

THE 12 DISCIPLES NAMED APOSTLES

The apostles of Christ had the highest position in the Church. They were special representatives with special powers who gave us the New Testament, which was authenticated with supernatural apostolic signs.

Matthew 10:2 (NKJV)

2 Now 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;

Along with the supernatural powers given to them in verse 1 came this special title of “apostle”. The word apostle means “sent one”. It is used in a general sense in the NT and in a technical sense (cf. Lk. 6:13).

Apostle

General Sense: “messengers of the churches” – 2 Cor. 8:23

Technical Sense: “apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” – Jude 17

THE APOSTLES WERE SPECIAL...

1. The Church was founded upon them (Eph. 2:19-20, 3:1-6).
2. Eyewitnesses of the risen Lord (Acts 1:22, 1 Cor. 9:1, 15:7-8, Gal. 1:11-12).
3. Personally chosen and commissioned by Christ (Lk. 6:13, Acts 9:1-6, 15-16, Gal. 1:1).
4. Authenticated by unique miracles (2 Cor. 12:11-12).
5. Spoke for Christ with absolute authority (1 Cor. 14:29-33, Jude 17).
6. All N.T. truth was communicated through them (Jn. 16:13, 17:20, Heb. 2:3-4).
7. The 12 have an eternal place of special honor (Rev. 21:14).

Anyone who today claims to be an apostle of Christ in the technical sense of the word is a false teacher and a LIAR.

Even in the early church, people falsely claiming to be an apostle was a problem. Christ gave this message to John, the last living real apostle of Christ, who relayed this to the church at Ephesus towards the end of his life.

Revelation 2:2 (NKJV)

2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you **cannot bear those who are evil.** And you have **tested** those who **say they are apostles and are not**, and have found them **liars**;

People who falsely claim to be apostles need to be called out for the liars they are, and Christ approves of this message!

Christ chose 12 special disciples who learned from Him personally, and then He further empowered them to do “kingdom miracles” in His name, and with that power came the title of “apostle,” designating them as Christ’s very special authoritative representatives. And then the 12 are named.

The apostles are listed in Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:12-18.

The lists uniformly always name Peter first and Judas Iscariot as last. And there are consistently three groupings of four, although the names are not always in uniform order. And it seems that they may be named in pairs – perhaps because, as it says in Mark 6:7, they were sent out “two by two”.

The text says, “***first, Simon, who is called Peter***”. Peter is always named first in all 4 listings that we have in Scripture. The word FIRST here we believe emphasizes his prominence among the apostles. Peter was a leader of leaders. The word “first” here denotes him as “first among equals”.

“In Matthew 10:2, the first does not refer to the order of selection, because Jesus called Andrew, Peter’s brother, before He called Peter (John 1:40-42). In this context, protos (first) indicates foremost in rank. The apostles were equal in their divine commission, authority, and power; and one day they will sit on equal thrones as they judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). But in terms of function, Peter was the first, the foremost member of the twelve. ... No group can function properly without a leader, and Peter was the leading member of the twelve from the beginning.” – ***John MacArthur***

Peter is called “the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth”. No one is rebuked by the Lord more than Peter (perhaps because he was always talking). But Peter also had the great confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). But then he turned right around and rebuked the Lord for talking about getting killed only to hear Jesus say, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (Mt. 16:23). Peter sincerely said he was willing to die for Christ and whipped out his sword to prove it – but then he also denied the Lord and was restored in the resurrection.

Peter had a good heart, and he had passion – it's just that his mouth got him in trouble. And so, the Lord went to work on him and in the end used him greatly. John MacArthur wrote a book about the apostles titled “Twelve Ordinary Men,” and that is what they were. God took 12 ordinary men and used them in an extraordinary way. God specializes in this.

Andrew was Peter's brother, and he was more of a quiet figure. But it was he who brought Peter to Jesus (cf. Jn. 1:35-42). Both Peter and Andrew were fishermen by trade in terms of background.

After naming Peter and his brother Andrew, **James** the son of Zebedee and his brother **John** are named.

These brothers too were fishermen who worked with their father Zebedee. James became the first apostolic martyr as seen in Acts 12:2. Jesus gave James and John the nickname “Sons of Thunder” (Mk. 3:17). They evidently had motorcycles! 😊 But seriously, this evidently speaks of their aggressive nature (cf. Lk. 9:54-56).

John went on to write 5 books in the NT (the gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3rd John, and the book of Revelation). And with his great emphasis on LOVE, he became known as “the apostle of love”. Even so, John's style is to write in black and white. For example, John says, “we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3); and again, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” (1 Jn. 3:14)

“From reading John, one might think that righteousness comes so easily and naturally to the Christian that every failure would be enough to shatter our assurance completely. That is why when I read heavy doses of John, I sometimes have to turn to Paul's epistles just to find some breathing space. Of course, both Paul's and John's epistles are inspired Scripture, and both emphases are necessary. The exceptions dealt with by Paul don't nullify the truths stated so definitively by John. And the relentlessly unequivocal statements of John don't rule out the careful qualifications given by Paul. Both are necessary aspects of God's revealed truth.”

– **John MacArthur**

Next we have named as apostles...

Matthew 10:3 (NKJV)

3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;

It was Philip who brought Nathanael to Jesus (cf. Jn. 1:43-46). Furthermore, many think that another name for Nathanael is Bartholomew. When the apostles are listed, Philip and Bartholomew are always linked together, and because of this some think they were either close friends or perhaps related. It was Bartholomew, otherwise known as Nathanael, that Jesus paid tribute to in John 1:47.

John 1:47 (NKJV)

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”**

Thomas is also called “Didymus,” which means “Twin” (cf. Jn. 11:16; 21:2). He is often called “**Doubting Thomas**” because he refused to believe in the resurrected Christ without being able to personally see him. However, upon seeing Jesus, he made the climactic confession of faith in the gospel of John, as seen in John 20:28.

John 20:28 (NKJV)

28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, **“My Lord and my God!”**

“Let those who question the deity of Christ meet Thomas.” (John MacArthur)

Matthew the tax collector (by background) is only labeled this way in the gospel of Matthew – written by Matthew. That shows humility and emphasizes the great grace he experienced in salvation – being brought from the most despised position in Jewish thinking to the most honored position as an apostle.

James the son of Alphaeus is mentioned only in the lists of the apostles. Isn't it great that God also chooses “nobodies” who are basically unknown and yet also have an important purpose in the calling of God?

Labbaeus was chosen, whose surname (family name) was Thaddaeus. Labbaeus it appears, actually went by three names: Labbaeus, Thaddaeus, and Judas (not Iscariot) (cf. Lk. 6:16; Jn. 14:22; Acts 1:13). The word Thaddaeus means beloved. It is surmised that he may have been called “Judas the beloved” to distinguish him from Judas the betrayer. And then there was...

Matthew 10:4 (NKJV)

4 Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

Simon the Cananite is rendered in the older manuscripts as “Simon the Cananean,” which is the Aramaic form of the word “Zealot” (cf. Acts 1:13).

Luke 6:15 (NKJV)

15 Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and **Simon called the Zealot;**

It is thought that prior to his conversion this Simon belonged to the militant sect called “the Zealots”. In a militant way they sought to free Judaism from Rome. They were fanatic about it and willing to die for it. They lynched people whom they considered traitors. Prior to his conversion, a Zealot like Simon would have sought the death of a Jewish tax collector like Matthew.

Think about this. What a motley crew. In terms of background, Jesus chose as His apostles ordinary fisherman, a despised tax collector, and a passionate Zealot. Only the Lord could take this mix and make them into an apostolic band that became so united in Christ they were all willing to die for Jesus. Jesus Himself was their bond! Their unity was found in Jesus. He changed their lives.

And finally, there was “Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.” What an amazing thing – Judas too was called an apostle. Most believe that Iscariot means “man of Kerioth” which was a town in Judah, making Judas Iscariot the only apostle to hail from the region of Judah (cf. Jn. 6:71; 13:26). The rest of the disciples were Galileans.

Amazingly, Judas Iscariot (the betrayer) also received authority to perform miracles. Judas not only saw Christ perform unparalleled miracles, but he also did kingdom miracles himself.

Yet, in spite of it all, his heart remained unchanged. He is called “the son of perdition” (Jn. 17:12), which literally means “son of destruction”. In John 6:70, speaking of Judas, Jesus said to His disciples, “and one of you is a devil”. Jesus said it would have been better for him never to have been born (cf. Mt. 26:24; Mk. 14:21).

This serves to remind us that no matter how close to the things of God; no matter how close to miracles and the power of God; yet that does not necessarily result in conversion. Hebrews 6 and 10 both warn about those who are intimately in contact with the things of God and yet do not enter in.

Jesus said that if people are not converted by the Word of God neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead (cf. Lk. 16:31).

Judas had every opportunity, but his heart remained hard. Oh, he played the part of the hypocrite very well. All the time he was really in the movement for what he could get out of it. He liked the popularity. He liked the kingdom talk. But he never really loved Jesus for being Jesus. And when Jesus started talking about dying instead of the kingdom, Judas sought to get out of it what he could for SELF. If the “kingdom movement was over,” he figured he might as well salvage a few shekels out of his position and then move on. The LORD of Judas was SELF and not Jesus!

Judas was a first-hand witness of Jesus' life and miracles. He himself did kingdom miracles. He heard all the warnings, he knew the message well, and yet he is an example of one who went to hell with his hand on the doorknob of heaven – so to speak. So close and yet so far!

“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.” – **John MacArthur**