

The Twelve Disciples
Matthew 10:1-4
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

Matthew 10 contains the summoning of the twelve disciples for their commission to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom to the Jewish people. After teaching the disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest,” Jesus sends these twelve disciples to do this work. The entirety of chapter 10 contains the teaching of Jesus to the twelve that He was sending so they would be prepared for their mission. Matthew 10:1-4 contains one of four lists of the disciples of Christ.

The twelve disciples commissioned (10:1)

The only disciples previously named in Matthew’s Gospel were “*Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother,*” (Matthew 4:18), “*two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother*” (Matthew 4:21) and Matthew himself (Matthew 9:9). Now we see the group of twelve disciples mentioned for the first time. They would be now known as the twelve disciples throughout the book (Matthew 10:5; 11:1; 20:17; 26:14, 20). This was such a defined group that even after Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5) and there were only eleven disciples left, they are still referred to by the title “the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5).

These twelve disciples were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. Later in Matthew, these twelve are told that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel, “*Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’*” (Matthew 19:28). Thus they are presented as the leaders of the nation of Israel when the Lord returns in glory in His kingdom.

Jesus took the initiative to call His disciples (Matthew 4:18-22) and now Jesus summoned them, which communicates His authority, as a king would summon people. He commissions them by extending His authority to them. This authority is even over the evil one, as Jesus “*gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out.*” This corresponds to the work of Jesus to cast out demons (Matthew 4:24; 8:16, 28-34; 9:32-34).

This authority that He gave to these twelve is described by using the exact phrase that was used of Jesus in Matthew 9:35, *“healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”* This is the embryonic stage of the establishment of the apostles as the leaders of the church, who go out in the power of the Holy Spirit to perform various miracles.

“After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:3-4).

By healing and casting out demons, the apostles demonstrated that they carried the authority that Christ imparted to them. They will be His leaders in the kingdom of God and because Israel rejected the Messiah, they became His foundational leaders of the church.

For the first time in human history, God sent One with the authority to delegate miraculous powers to others. Certain earlier prophets, such as Moses or Elijah, had miraculous powers that resided with them until their passing. One of the many unique aspects of Jesus’ ministry was the empowerment of the disciples to do some of the same miracles themselves.

The twelve apostles catalogued (10:2-4)

Matthew 10:2-4 lists the names of the twelve disciples. When Matthew lists these names he calls them “apostles,” which is the only time in his Gospel where he uses this technical term “apostle” to describe any of these men. Obviously Judas Iscariot was not one of the twelve apostles in the sense of those who were the foundation of the church (cf. Ephesians 2:20). Judas was replaced by Matthias according to Acts 1:15-26.

Matthew calls the twelve “apostles” in the sense of its basic sense of “sent ones,” and not the technical position of apostles as an authority in the church. The church had not begun at this point in time and so this was only a foreshadowing of the role they would take once Jesus ascended into heaven. It is in the sense of being sent that Judas was an apostle. This usage of the term apostle is seen elsewhere in the New Testament where certain individuals who do not hold the office of apostle are nevertheless called apostles in the sense that they are being sent out (Acts 14:4, 14; Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 2:18; 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

This list of the twelve in Matthew 10:2-4 appears also in Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13. Each list is slightly different:

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
Simon, called Peter Andrew James John Philip Bartholomew Thomas Matthew James of Alphaeus Thaddeus Simon the Zealot Judas Iscariot	Simon, called Peter James John Andrew Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas James of Alphaeus Thaddeus Simon the Zealot Judas Iscariot	Simon, called Peter Andrew James John Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas James of Alphaeus Simon the Zealot Judas of James Judas Iscariot	Simon, called Peter John James Andrew Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew James of Alphaeus Simon the Zealot Judas of James

- Though differently arranged, the first four names are the same in all lists.
- The four lists are all divided into three groups of four; the names in each group are identical in all lists, though arranged differently.
- The first name in each group is the same in each list (Peter, Philip, James).
- Judas Iscariot is the last name in all the lists where he is included.
- Matthew lists them in groups of two with the conjunction “and” as they will be sent out “two by two” (cf. Mark 6:7).

Below is a brief summary of each person listed:

1. Peter

Peter is listed first in all four lists of disciples. He was the brother of Andrew and a fisherman from Bethsaida by trade (Matthew 4:18; John 1:44). He was married and his mother-in-law was healed in Matthew 8:14-15. He is featured prominently in the Gospel and served as the spokesman for the disciples. He authored two Bible books, First and Second Peter. The Gospel of Mark is considered to be influenced by Peter based upon a comparison of the material included and Peter’s preaching. The Book of Acts follows his ministry through the first twelve chapters. In Acts 15, Peter, with James, functions as the leading voice of the Jerusalem church. Early Christian writers (Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons) place Peter in Rome and abundant tradition reports that he was crucified in Rome.

2. Andrew

Andrew was the brother of Peter and also a fisherman. He was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, who led him and another unnamed disciple to Jesus (John 1:35-37). Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and brought his brother to Jesus (John 1:40-42).

Andrew is not nearly as prominent as his brother in the New Testament but we find him with the inner circle of Peter, James and John, privately questioning Jesus in Mark 13:3. He was also involved in the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:8-9). In John 12:20-22, we find Philip needing Andrew to ask Jesus about certain Greeks who were going to worship. Tradition holds that he visited many areas in Europe and was martyred by crucifixion in the Greek city of Patras.

3. James

James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee, was the first apostle to be martyred when Herod had him put to death with a sword in Jerusalem, according to Acts 12:2. He, along with Peter and John, formed the closest group of disciples to Jesus. James is seen with Peter and John in key moments in the Gospels: the raising of Jarius' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:51-55), the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8), and in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37).

When we compare the list of women who observed the crucifixion in Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and John 19:25, we see a probable identification of the mother of James and John being named Salome and being also the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Assuming that these passages refer to the same person, then James and John would be Jesus' cousins.

4. John

John, the son of Zebedee, was likely the younger brother of James, as he is typically listed second. He authored the Gospel of John, the three Epistles that bear his name, and the book of Revelation. As seen with his brother, he was part of the inner circle of Jesus. He outlived all the other apostles and was the only one not to be martyred, dying in exile on the Greek island of Patmos.

In the Gospel of John, it is commonly considered that an unnamed disciple is John himself. He is called "the disciples that Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7). This is likely also the unnamed disciple following Jesus into the palace of the high priest when Jesus was arrested (John 18:15), was at the foot of the cross of Jesus (John 19:26) and an early witness to the resurrection (John 20:2; 21:7).

5. Philip

The Gospel of John records the calling of Philip as a disciple of Jesus in John 1:43-46, *“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’”*

The Gospel of John features Philip unlike the synoptic Gospels. We learn he would have had a prior relationship with Peter and Andrew, being from the same town. John records Jesus’ testing of Philip when He asks how the 5,000 could be fed (John 6:5-7). In John 12:21-22, Philip tells Andrew about the Greeks who plan to worship at the feast and joins Andrew in reporting this to Jesus. The final time we see Philip is at the Last Supper, where he asks Jesus to show them the Father (John 14:8). This leads Jesus to teach them about the unity of the Father and the Son (John 14:9-21).

Philip the apostle should not be confused with the Philip we see bringing the gospel to Samaria in Acts 8:4-40. Philip of Acts 8 was one of the seven who were summoned by the twelve apostles to solve the conflict of the widows being overlooked in the serving of food (Acts 6:17-7).

6. Bartholomew

Bartholomew is only mentioned in the lists of the twelve disciples. Many people believe Bartholomew is the Nathaniel that was introduced to Jesus by Philip in John 1:45. The reasons this link is made include (1) in each Synoptic list, Bartholomew follows immediately after Philip; (2) Nathaniel is spoken of highly by Jesus in John 1:47-51, leading people to consider him worthy as an apostle; (3) Nathaniel is with six of the other twelve disciples to witness the resurrected Christ in John 21:2-14. However, there is no clear biblical evidence to conclude Bartholomew and Nathaniel were the same person.

In the early 300s, Eusebius, in his history of the church, described Bartholomew as a missionary to India. Jerome in the late 400s supported this. Tradition holds that Bartholomew joined Thaddeus in establishing the church in Armenia.

7. Thomas

As with Philip, the source for additional information about Thomas comes from the Gospel of John. In John 11:16, Thomas is referred to as “*who is called Didymus.*” Didymus means “twin” in Greek and we do not have any information about who his twin might have been. Indeed, the name Thomas is derived from a word that means “twin” in both Hebrew and Aramaic.

Thomas is typically known as “doubting Thomas” for the story about him in John 20:24-29, where he refuses to believe that Jesus rose from the dead until he touched Jesus’ side. Yet Jesus allows Thomas to become convinced and Thomas responds with a declarative statement regarding Jesus’ deity, “*My Lord and My God*” (John 20:28). Thomas was courageous in his willingness to follow Jesus unto death (John 11:16) and was one of the group of disciples who saw the resurrected Christ in John 21. Tradition considers him a missionary to India, where he was martyred with a spear.

8. Matthew

Only in Matthew’s Gospel does Matthew refer to himself as “*the tax collector,*” as the other lists list just his name and not his occupation. He is also called Levi, as we see in the accounts of his calling by Jesus in both Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27, with Matthew being his Greek name and Levi being his Jewish name.

He is unique among the disciples in his occupation. A tax collector would be despised by other Jewish disciples, particularly Simon the Zealot (a faction devoted to the overthrow of the Roman occupation). Clearly, the devotion of the disciples to Jesus overcame any animosity they had toward tax collectors.

By including someone like Matthew as a disciple, Jesus elevated a person’s present state over their past allegiances. Matthew humbly notes his past occupation in this Gospel, while other writers ignore his past.

9. James the son of Alphaeus

James the son of Alphaeus is listed with the identifier “son of Alphaeus” in each list of disciples (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13). This is to distinguish him from other people named James in the New Testament. Particularly, this distinguishes him from James, the brother of John, whose father was named Zebedee. Matthew’s father was also named Alphaeus in Mark 2:14 but there is no clear reason to conclude they must be brothers, and unlike the other brothers in Matthew’s list, James and Matthew are not linked by a conjunction.

Some people believe that James the son of Alphaeus is the same person as James the brother of Jesus. This is a view associated with Catholicism, which views James the brother of Jesus as a cousin in light of their doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. This is highly dubious since brother should not be read as cousin and James the brother of Jesus was referred to by his relationship with Jesus, not by his father.

A more likely possibility is to connect James the son of Alphaeus with a person referred to as “James the Less” (NASB, KJV) or “the younger” (ESV, NIV) in Mark 15:40, “*There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome.*” This Mary is at Christ’s crucifixion (cf. 27:56; Luke 24:10). The term “less” may mean younger or possibly shorter or less prominent.

10. Thaddeus

Thaddeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18) is another name for Judas the son of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). As we’ve seen elsewhere in the New Testament, people were called by more than one name. We see this also with the disciples where Simon was also known as Cephas, which translated means Peter (John 1:42). Also, Matthew was known as Levi in Mark 2:14 and in Luke 5:27.

The King James Version calls Thaddeus “and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus” in Matthew 10:3. This most likely resulted from a manuscript transcription error that conflated Thaddeus with Lebbaeus.

There is some debate about whether Thaddeus was a surname, as some call him Judas Thaddeus. More likely, it is a nickname. The literal translation in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 would be “Judas of James,” leading some to view this person as the brother of Jesus. However, this is how descendants were referred to, not brothers.

Catholicism generally considers Thaddeus or Judas to be the cousin of Jesus and the author of the Epistle of Jude, as they believe Jesus had no brothers (contra Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Jesus had a brother named Judas and this is impossible given that this Judas’ father would have been Joseph, not James.

Thaddeus, or Judas, is only mentioned outside of the lists of disciples once in the Bible, in John 14:22, “*Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?’*” This question precipitated the lengthy discourse by Jesus in the upper room from John 14:23-17:26. Beyond this, all that is known about Thaddeus rests on various traditional accounts. The church in Armenia claims to be founded by this apostle.

11. Simon the Zealot

Simon is referred to as Simon the Canaanite in the King James Version and some other Bible translations (RSV, ASV, The Message) in Matthew 10:4 (and in Mark 3:18). This translation leads to the conclusion that Simon was from the land of Cana in Galilee and was a Gentile. This is certainly erroneous for Simon the Canaanite is the same person called Simon the Zealot in Luke 6:15 and in Acts 1:13. The translation “Canaanite” comes from the Hebrew word KANA which means “ardent” or “fervent” and is a synonym for being zealous. Matthew and Mark used this Hebrew word for the Zealots while Luke used the Greek word ZELOTES since he wrote to a Greek reader, Theophilus (Luke 1:3).

The Zealots were the fourth political party in first century Judea (along with the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes). Their goal was the overthrow of the occupying Roman military. Simon, as a member of this group, would not be a Canaanite or likely to associate with Gentiles, much less tax collectors such as Matthew. This again shows the diverse nature of the disciples who joined together in following Jesus.

12. Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot is always listed last in each list in which he is included, as he is unique in his betrayal of Jesus. Each Gospel account repeatedly describes Judas with versions of the description “the betrayer.”

What is remarkable about Judas is that Jesus knowingly chose him and even sent him out with the other eleven. *“For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him....Jesus answered them, ‘Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?’ Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him”* (John 6:64, 70-71). This fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, *“But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets”* (Matthew 26:54; cf. Psalm 41:9; Zechariah 11:12-13). It also illustrates the tares that will exist among the wheat among the followers of Jesus (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

Conclusion

The list of the twelve disciples are diverse men. Many were fishermen with little experience to think they could be the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus selected men who would demonstrate His power rather than their ability.