destroyed) contained full records of Thaddaeus’s visit and the healing of Abgar.

The traditional apostolic symbol of Judas Lebbaeus Thaddaeus is a club, because tradition says he was clubbed to death for his faith.

Thus this tender-hearted soul followed his Lord faithfully to the end. His testimony was as powerful and as far-reaching as that of the better-known and more outspoken disciples. He, like them, is proof of how God uses perfectly ordinary people in remarkable ways.

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JUDAS—THE TRAITOR

Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?”

—MATTHEW 26:25

The most notorious and universally scorned of all the disciples is Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. His name appears last in every biblical list of apostles, except for the list in Acts 1, where it doesn’t appear at all. Every time Judas is mentioned in Scripture, we also find a notation about his being a traitor. He is the most colossal failure in all of human history. He committed the most horrible, heinous act of any individual, ever. He betrayed the perfect, sinless, holy Son of God for a handful of money. His dark story is a poignant example of the depths to which the human heart is capable of sinking. He spent three years with Jesus Christ, but for all that time his heart was only growing hard and hateful.

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

Judas was as common as the rest, without earthly credentials and without any characteristics that made him stand out from the group. He began exactly like the others had begun. But he never laid hold



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of the truth by faith, so he was never transformed like the rest. While they were increasing in faith as sons of God, he was becoming more and more a child of hell.

The New Testament tells us plenty about Judas—enough to accomplish two things: First, the life of Judas reminds us that it is possible to be near Christ and associate with Him closely (but superficially) and yet become utterly hardened in sin. Second, Judas reminds us that no matter how sinful a person may be, no matter what treachery he or she may attempt against God, the purpose of God cannot be thwarted. Even the worst act of treachery works toward the fulfillment of the divine plan. God’s sovereign plan cannot be overthrown even by the most cunning schemes of those who hate Him.

HIS NAME

Judas’s name is a form of *Judah*. The name means “Jehovah leads,” which indicates that when he was born his parents must have had great hopes for him to be led by God. The irony of the name is that no individual was ever more clearly led by Satan than Judas was.

His surname, *Iscariot*, signifies the region he came from. It is derived from the Hebrew term *ish* (“man”) and the name of a town, Kerioth—“man of Kerioth.” Judas probably came from Kerioth-hezron (cf. Joshua 15:25), a humble town in the south of Judea. He was apparently the only one of the apostles who did not come from Galilee. As we know, many of the others were brothers, friends, and working companions even before meeting Christ. Judas was a solitary figure who entered their midst from afar. Although there is no evidence that he was ever excluded or looked down upon by the rest of the group, he may have thought of himself as an outsider, which would have helped him justify his own treachery.

The Galilean disciples’ unfamiliarity with Judas would have aided and abetted him in his deception. The others knew little about his family, his background, or his life before he became a disciple. So it was easy for him to play the hypocrite. He was able to work his way into a place of trust, which we know he did, because he ultimately became the treasurer of the group and used that position to pilfer funds (John 12:6).

Judas’s father was named Simon (John 6:71). This Simon is otherwise unknown to us. It was a common name, obviously, because two of the disciples (Peter and the Zealot) were also named Simon. Beyond that, we know nothing of Judas’s family or social background.

Judas was ordinary in every way, just like the others. It is significant that when Jesus predicted one of them would betray Him, no one pointed the finger of suspicion at Judas (Matthew 26:22–23). He was so expert in his hypocrisy that no one seemed to distrust him. But Jesus knew his heart from the beginning (John 6:64).

HIS CALL

The call of Judas is not recorded in Scripture. It is obvious, however, that he followed Jesus willingly. He lived in a time of heightened messianic hope, and like most in Israel, he was eager for the Messiah to come. When he heard about Jesus, he must have become convinced that this must be the true Messiah. Like the other eleven, he left whatever other enterprise he may have been engaged in and began to follow Jesus full-time. Judas even stayed with Jesus when less-devoted disciples began to leave the group (John 6:66–71). He had given his life to following Jesus. But he never gave Jesus his heart.

Judas was probably a young, zealous, patriotic Jew who did not want the Romans to rule and who hoped Christ would overthrow the foreign oppressors and restore the kingdom to Israel. He obviously could see that Jesus had powers like no other man. There was plenty of reason for a man like Judas to be attracted to that.

It is equally obvious, however, that Judas was not attracted to Christ on a spiritual level. He followed Jesus out of a desire for selfish gain, worldly ambition, avarice, and greed. He sensed Jesus’ power, and he wanted power like that for himself. He was not interested in the kingdom for salvation’s sake or for Christ’s sake. He was interested only in what he could get out of it. Wealth, power, and prestige were what fueled his ambitions.



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It is clear, on the one hand, that he *chose* to follow. He continued following even when following became difficult. He persisted in following even though it required him to be a more clever hypocrite in order to cover up the reality of what he really was.

On the other hand, Jesus also chose him. The tension between divine sovereignty and human choice is manifest in Judas's calling, just as it is manifest in the calling of the other apostles. They had all chosen Jesus, but He chose them first (John 15:16). Judas had likewise chosen to follow Jesus. And yet he had also been chosen *by* Jesus, but not for redemption. His role of betrayal was ordained before the foundation of the world and even prophesied in the Old Testament.

Psalm 41:9, a messianic prophecy, says, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Jesus cited that verse in John 13:18 and said its fulfillment would come in His own betrayal. Psalm 55:12–14 says, "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng." That passage also foretold the treachery of Judas. Zechariah 11:12–13 says, "They weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'; that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter." Matthew 27:9–10 identifies that as another prophecy about Judas. So Judas's role was foreordained.

Scripture even says that when Jesus chose Judas, He *knew* Judas would be the one to fulfill the prophecies of betrayal. He knowingly chose him to fulfill the plan.

And yet Judas was in no sense coerced into doing what he did. No invisible hand forced him to betray Christ. He acted freely and without external compulsion. He was responsible for his own actions. Jesus said he would bear the guilt of his deed throughout eternity. His own greed, his own ambition, and his own wicked desires were the only forces that constrained him to betray Christ.

How do we reconcile the fact that Judas's treachery was prophesied and predetermined with the fact that he acted of his own volition? There is no need to reconcile those two facts. They are not in contradiction. God's plan and Judas's evil deed concurred perfectly. Judas did what he did because his heart was evil. God, who works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11), had foreordained that Jesus would be betrayed and that He would die for the sins of the world. Jesus Himself affirmed both truths in Luke 22:22: "Truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

Spurgeon said this about the tension between divine sovereignty and human choice:

If ... I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.

God ordained the events by which Christ would die, and yet Judas carried out his evil deed by his own choice, unfettered and uncoerced by any external force. Both things are true. The perfect will of God and the wicked purposes of Judas concurred to bring about Christ's death. Judas did it for evil, but God meant it for good (cf. Genesis 50:20). There is no contradiction.

From a human perspective, Judas had the same potential as the others. The difference is that he was never really drawn to the Person of Christ. He saw Him only as a means to an end. Judas's secret goal was personal prosperity—gain for himself. He never embraced Jesus' teaching by faith. He never had an ounce



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of true love for Christ. His heart had never been changed, and therefore the light of truth only hardened him.

Judas had every opportunity to turn from his sin—as much opportunity as was ever afforded anyone. He heard numerous appeals from Christ urging him *not* to do the deed he was planning to do. He heard every lesson Jesus taught during His ministry. Many of those lessons applied directly to him: the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1–13); the message of the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11–14); and Jesus’ preaching against the love of money (Matthew 6:19–34), against greed (Luke 12:13–21), and against pride (Matthew 23:1–12). Jesus had even candidly told the Twelve, “One of you is a devil” (John 6:70). He cautioned them about the woe that would come to the person who betrayed him (Matthew 26:24). Judas listened to all of that unmoved. He never applied the lessons. He just kept up his deceit.

HIS DISILLUSIONMENT

Meanwhile, Judas was becoming progressively more disillusioned with Christ. No doubt at the start, *all* the apostles thought of the Jewish Messiah as an oriental monarch who would defeat the enemies of Judea, rid Israel of pagan occupation, and reestablish the Davidic kingdom in unprecedented glory. They knew Jesus was a miracle worker. He obviously had power over the kingdom of darkness. He also had authority to command the physical world. No one ever taught the way He taught, spoke the way He spoke, or lived the way He lived. As far as the disciples were concerned, He was the obvious fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic promises.

But Jesus did not always fulfill their personal expectations and ambitions. To be perfectly honest, their expectations were not all spiritually motivated. We see evidence of this from time to time, such as when James and John asked for the chief seats in the kingdom. Most of them had hoped to see an earthly, materialistic, political, military, and economic kingdom. Although they had left all to follow Jesus, they did so with an expectation that they would be rewarded (Matthew 19:27). The Lord assured them they *would* be rewarded, but their full and final reward would be in the age to come (Luke 18:29–30). If they were counting on immediate, material rewards, they were going to be disappointed.

The rest of the apostles had begun to catch on slowly that the true Messiah was not what they at first expected. They embraced the superior understanding of the biblical promises Jesus unfolded to them. Their love for Christ overcame their worldly ambitions. They received His teaching about the spiritual dimension of the kingdom, and they gladly became partakers.

Judas, meanwhile, simply became disillusioned. For the most part, he hid his disappointment under his blanket of hypocrisy, probably because he was looking for a way to get some money out of the years he had invested with Jesus. The worldliness in his heart was never conquered. He never embraced the spiritual kingdom of Christ. He remained an outsider, albeit secretly.

The few glimpses of Judas that are shown to us from time to time in the Gospels suggest that he had long been growing progressively more disillusioned and embittered but kept it hidden from everyone. As early as John 6, during Jesus’ Galilean ministry, Jesus referred to Judas as “a devil.” Jesus knew what no one else knew: Judas was becoming disgruntled already. He was still unbelieving, unrepentant, and unregenerate; and he was growing more and more hardhearted all the time.

By the time Jesus and the apostles went to Jerusalem for the Passover in the last year of Jesus’ earthly ministry, Judas’s spiritual disenfranchisement was complete. At some point in those final few days, his disillusionment turned to hate, and hate mixed with greed finally turned to treachery. Judas probably convinced himself that Jesus had stolen his life—robbed him of two years of money-making potential. That sort of thinking ate away at him until finally he became the monster who betrayed Christ.

HIS AVARICE

Shortly after the raising of Lazarus, and just before Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany, on the outskirts of the city. This was the place where Lazarus had been raised and where he lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha. Jesus was invited to a meal at the home of



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one “Simon the Leper” (Matthew 26:6). His dear friend Lazarus was present with Mary and Martha, who were helping serve the meal. John 12:2–3 records what happened: “There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.”

This act was shocking in its extravagance. Not only was it an overt act of worship, but it also had the appearance of wastefulness. Obviously perfume—especially such an expensive fragrance—is designed to be used in small amounts. Once poured out, it cannot be reused. To pour out a pound of expensive oil and use it to anoint someone’s feet gave the appearance of gross excess.

“Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ ” (vv. 4–5). Three hundred denarii was a lot of money for perfume by any measure. Remember, a denarius was basically a working man’s daily wage (Matthew 20:2). Three hundred denarii is a full year’s wages (allowing for Sabbaths and holidays off). I have purchased costly perfume for my wife, but I would never think of spending a year’s wages on one dose of perfume! This was an amazingly lavish act on the part of a family who must have had some means.

Judas’s response was a clever ploy. He feigned concern for the poor. Apparently, his protest seemed reasonable to the other apostles, too, because Matthew 26:8 says they all echoed Judas’s indignation. What an expert Judas had become in his hypocrisy! The apostle John, reflecting on this incident years later, wrote, “This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it” (John 12:6). Of course, neither John nor any of the other apostles saw through Judas’s deceit at the time, but in retrospect, and writing his book under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, John told us plainly what Judas’s motive was: sheer greed.

Jesus responded to Judas in verse 7: “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” Given the circumstances, and since Jesus knew perfectly well what was in Judas’s heart, this seems a rather mild rebuke. He could have blasted Judas with a fierce condemnation and exposed his real motives, but He did not.

Nonetheless, the gentle reprimand seems to have made Judas resent Jesus even more. He did not repent. He did not even examine his own heart. In fact, this incident seems to have been the turning point in his thinking. Three hundred denarii would have been a lot to add to the treasury, offering a prime opportunity for Judas to skim money for his own pocket. Because of Jesus’ willingness to receive such lavish worship, Judas missed a prime opportunity to embezzle funds.

It appears to have been the last straw as far as Judas was concerned, because immediately after telling the story of Jesus’ anointing, Matthew says, “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him” (Matthew 26:14–16). He crept away, left Bethany, walked about a mile and a half to Jerusalem, met with the chief priests, and sold Jesus to His enemies for a pocketful of coins. Thirty pieces of silver. That is all he could get. According to Exodus 21:32, it was the price of a slave. It was not much money. But it was all he could negotiate.

The contrast is staggering: Our Lord is anointed with overwhelming love by Mary and betrayed with overwhelming hate by Judas at the same time.

Notice that this is the first time Judas had ever exposed himself in any way. Up to that point, He had blended in perfectly with the rest of the group. This is the first time on record that he spoke out as an individual, and it is the first time he merited any kind of direct rebuke from Christ. Apparently, that is all that was needed to provoke his betrayal. He had kept his bitterness and disillusionment bottled up as long as he could. Now it spilled forth in secret treachery.

HIS HYPOCRISY



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John 13:1 begins the apostle John's lengthy account of what happened in the Upper Room on the night of Jesus' arrest. Having already taken money to betray Christ, Judas came back, blended into the group, and pretended nothing unusual had happened. John says it was the devil who put it in the heart of Judas to betray Jesus (v. 2). That is no surprise. Again, Judas did what he did willingly, without any coercion. Satan could not *force* him to betray Jesus. But Satan through some means suggested the plot, tempted Judas to do this thing, and planted the very seed of treachery in his heart. Judas's heart was so hostile to the truth and so filled with evil that Judas became a willing instrument of Satan himself.

It was at this very point that Jesus gave the apostles a lesson in humility by washing their feet. He washed the feet of all twelve, which means He even washed the feet of Judas. Judas sat there and let Jesus wash his feet and remained utterly unmoved. The world's worst sinner was also the world's best hypocrite.

Peter, on the other hand, was deeply moved by Jesus' act of humility. At first he was ashamed and refused to let Jesus wash his feet. But when Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me," (v. 8), Peter replied, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" (v. 9).

Jesus replied, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, *but not all of you*" (v. 10, emphasis added). A buzz must have gone around the room when He said that. There were only twelve of them, and Jesus was saying that someone in the group was not clean. Matthew adds, "For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean' " (v. 11).

In verses 18–19, Jesus spoke even more directly: "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.' Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He." Of course, He was saying Judas's act was the fulfillment of Psalm 41:9.

All of that seems to have gone over the heads of most of the apostles. So in verse 21, Jesus makes an even more explicit prediction about the impending act of betrayal: "When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.' " All the disciples except Judas were perplexed and deeply troubled by this. They apparently began to examine their own hearts, because Matthew 26:22 says, "They were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, 'Lord, is it I?' " Even Judas, ever careful to keep up the appearance of being like everyone else, asked, "Rabbi, is it I?" (v. 25). But in his case there had been no sincere self-examination. He asked the question only because he was worried about how the others perceived him; he already knew that he was the one of whom Jesus spoke.

The apostle John concludes his account of this incident:

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. (John 13:23–30)

The day of salvation closed for Judas. Divine mercy gave way to divine judgement. Judas was in essence handed over to Satan. Sin had triumphed in his heart. Satan moved in.

Notice, however, that even though Jesus had just spoken of the betrayer and had given Judas the morsel to identify him, it *still* did not compute in the minds of the apostles. No one seemed to anticipate that Judas would be the traitor. So expert was he in his hypocrisy that he fooled everyone but Jesus, right up to the very end.



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Jesus sent him away. That is easy to understand. Jesus is pure, sinless, spotless, and holy. Here was this wretched, evil presence into whom Satan had literally entered. Jesus was not about to have the first communion service with the devil and Judas present in the room. *Get out.*

Only after Judas had left did our Lord institute the Lord's Supper. To this day, when we come to the Lord's Table, we are instructed to examine ourselves lest we come hypocritically to the table and bring judgment upon ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:27–32).

The apostle John says that throughout this entire episode, until Judas left the company of apostles, Jesus was deeply "troubled in spirit" (John 13:21). Of course He was troubled! This wicked, wretched, Satan-possessed presence was polluting the fellowship of the apostles. Judas's ingratitude, His rejection of Jesus' kindness, the hate Judas secretly harbored for Jesus, the repulsiveness of the presence of Satan, the heinousness of sin, the horrors of knowing that the gaping jaws of hell were awaiting one of His closest companions—all of that troubled and agitated Jesus. No wonder he sent Judas away.

HIS BETRAYAL

Judas apparently went straight from the Upper Room to the Sanhedrin. He reported to them that the final breach had been made, and he now knew where they could apprehend Jesus under cover of darkness. Judas had been secretly seeking a convenient opportunity to betray Jesus ever since making his bargain with the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:11). Now the time had come.

Remember, Judas did not act in a moment of insanity. This was not a sudden impulse. It was not an act borne only out of passion. This dark deed was deliberately planned and premeditated. He had been planning this for days, if not weeks or even months. He had already taken the money for it (Matthew 26:15). He had just been waiting for an opportune hour. Along the way, he had continued his campaign of embezzlement, kept up the hypocritical facade, and carried on with the rest of the apostles as if he were truly one of them. But now Jesus had spoken openly to the other disciples about Judas's plot to betray Him. Judas had nearly been unmasked in front of the others. It was time for him to act.

What had he been waiting for anyway? According to Luke 22:6, Judas had been seeking an opportunity "to betray [Jesus] to them *in the absence of the multitude*" (emphasis added). He was a coward. He knew the popularity of Jesus. He was afraid of the crowd. Like every hypocrite, he was obsessed with concerns about what people thought of him, so he was hoping to betray Jesus as quietly as possible. He was looking for the doorway to hell that was most convenient. And when he found it, he plunged right in.

So at the very moment when Jesus was instituting the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, Judas was making arrangements for His capture. He knew Jesus regularly went to Gethsemane to pray with His disciples. Luke 22:39 says it was Jesus' custom to go there. John 18:2 says Judas "knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples." So Judas knew exactly where to bring the authorities to capture Jesus.

The next time we see Judas is in John 18, when his conspiracy of betrayal reaches its culmination. The evening was at its end. Jesus had gone from the Upper Room to His customary place of prayer in the little olive grove known as Gethsemane. There He poured out his heart to the Father in such agony that His sweat became as great drops of blood. He had left eight of the disciples some distance away and gone deep into the garden with Peter, James, and John (Mark 14:32–33).

"Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons" (John 18:3). The "detachment of troops" was most likely a Roman cohort from the Antonio Fortress, adjacent to the temple. A full cohort numbered about six hundred men. No exact figure is given, but all the Gospel writers say it was a great multitude (Matthew 26:47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47)—probably hundreds of soldiers. They obviously expected the worst. They came armed to the teeth.

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' " (John 18:4). He did not wait for Judas to single him out; He did not try to hide; He "went forward," presenting Himself to them, and said, "I am He" (v. 5).



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Judas had a prearranged signal to identify Jesus: “Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him” (Matthew 26:48). What a diabolical way to point out Jesus! But his wretchedness was so profound and his hypocrisy so malicious that he seemingly had no conscience. Furthermore, since Jesus stepped forward and identified Himself, the signal would have been unnecessary, but Judas—cynic and scoundrel that he had become—kissed Him anyway (Mark 14:45).

“Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ ” (Luke 22:48). Kissing is a mark of homage, love, affection, tenderness, respect, and intimacy. Judas’s feigned feelings for Christ only made his deed that much darker. It was a devious hypocrisy, trying to keep up the veneer of respect even to the bitter end.

Jesus, ever gracious, even addressed him as “Friend” (Matthew 26:50). Jesus had never been anything but friendly to Judas, but Judas was no true friend of Jesus (cf. John 15:14). He was a betrayer and a deceiver. His kisses were the kisses of the worst kind of treachery.

Judas profaned the Passover that night. He profaned the Lamb of God. He profaned the Son of God. He profaned the place of prayer. He betrayed his Lord with a kiss.

HIS DEATH

Judas sold Jesus for a pittance. But as soon as the deal was complete, Judas’s conscience immediately came alive. He found himself in a hell of his own making, hammered by his own mind for what he had done. The money, which had been so important to him before, now did not matter. Matthew 27:3–4 says, “Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ ”

His remorse was not the same as repentance, as subsequent events clearly show. He was sorry, not because he had sinned against Christ, but because his sin did not satisfy him the way he had hoped.

The chief priests and elders were unsympathetic. “They said, ‘What is that to us? You see to it!’ ” (v. 4). They had what they wanted. Judas could do what he liked with the money. Nothing would undo his treachery now.

Matthew says, “Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (v. 5). Judas was already in a hell of his own making. His conscience would not be silenced, and that is the very essence of hell. Sin brings guilt, and Judas’s sin brought him unbearable misery. Again, his remorse was not genuine repentance. If that were the case, he would not have killed himself. He was merely sorry because he did not like what he felt.

Sadly, he did not seek the forgiveness of God. He did not cry out for mercy. He did not seek deliverance from Satan. Instead, he tried to silence his conscience by killing himself. This was the grief of a madman who had lost control.

Matthew concludes his account of Judas: “But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.’ And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day” (Matthew 27:6–8).

Acts 1:18–19 adds a final note to the tragedy of Judas, with more detail about his death and the acquisition of the Field of Blood: “This man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.”

Some have imagined a contradiction between Matthew and Acts, but all apparent discrepancies are easily reconciled. Matthew indicates that the priests purchased the field with Judas’s blood money. Thus it is true that Judas acquired the field “with the wages of iniquity.” It was purchased *for* him by the chief priests, but the purchase was made with his money. The field became his possession. His heirs—if he had any—would inherit the field. So it is correct to say that “purchased a field with the wages of iniquity,” even though the field was purchased *for* him, by proxy.



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Why this particular field? Because it was the very place where Judas hanged himself. Apparently he chose a tree on an overhang above some jagged rocks. (There is a place that precisely fits that description in the field in Jerusalem where tradition says Judas hanged himself.) Either the rope or the tree branch broke, and Judas fell headlong onto the rocks. The biblical description is graphic and ugly: “He burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (Acts 1:18). Judas was such a tragic figure that he couldn’t even kill himself the way he wanted to. Nonetheless, he died.

This is virtually the last word in Scripture about Judas: “His entrails gushed out.” His life and his death were grotesque tragedies. He was a child of hell and a son of perdition, and he went to his own place where he belonged. Jesus said these chilling words: “It would have been good for that man if he had never been born” (Mark 14:21).

THE MORAL OF HIS LIFE

We can draw some important lessons from the life of Judas. *First*, Judas is a tragic example of lost opportunity. He heard Jesus teach day in and day out for some two years. He could have asked Jesus any question he liked. He could have sought and received from the Lord any help he needed. He could have exchanged the oppressive burden of his sin for an easy yoke. Christ had given an open invitation for anyone to do so (Matthew 11:28–30). Yet in the end Judas was damned because of his own failure to heed what he heard.

Second, Judas is the epitome of wasted privilege. He was given the highest place of privilege among all the Lord’s followers, but he squandered that privilege—cashed it in for a fistful of coins he decided he did not really want after all. What a stupid bargain!

Third, Judas is the classic illustration of how the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Fourth, Judas exemplifies the ugliness and danger of spiritual betrayal. Would that Judas were the only hypocrite who ever betrayed the Lord, but that is not so. There are Judases in every age—people who seem to be true disciples and close followers of Christ but who turn against Him for sinister and selfish reasons. Judas’s life is a reminder to each of us about our need for self-examination (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5).

Fifth, Judas is proof of the patient, forbearing goodness and loving-kindness of Christ. “The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9). He even shows His loving-kindness to a reprobate like Judas. Remember, Jesus was still calling him “Friend,” even in the midst of Judas’s betrayal. Jesus never showed Judas anything but kindness and charity, even though the Lord knew all along what Judas was planning to do. In no sense was Judas driven to do what he did by Christ.

Sixth, Judas demonstrates how the sovereign will of God cannot be thwarted by any means. His betrayal of Christ seemed at first glance like Satan’s greatest triumph ever. But in reality, it signalled utter defeat for the devil and all his works (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

Seventh, Judas is a vivid demonstration of the deceitfulness and fruitlessness of hypocrisy. He is the branch spoken of in John 15:6 that does not abide in the True Vine. That branch bears no fruit, is cut off, and is thrown into the fire to be destroyed. Judas was so expert at his hypocrisy that none of the other eleven ever suspected him. But he could never fool Jesus. Nor can any hypocrite. And Christ is the righteous Judge who will render to every person his due (John 5:26–27). Hypocrites like Judas will have no one but themselves to blame for the destruction of their souls.

When Judas bartered away the life of Christ, he was in effect selling his own soul to the devil. The tragedy of his life was a tragedy of his own making. He ignored the light he had been exposed to for all those years, and thus he relegated himself to eternal darkness.

After Jesus’ resurrection, Judas’s office was filled by Matthias (Acts 1:16–26). The apostle Peter said, “For it is written in the Book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it’; and,



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‘Let another take his office’ ” (v. 20). Matthias was selected because he had been with Jesus and the other apostles “from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us” (v. 22).

Nothing is known of Matthias other than that. His name appears only twice in Scripture, both times in Acts 1, the account of how he was chosen. Thus in the end, another perfectly ordinary man was chosen to fill the place of that extraordinary villain. And so along with the other eleven, Matthias became a powerful witness of Jesus’ resurrection (v. 22)—one more ordinary man whom the Lord elevated to an extraordinary calling.⁶

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THE APOSTLES

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus selected 12 men to travel with Him. These men would have an important responsibility: They would continue to represent Him after He had returned to heaven. Their reputation would continue to influence the church long after they were dead.

So the selection of the Twelve was a great responsibility. “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose 12, whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:12–13).

Most of the apostles came from the area of Capernaum, which was despised by polite Jewish society because it was the center of a part of the Jewish state (only recently added) and was known in fact as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Jesus Himself said, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven, shalt be brought down to hell” (Matt. 11:23). Yet Jesus molded these 12 men into strong leaders and articulate spokesmen of the Christian faith. Their success bears witness to the transforming power of Jesus’ lordship.

None of the Gospel writers have left us any physical descriptions of the Twelve. Nevertheless, they give us tiny clues that help us to make “educated guesses” about how the apostles looked and acted. One very important fact that has traditionally been overlooked in countless artistic representations of the apostles is their youth. If we realize that most lived into the third and fourth quarter of the century and John into the second century, then they must have been only teenagers when they first took up Christ’s call.

Different biblical accounts list the Twelve in pairs. We are not sure whether this indicates family relationships, team functions, or some other kind of association between them.

- I. **ANDREW**
- II. **BARTHOLOMEW (NATHANAEL?)**
- III. **JAMES, SON OF ALPHEUS**
- IV. **JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE**
- V. **JOHN**
- VI. **JUDAS (NOT ISCARIOT)**
- VII. **JUDAS ISCARIOT**
- VIII. **MATTHEW**
- IX. **PHILIP**
- X. **SIMON PETER**
- XI. **SIMON ZELOTES**
- XII. **THOMAS**
- XIII. **JUDAS’S REPLACEMENT**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS

Where is Peter Buried?

⁶ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *Twelve ordinary men: how the Master shaped his disciples for greatness, and what He wants to do with you* (pp. 167–198). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.



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I. Andrew. The day after John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus, he identified Jesus for two of his disciples and said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). Intrigued by this announcement, the two men left John and began to follow Jesus. Jesus noticed them and asked what they were seeking. Immediately they replied, “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” Jesus took them to the house where He was staying and they spent the night with Him. One of these men was named Andrew (John 1:38–40).

Andrew soon went to find his brother, Simon Peter. He told Peter, “We have found the Messiah ...” (John 1:41). Through his testimony, he won Peter to the Lord.

Andrew is our English rendering of the Greek word *Andreas*, which means “manly.” Other clues from the Gospels indicate that Andrew was physically strong and a devout, faithful man. He and Peter owned a house together (Mark 1:29). They were sons of a man named Jonah or John, a prosperous fisherman. Both of the young men had followed their father into the fishing business.

SEA OF GALILEE. *This freshwater lake is also referred to in the New Testament as the “Sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1) and the “lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1). Several of the apostles worked as fishermen along its shores. It measures up to 10 km. (6 mi.) wide and 24 km. (15 mi.) from north to south. Along the shores of the lake were many towns such as Capernaum (in the background), where Christ conducted much of His ministry. In His time, these towns formed an almost continuous belt of settlements around the lake.*

Andrew was born at Bethsaida on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Though the Book of John describes Andrew’s first encounter with Jesus, it does not mention him as a disciple until much later (John 6:8). The Book of Matthew says that when Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee He hailed Andrew and Peter and invited them to become His disciples (Matt. 4:18–19). This does not contradict John’s narrative; it simply adds a new feature. A close reading of John 1:35–40 shows that Jesus did not call Andrew and Peter to follow Him the first time they met.

Andrew and another disciple named Philip introduced a group of Greek men to Jesus (John 12:20–22). For this reason, we might say that Andrew and Philip were the first foreign missionaries of the Christian faith.

Tradition says that Andrew spent his last years in Scythia, north of the Black Sea. But a small book entitled the *Acts of Andrew* (probably written about A.D. 260) says that he preached primarily in Macedonia and was martyred at Patras.

Roman Catholic tradition says that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross, a religious symbol that is now known as St. Andrew’s Cross. It was believed that he was crucified on November 30, so the Roman Catholic church and Greek Orthodox church observe his festival on that date. Today he is the patron saint of Scotland. The Order of St. Andrew is an association of church ushers who make a special effort to be courteous to strangers.

II. Bartholomew (Nathanael?). We lack information about the identity of the apostle named Bartholomew. He is mentioned only in the lists of apostles. Moreover, while the synoptic Gospels agree that his name was Bartholomew, John gives it as Nathanael (John 1:45). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was the surname of Nathanael.

The Aramaic word *bar* means “son,” so the name *Bartholomew* literally meant “son of Thalmai.” The Bible does not identify Thalmai for us, but he may have been named after the King Thalmai of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was connected with the Ptolemies, the ruling family of Egypt; **this theory is based upon Jerome’s statement that Bartholomew was the only apostle of noble birth.**

Assuming that Bartholomew is the same person as Nathanael, we learn a bit more about his personality from the Gospel of John. Jesus called Nathanael “an Israelite ... in whom is no guile” (John 1:47).

Tradition says Nathanael served as a missionary in India. The Venerable Bede said that Nathanael was beheaded by King Astriagis. Other traditions say that Nathanael was crucified head-down.

III. James, Son of Alphaeus. The Gospels make only fleeting reference to James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Many scholars believe that James was a brother of Matthew, since Scripture says that Matthew’s father was also named Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). Others believe that this James was identified with “James the Less”; but we have no proof that these two names refer to the same man (cf. Mark 15:40).

If the son of Alphaeus was indeed the same man as James the Less, he may have been a cousin of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:56; John 19:25). Some Bible commentators theorize that this disciple bore a close physical resemblance to Jesus, which could explain why Judas Iscariot had to identify Jesus on the night of His betrayal (Mark 14:43–45; Luke 22:47–48).



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Legends say that this James preached in Persia and was crucified there. But we have no concrete information about his later ministry and death.

IV. James, Son of Zebedee. After Jesus summoned Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, He went a little farther along the shore of Galilee and summoned “James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets” (Mark 1:19). Like Peter and Andrew, James and his brother responded immediately to Christ’s invitation.

James was the first of the Twelve to suffer a martyr’s death. King Herod Agrippa I ordered that James be executed with a sword (Acts 12:2). Tradition says this occurred in A.D. 44, when James would have been quite young. (Although the New Testament does not describe the martyrdom of any other apostles, tradition tells us that all except John died for their faith.)

The Gospels never mention James alone; they always speak of “James and John.” Even in recording his death, the Book of Acts refers to him as “James the brother of John” (Acts 12:2). James and John began to follow Jesus on the same day, and both of them were present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2–13). Jesus called both men the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).

The persecution that took James’s life inspired new fervor among the Christians (cf. Acts 12:5–25). Undoubtedly, Herod Agrippa had hoped to quash the Christian movement by executing leaders such as James. “But the Word of God grew and multiplied” (v. 24).

Strangely, the Gospel of John does not mention James. John was reluctant to mention his own name, and he may have felt the same kind of modesty about reporting the activities of his brother. Once John refers to himself and James as the “sons of Zebedee” (John 21:2). Otherwise he is silent about the work of James.

Legends say that James was the first Christian missionary to Spain. Roman Catholic authorities believe that his bones are buried in the city of Santiago in northwestern Spain.

CATACOMB FRESCO. *Dating from A.D. 200–220, this fresco is one of the oldest catacomb paintings yet discovered. It depicts the events of John 21, when seven disciples (i.e., Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples) feasted on bread and fish.*

V. John. Fortunately, we have a considerable amount of information about the disciple named John. Mark tells us he was the brother of James, son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19). Mark says that James and John worked with the “hired servants” of their father (Mark 1:20).

Some scholars speculate that John’s mother was Salome, who observed the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:40). If Salome was the sister of Jesus’ mother, as the Gospel of John suggests (John 19:25), John may have been a cousin of Jesus.

Jesus found John and his brother James mending their nets beside the Sea of Galilee. He ordered them to launch out into the lake and let down their nets to catch fish. They hauled in a tremendous catch—a miracle that convinced them of Jesus’ power. “And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him” (Luke 5:11). Simon Peter went with them.

John seems to have been an impulsive young man. Soon after he and James entered Jesus’ inner circle of disciples, the Master labeled them “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). The disciples seemed to relegate John to a secondary place in their company. All of the Gospels mentioned John after his brother James; on most occasions, it seems, James was the spokesman for the two brothers. When Paul mentions John among the apostles at Jerusalem, he places John at the end of the list (Gal. 2:9).

John’s emotions often erupted in his conversations with Jesus. On one occasion, John became upset because someone else was ministering in Jesus’ name. “We forbade him,” he told Jesus, “because he followeth not us” (Mark 9:38). Jesus replied, “Forbid him not ... For he that is not against us is on our part” (Mark 9:39–40). On another occasion, James and John ambitiously suggested that they should be allowed to sit on Jesus’ right hand in heaven. This idea antagonized the other disciples (Mark 10:35–41).

Yet John’s boldness served him well at the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection. John 18:15 tells us that John “was known unto the high priest.” A Franciscan legend says that John’s family supplied fish to the high priest’s household. This would have made him especially vulnerable to arrest when the high priest’s guards apprehended Jesus. Nevertheless, John was the only apostle who dared to stand at the foot of the cross, and Jesus committed His mother into his care (John 19:26–27). When the disciples heard that Jesus’ body was no longer in the tomb, John



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ran ahead of the others and reached the sepulcher first. However, he allowed Peter to enter the burial chamber ahead of him (John 20:1–4, 8).

If John indeed wrote the fourth Gospel, the letters of John, and the Book of Revelation, he penned more of the New Testament than any of the other apostles. We have no sound reason to doubt John's authorship of these books. (See "Outline of the Books of the Bible.")

Tradition says that John cared for Jesus' mother while he was pastor of the congregation in Ephesus, and that she died there. Tertullian says that John was taken to Rome and "plunged into boiling oil, unhurt, and then exiled on an island." This was probably the island of Patmos, where the Book of Revelation was written. It is believed that John lived to an old age and that his body was returned to Ephesus for burial.

THE LAST SUPPER. *Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) began work in 1496 on what many art critics consider to be his greatest masterpiece. Christ is shown at the center of the table. He has just revealed that one of them would betray Him. The disciples murmur among themselves, wondering which of them would do this (Luke 22:21–23). Judas, the second figure left of center, sits silently and clutches the disciples' purse (cf. John 12:4–6).*

VI. Judas (Not Iscariot). John refers to one of the disciples as "Judas, not Iscariot" (John 14:22). It is not easy to determine the identity of this man. Jerome dubbed him *Trionius*—"the man with three names."

The New Testament refers to several men by the name of Judas—Judas Iscariot (*see below*), Judas the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), and "Judas, not Iscariot." Clearly, John wanted to avoid confusion when he referred to this man, especially because the other disciple named Judas had such a poor reputation.

Matthew refers to this man as Lebbeus, "whose surname was Thaddeus" (Matt. 10:3). Mark refers to him simply as Thaddeus (Mark 3:18). Luke refers to him as "Judas the son of James" (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). The KJV incorrectly translates Luke as saying that this man was the *brother* of James.

We are not sure who Thaddeus's father was. Some think he was James, the brother of Jesus—making Judas a nephew of Jesus. But this is not likely, for early church historians report that this James never married. Others think that his father was the apostle James, son of Zebedee. We cannot be certain.

William Steuart McBirnie suggests that the name Thaddeus was a diminutive form of *Theudas*, which comes from the Aramaic noun *tad*, meaning "breast." Thus, Thaddeus may have been a nickname that literally meant "one close to the breast" or "one beloved." McBirnie believes that the name Lebbeus may be derived from the Hebrew noun *leb*, which means "heart."

The historian Eusebius says that Jesus once sent this disciple to King Abgar of Mesopotamia to pray for his healing. According to this story, Judas went to Abgar after Jesus' ascension to heaven, and he remained to preach in several cities of Mesopotamia. Another tradition says that this disciple was murdered by magicians in the city of Suanir in Persia. It is said that they killed him with clubs and stones.

VII. Judas Iscariot. All of the Gospels place Judas Iscariot at the end of the list of Jesus' disciples. Undoubtedly this reflects Judas's ill repute as the betrayer of Jesus.

The Aramaic word *Iscariot* literally meant "man of Kerioth." Kerioth was a town near Hebron (Josh. 15:25). However, John tells us that Judas was the son of Simon (John 6:71).

If Judas indeed came from the town of Kerioth, he was the only Judean among Jesus' disciples. Judeans despised the people of Galilee as crude frontier settlers. This attitude may have alienated Judas Iscariot from the other disciples.

The Gospels do not tell us exactly when Jesus called Judas Iscariot to join His band of followers. Perhaps it was in the early days when Jesus called so many others (cf. Matt. 4:18–22).

Judas acted as the treasurer of the disciples, and on at least one occasion he manifested a penny-pinching attitude toward their work. When a woman named Mary came to pour rich ointment on the feet of Jesus, Judas complained, "Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence, and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). John comments that Judas said this "not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief" (John 12:6).

As the disciples shared their last meal with Jesus, the Lord revealed that He knew He was about to be betrayed, and He singled out Judas as the culprit. He told Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). However, the other disciples did not suspect what Judas was about to do. John reports that "some of them thought, because Judas had



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the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, 'Buy those things that we have need of against the (Passover) feast ...' " (John 13:28–29).

Scholars have offered several theories about the reason for Judas' betrayal. Some think that he was reacting to Jesus' rebuke when he criticized the woman with the ointment. Others think that Judas acted out of greed for the money that Jesus' enemies offered him.⁶ Luke and John simply say that Satan inspired Judas's actions (Luke 22:3; John 13:27).

Matthew tells us that Judas in remorse attempted to return the money to Jesus' captors: "And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matt. 27:5). A folk legend says that Judas hanged himself on a redbud tree, which is sometimes called the "Judas tree." In most modern works, Judas is portrayed as a zealot or extreme patriot who was disappointed at Jesus' failure to lead a mass movement or rebellion against Rome. There is, as yet, little evidence for this viewpoint.

CHALICE OF ANTIOCH. *This large silver cup (19 cm. or 7 1/2 in. high) was discovered in 1916 at Antioch. At first, many scholars thought this was the actual cup used at the Last Supper. However, subsequent study of the artwork on the cup leads authorities to believe it dates no later than the fourth or fifth centuries A.D. The plain metal lining may be a substitute for an original glass vessel. In 1954, Warner Brothers Studios produced a feature-length film about the story of this cup, entitled "The Silver Chalice," starring Paul Newman and Jack Palance.*

VIII. Matthew. In Jesus' day, the Roman government collected several different taxes from the people of Palestine. Tolls for transporting goods by land or sea were collected by private tax collectors, who paid a fee to the Roman government for the right to assess these levies. The tax collectors made their profits by charging a higher toll than the law required. The licensed collectors often hired minor officials called *publicans* to do the actual work of collecting the tolls. The publicans extracted their own wages by charging a fraction more than their employer required. The disciple Matthew was a publican who collected tolls on the road between Damascus and Accho; his booth was located just outside the city of Capernaum and he may have also collected taxes from the fishermen for their catches.

Normally a publican charged five percent of the purchase price of normal trade items and up to 12.5 percent on luxury items. Matthew also collected taxes from fishermen who worked along the Sea of Galilee and boatmen who brought their goods from cities on the other side of the lake.

The Jews considered a tax collector's money to be unclean so they would never ask for change. If a Jewish man did not have the exact amount that the collector required, he borrowed from a friend. Jewish people despised the publicans as agents of the hated Roman Empire and the puppet Jewish king. Publicans were not allowed to testify in court, and they could not tithe their money to the temple. A good Jew would not even associate with publicans in private life (cf. Matt. 9:10–13).

Yet the Jews divided the tax collectors in two classes. First were the *gabbei*, who levied general agricultural taxes and census taxes from the people. The second group were the *mokhsa*, the officials who collected money from travelers. Most of the *mokhsa* were Jews, so they were despised as traitors to their own people. Matthew belonged to this class of tax collectors.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus approached this unlikely disciple as he sat at his tax table one day. Jesus simply commanded Matthew to "follow me," and Matthew left his work to follow the Master (Matt. 9:9).

Apparently Matthew was fairly well-to-do, because he provided a banquet in his own house. "And there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them" (Luke 5:29). The simple fact that Matthew owned his own house indicates that he was wealthier than the typical publican.

Because of the nature of his work, we feel quite certain that Matthew knew how to read and write. Papyrus tax documents dating from about A.D. 100 indicate that the publicans were quite efficient with figures. (Instead of using the clumsy Roman numerals, they preferred the simpler Greek symbols.)

Matthew may have been related to the disciple James, since each of them is said to have been a "son of Alphaeus" (Matt. 10:3; Mark 2:14). Luke sometimes uses the name Levi to refer to Matthew (cf. Luke 5:27–29). Thus some scholars believe that Matthew's name was Levi before he decided to follow Jesus, and that Jesus gave him the new name, which means "gift of God." Others suggest that Matthew was a member of the priestly tribe of Levi.



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Even though a former publican had joined His ranks, Jesus did not soften His condemnation of the tax collectors. He ranked them with the harlots (cf. Matt. 21:31), and Matthew himself classes the publicans with sinners (Matt. 9:10).

Of all the Gospels, Matthew's has probably been the most influential. Second-century Christian literature quotes from the Gospel of Matthew more than from any other. The church fathers placed Matthew's Gospel at the beginning of the New Testament canon, probably because of the significance they attributed to it. Matthew's account emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It stresses that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who had come to redeem all mankind.

We do not know what happened to Matthew after the day of Pentecost. In his *Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe stated that Matthew spent his last years preaching in Parthia and Ethiopia. Foxe says that Matthew was martyred in the city of Nadabah in A.D. 60. However, we do not know from what source Foxe got this information (other than from medieval Greek sources) and we cannot judge whether it is trustworthy.

IX. Philip. John's Gospel is the only one to give us any detailed information about the disciple named Philip. (This Philip should not be confused with Philip the evangelist—cf. Acts 21:8.)

Jesus first met Philip at Bethany beyond the Jordan River (John 1:28, RSV). It is interesting to note that Jesus called Philip individually while He called most of the other disciples in pairs. Philip introduced Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:45–51), and Jesus also called Nathanael (or Nathanael Bartholomew) to be His disciple.

When 5,000 people gathered to hear Jesus, Philip asked his Lord how they would feed the crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little," he said (John 6:7).

On another occasion, a group of Greek men came to Philip and asked him to introduce them to Jesus. Philip enlisted the help of Andrew and together they took the men to meet Him (John 12:20–22).

While the disciples ate their last meal with Jesus, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). Jesus responded that they had already seen the Father in Him.

These three brief glimpses are all that we see of Philip in the Gospels. The church has preserved many traditions about his later ministry and death. Some say that he preached in France; others that he preached in southern Russia, Asia Minor, or even India. In A.D. 194, Bishop Polycrates of Antioch wrote that "Philip, one of the twelve apostles, sleeps at Hierapolis." However, we have no firm evidence to support these claims.

ST. PETER'S BASILICA. *According to tradition, Peter was executed in the circus of Nero, where thousands of Christians suffered martyrdom. In A.D. 319, Emperor Constantine destroyed the circus and built over its northern foundations the first basilica of Saint Peter. The present structure was started in 1450 and took 176 years to build. Michelangelo designed the magnificent dome. St. Peter's is the largest church building in the world.*

X. Simon Peter. The disciple named Simon Peter was a man of contrasts. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter immediately replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15–16). But seven verses later we read, "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him...." Going from one extreme to another was characteristic of Peter.

When Jesus attempted to wash Peter's feet in the Upper Room, the intemperate disciple exclaimed, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But when Jesus insisted, Peter said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:8–9).

On their last night together, Peter told Jesus, "Although all shall offend thee, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). Yet within hours, Peter not only denied Jesus but cursed Him (Mark 14:71).

This volatile, unpredictable temperament often got Simon Peter into trouble. Yet the Holy Spirit would mold Peter into a stable, dynamic leader of the early church, a "rockman" (*Peter* means "rock") in every sense.

The New Testament writers used four different names in referring to Peter. One is the Hebrew name *Simeon* (Acts 15:14), which may mean "hearing." A second name was *Simon*, the Greek form of Simeon. A third name was *Cephas*, Aramaic for "rock." The fourth name was *Peter*, Greek for "rock"; the New Testament writers apply this name to the disciple more often than the other three.

When Jesus first met this man, He said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas" (John 1:42). Jonah was a Greek name meaning "dove" (cf. Matt. 16:17; John 21:15–17). Some modern translations render this name as "John."



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Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16). He spoke with the accent of a Galilean, and his mannerisms identified him as an uncouth native of the Galilean frontier (cf. Mark 14:70). His brother Andrew led him to Jesus (John 1:40–42).

While Jesus hung on the cross, Peter was probably among the group from Galilee that “stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:49). In 1 Peter 5:1 he wrote, “I ... am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...”

Simon Peter heads the list of apostles in each of the Gospel accounts, which suggests that the New Testament writers considered him to be the most significant of the Twelve. He did not write as much as John or Matthew, but he emerged as the most influential leader of the early church. Though 120 followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Scripture records the words of Peter (Acts 2:14–40). Peter suggested that the apostles find a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:22). And he and John were the first disciples to perform a miracle after Pentecost, healing a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of Jerusalem (Acts 3:1–11).

The Book of Acts emphasizes the travels of Paul, yet Peter also traveled extensively. He visited Antioch (Gal. 2:21), Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11), and perhaps Rome. Eusebius states that Peter was crucified in Rome, probably during the reign of Nero.

Peter felt free to minister to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10) but he is best known as the apostle to the Jews (cf. Gal. 2:8). As Paul took a more active role in the work of the church and as the Jews became more hostile to Christianity, Peter faded into the background of the New Testament narrative.

The Roman Catholic church traces the authority of the Pope back to Peter, for it is alleged that Peter was bishop of the church at Rome when he died. Tradition says that the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome is built over the spot where Peter was buried. Modern excavations under the ancient church demonstrate a very old Roman cemetery and some graves hastily used for Christian burials. A careful reading of the Gospels and the early segment of Acts would tend to support the tradition that Peter was the leading figure of the early church. The tradition that Peter was the leading figure of the apostolic church has strong support.

CAESAREA PHILIPPI. *This town was situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, on the main source of the Jordan River. Here Christ asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter immediately replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).*

XI. Simon Zelotes. Matthew and Mark refer to a disciple named “Simon the Canaanite” (modern translations have “Canaanite,” which is more correct), while Luke and the Book of Acts refer to one named “Simon Zelotes.” These names refer to the same man. *Zelotes* is a Greek word that means “zealous one”; “Canaanite” is an English transliteration of the Aramaic word *kanna’ah*, which also means “zealous one”; thus it appears that this disciple belonged to the Jewish sect known as the Zealots. (See “Jews in New Testament Times.”)

The Scripture does not indicate when Simon Zelotes was invited to join the apostles. Tradition says that Jesus called him at the same time that He called Andrew and Peter, James and John, Judas Iscariot and Thaddeus (cf. Matt. 4:18–22).

We have several conflicting stories about the later ministry of this man. The Coptic church of Egypt says that he preached in Egypt, Africa, Great Britain, and Persia; other early sources agree that he ministered in the British Isles but this is doubtful. Nicephorus of Constantinople wrote: “Simeon born in Cana of Galilee who ... was surnamed Zelotes, having received the Holy Ghost from above, traveled through Egypt and Africa, then Mauretania and Libya, preaching the Gospel. And the same doctrine he taught to the Occidental Sea and the Isles called Britanniae.”

XII. Thomas. The Gospel of John gives us a more complete picture of the disciple named Thomas than we receive from the synoptic Gospels or the Book of Acts. John tells us he was also called Didymus (John 20:4) the Greek word for “twins” just as the Hebrew word *t’hom* means “twin.” The Latin Vulgate used Didymus as a proper name and that style was followed by most English versions until the twentieth century. The RSV and other recent translations refer to him as “Thomas called the Twin.”

We do not know who Thomas might have been, nor do we know anything about his family background or how he was invited to join the apostles. However, we know that Thomas joined six other disciples who returned to the fishing boats after Jesus was crucified (John 21:2–3). This suggested that he may have learned the fishing trade as a young man.

On one occasion Jesus told His disciples that He intended to return to Judea. His disciples warned Him not to go because of the hostility toward Him there. But Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).



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Yet modern readers often forget Thomas's courage; he is more often remembered for his weakness and doubt. In the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." But Thomas retorted, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:4–5). After Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas told his friends, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). A few days later Jesus appeared to Thomas and the other disciples to give them physical proof that He was alive. Then Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

The early church fathers respected the example of Thomas. Augustine commented, "He doubted that we might not doubt."

Tradition says that Thomas eventually became a missionary in India. It is said that he was martyred there and buried in Mylapore, now a suburb of Madras. His name is carried on by the very title of the Marthoma or "Master Thomas" church.

XIII. Judas's Replacement. Following the death of Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter suggested that the disciples choose someone to replace the betrayer. Peter's speech outlined certain qualifications for the new apostle (cf. Acts 1:15–22). The apostle had to know of Jesus "from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us." He also had to be "a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22).

The apostles found two men who met the qualifications: Joseph surnamed Justus and Matthias (Acts 1:23). They cast lots to decide the matter and the lot fell to Matthias.

The name Matthias is a variant of the Hebrew name *Mattathias*, which means "gift of God." Unfortunately, Scripture tells us nothing about the ministry of Matthias. Eusebius speculated that Matthias would have been one of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out on a preaching mission (cf. Luke 10:1–16). Some have identified him with Zaccheus (cf. Luke 19:2–8). One tradition says he preached to cannibals in Mesopotamia; another says he was stoned to death by the Jews. However, we have no evidence to support any of these stories.

Some scholars have suggested that Matthias was disqualified and the apostles chose James the brother of Jesus to take his place (cf. Gal. 1:19; 2:9). But there appear to have been more than 12 men thought of as apostles in the early church and Scripture gives us no indication that Matthias left the group.⁷

SIMON THE ZEALOT (Σίμων ὁ Καναναῖος, *Simōn ho Kananaïos*). One of the twelve apostles.

In the New Testament

Simon the Zealot appears once in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15) and once in the book of Acts (Acts 1:13) in the lists of the twelve apostles.

Simon is a common Greek name, a transliteration of the Hebrew name Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן, *shim'on*).

In Matthew and Mark, Simon is given the title of "Cananaean" (Καναναῖος, *Kananaïos*), which Jerome and other church fathers misinterpreted as "Simon of Cana" (Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 10:2). As a result Simon was identified as the bridegroom present at Jesus' miracle at the wedding feast in John 2, as well as Jesus' brother in Matt 13:55 and in Mark 6:3. The majority text of Matt 10:4 and Mark 3:18 reads Κανανίτης (*Kananitēs*), which occurs in some translations as "Simon the Canaanite" (Matt 10:4 KJV). The standard interpretation among modern scholarship is that the title "Cananaean" is an Aramaic word (ܩܢܢܝܢ, *qan'an*) meaning "zealous one" and is not associated with the land of Canaan or the city of Cana (Hengel, *The Zealots*, 69–70).

Luke gives him the title "Zealot" (ζηλωτής, *zēlōtēs*) in both his Gospel and the book of Acts, implying that Simon was the "zealous one." Both of these titles, Cananaean and Zealot, reflect the author's intention to distinguish between this Simon and the other apostle, Simon Peter.

Dispute over the Meaning of "Zealot"

A common interpretation of the title "Zealot" ascribed to Simon is that, prior to becoming an apostle, he was a member of the radical Jewish faction called the Zealots, who would later revolt against Roman occupation (Brownrigg, *Who's Who*, 413). The revolt began in AD 66 and ended when the Roman general Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in AD 70 (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.10.1).

⁷ Packer, J. I., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., Jr. (1997). *Nelson's illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (pp. 528–539). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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The other popular interpretation of the title “Zealot” is that Simon was formerly zealous for obeying the Mosaic law (Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 206). The Apostle Paul uses the same Greek word (ζηλωτής, *zēlōtēs*) in Gal 1:14, also present in Acts 22:3. In both instances Paul uses it to describe himself as being one who was zealous for Jewish law and tradition.

An argument in favor of understanding the title as “zealous” is that the Zealot party, as a revolutionary movement, did not form until decades after the events recorded in the Gospels (Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 205). It is possible, however, that the Zealot party began as a Jewish group zealous for law and tradition, and years after the Gospels were written, officially became an anti-Roman political party (Mezange, “Simon le Zelote,” 489–506).

Simon the Zealot in Noncanonical Sources

In the noncanonical *Passion of Simon and Jude*, Simon the Zealot is recorded as traveling and preaching as far as Egypt, Persia, and various parts of the Near East and is martyred in Persia (James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 528–29). Perhaps due to this work, in some church traditions Simon became closely identified with the Apostle Jude (who is his traveling companion in the work) and thus the two share the same veneration day in these same church traditions, October 28 (Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 222).

Selected Resources for Further Study

- Brownrigg, Ronald. *Who's Who in the New Testament*. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.
- Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by G. A. Williamson. London: Penguin, 1989.
- Hengel, Martin. *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 AD*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989.
- James, Montague R. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Translated by J. K. Elliot. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Meier, John P. *Companions and Competitors*. Vol. 3 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Mezange, C. “Simon le Zelote etait-il un revolutionnaire?” *Biblica* 81 (2000): 489–506.
- Rose, Els. *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West (ca. 500–1215)*. Leiden: Brill Academic, 2009.

JOHN T. LOWE⁸

The Twelve Apostles

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13
Simon “Peter”	Simon “Peter”	Simon “Peter”	Peter
Andrew	James, son of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James, son of Zebedee	John	James	James
John	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James, son of Alphaeus			
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot

⁸ Lowe, J. T. (2016). [Simon the Zealot](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



Who Are The Apostles?

Week #8: The Final Three: James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Judas not Iscariot(Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Simon the Zealot

Judas, son of James

Judas, son of James

Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot

²⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

XIII. Judas’s Replacement. Following the death of Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter suggested that the disciples choose someone to replace the betrayer. Peter’s speech outlined certain qualifications for the new apostle (cf. Acts 1:15–22). The apostle had to know of Jesus “from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us.” He also had to be “a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).

The apostles found two men who met the qualifications: Joseph surnamed Justus and Matthias (Acts 1:23). They cast lots to decide the matter and the lot fell to Matthias.

The name Matthias is a variant of the Hebrew name *Mattathias*, which means “gift of God.” Unfortunately, Scripture tells us nothing about the ministry of Matthias. Eusebius speculated that Matthias would have been one of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out on a preaching mission (cf. Luke 10:1–16). Some have identified him with Zaccheus (cf. Luke 19:2–8). One tradition says he preached to cannibals in Mesopotamia; another says he was stoned to death by the Jews. However, we have no evidence to support any of these stories.

Some scholars have suggested that Matthias was disqualified and the apostles chose James the brother of Jesus to take his place (cf. Gal. 1:19; 2:9). But there appear to have been more than 12 men thought of as apostles in the early church and Scripture gives us no indication that Matthias left the group.⁹

⁹ Packer, J. I., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., Jr. (1997). *Nelson’s illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (pp. 538–539). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.