

The Twelve Apostles: Fact & Legend

(The Apostle Text Lists: Matthew 10:2ff; Luke 6:13ff; Acts 1:13ff)

1. **Andrew:** Andrew is a Greek name. He was the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew was also one of the first (i.e., *protokletos*) disciples of Jesus. He lived in BETH-SAIDA (the capital city of Herod Philip located to the NE of the Sea of Galilee). Philip was said to have re-built the city Bethsaida Julias, after the daughter of Caesar Augustus. This city was inhabited by both Jews and Gentiles at the time of Christ. According to the text, Andrew was originally a follower of John the Baptist (John 1:35ff). Andrew later moved to the city of Capernaum where it is thought that he became a fisherman. It was Andrew that brought his brother (Simon Peter) to the LORD and introduced him. From the Johannine story one would conclude that Andrew was a conscientious Jew, who had repented radically under the preaching of John the Baptist, and was eagerly awaiting the “messianic age.” Tradition is colorful as to the apostle’s post-resurrection involvement.

Fate: It is said is Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiae* III.1 that Scythia (the region N of the Black Sea) was allotted to Andrew as his field of labor. He is thus understandably become the patron saint of Russia. Another source (the apocryphal *Acts of Andrew*) represent him as evangelizing and suffering martyrdom by crucifixion in Achaia (Greece). Still another legend states that his body was carried to Constantinople and during the Crusades transferred to Amalfi Italy. It is even claimed that his arm was transported by Regulus to Scotland, where he also became the patron saint.

2. **Bartholomew (Nathaniel?):** His name appears in three lists, (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) immediately after Philip. Church tradition makes Bartholomew a missionary to various countries and explains his death in different ways. Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiae* V.x.3) reports that he preached the gospel in India and left behind the Gospel of Matthew “in actual Hebrew characters.” Armenia, Phrygia, Lycaonia, Mesopotamia, and Persia also have been claimed as the scenes of his labors. He is said to have evangelized with Philip and Thomas. St. Jerome believed that Bartholomew was the only one of the twelve to be of noble birth; however, the text does not give any details of such.

Fate: Form of death is unknown.

3. **James, Son of Alphaeus:** (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Perhaps the same identity known as “the Younger,” (Mark 15:40); however, there is much difficulty in explicating this relationship. We know little of this man outside the mention of his name in the gospels. He is often coupled with Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot. As Matthew, or Levi, is also called the son of Alphaeus (cf. Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14), he may possibly be a brother of Matthew.

Fate: Legend says that James was of the house of Gad, was stoned by the Jews for preaching Christ, and was buried by the sanctuary in Jerusalem.

4. **James:** Brother of John, called *boonerges*, meaning “sons of thunder,” perhaps because of a fiery temper (Mark 3:17; 9:38; Luke 9:54). Son of Zebedee and Salome (Matthew 20:20; 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1). From Bethsaida, later lived in Capernaum. Occupation, fisherman. He preached in Judea. Note... If Salome, the wife of Zebedee, was sister to Mary (John 19:25), then James and John were first cousins to Jesus.

Fate: The first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2). Was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I ca. 26-44 AD (Acts 12:1-2).

5. **John:** Brother of James, called *boonerges*, meaning “sons of thunder.” (Same refs. As above). Son of Zebedee and Salome (Matthew 20:20; 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1). From Bethsaida, later lived in Capernaum. Wrote the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation. He labored in Jerusalem and from Ephesus among the churches of Asia Minor. Note... If Salome, the wife of Zebedee, was sister to Mary (John 19:25), then James and John were first cousins to Jesus.

Fate: Was banished to Patmos in the reign of Nero or of Domitian; was released and died a natural death at Ephesus under Trajan.

6. **Matthew:** (Appears in the list of disciples and then disappears from the text of the NT). Only in the book of Matthew is the name Levi mentioned. Most famous for being a tax collector (called a *Publican* in KJV), thus hated by the Jews. Papias attested that Matthew ‘compiled the oracles’ *synegrapso ta logia* in Hebrew, was taken by the early church as evidence that Matthew was the author of the Gospel which had been handed down as ‘according to Matthew.’ If Matthew was Levi, he was in the service of Herod Antipas near or at Capernaum. It was his duty to appropriate levy on merchandise carried over the Damascus-Acre road and perhaps to tax the fishing and other industries of the area.

Fate: Tradition is not in agreement as to what happened to the apostle. L. M. Petersen in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* notes... “It is interesting that after his name appears in the list of the apostles, Matthew disappears from the history of the church as recorded in the NT.” Late legend dramatized his death by fire or the sword. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* thinks: “Matthew, otherwise named Levi, first of a publican made an apostle, wrote his Gospel to the Jews in the Hebrew tongue. After he had converted to the faith Ethiopia and all Egypt, Hircanus, their king, sent one to run him through with a spear.” Truthfully, we have no accurate record of Matthew’s fate.

7. **Philip:** Matthew, Mark and Luke record nothing about him except his name. He was from Bethsaida and probably was a fisherman. Philip may have been a brother to Nathaniel (Bartholomew) see: John 1:40-41; 43-45. The Gospel of John provides us with all that is known of Philip. Philip brought Nathaniel to see Jesus (John 1:45-46). He was involved in the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:5-7). Philip preached in Asia Minor and was martyred in Hierapolis, Phrygia.

Fate: There is much conflict concerning his manner of death. Legend says he was stripped, pierced in the ankles and thighs and hung head down. The Foxe's Book of Martyrs said he was even stoned to death after his ordeal on the cross. Tradition says that his daughters were buried with him. His relics are in the Church of the Apostles at Rome. In the Roman Church his feast is celebrated May 1; in the Greek Church November 14. His symbol is a cross with a loaf of bread on either side (John 6:7).

8. **Simon / Peter:** Called Peter and Cephas, both mean "rock," (Mark 3:16; John 1:42). He was son of Jonas (or John – John 1:42; 21:15) Brother of Andrew. Accredited to having written 1 & 2 Peter. He was the first leader of the Christian Church (Acts 1-15; Galatians 2:9). Attested from Bethsaida. Occupation, fisherman. Later lived in Capernaum. Preached in Judea. Peter is called *protos* denoting chief or leader.

Fate: Death in Rome? Tradition acclaims that he was crucified upside down because he did not want to be considered worthy to be killed in the same manner as the LORD.

9. **Thaddaeus:** (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). Known also as Judas, son (or brother?) of James (Acts 1:13). And ...called Judas (not Iscariot) in John 14:22. Tradition is unclear on this apostle.

Fate: Unknown.

10. **Thomas:** (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). From Galilee? Sometimes called "doubting Thomas" by his inference that he had to see for himself the resurrected Master before he would believe (John 20:24ff). Post-resurrection missionary work by the apostle is by far, vague. Eusebius quoting Origen thought that the apostle may have worked in Parthia. In the questionable work of The Acts of Thomas (a book of the Apocrypha that tells how the world was partitioned by lot as a mission field by the disciples) noted that perhaps the apostle's lot fell on India.

Fate: Foxe (i.e., Book of Martyrs) states: "*Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes and Persians, also to the Carmanians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians and Magians. He suffered in Calamina, a city of India, being slain with a dart.*"

11. **Simon, the Zealot:** (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Simon's recognition is understood in the fact that he was an 'enthusiast' who worked to plan the over-throw of the Roman government in Palestine. Violence was more than often employed in their process to purge the country of the un-holy enemy. He was selected by Jesus for apostleship; however, after his name appears on the list of apostles, he disappears from the NT.

Fate: Some early Christian writers identified him with Simeon, son of Clopas, who was said by Hegesippus to have become successor to James as head of the Jerusalem church; however, this is only conjecture. Another source (i.e., Foxe suggest: "Simon the apostle, called Cananeus and Zelotes, preached in Mauritania, in the country of Africa, and in Britain: he was likewise crucified."

12. **Judas, called Iscariot:** The betrayer of Jesus. It is probable that Judas was an important member of the apostolic circle. In lists of the disciples, he is always placed last (a literary device) to show utter contempt by early Christianity for his betrayal of Christ.

Fate: Judas' end is shrouded in the same obscurity as the events leading up to it. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible cites: *The manner of death of Judas was much commented on by early Christian preachers and writers, who introduced all sorts of gruesome details to make the death more horrible. The two NT accounts agree only that Judas died violently as a consequence of his perfidy and that the plot of ground in Jerusalem was purchased and became known as the "Field of Blood" as a result of his acts.*

Judas Iscariot's Replacement

Matthias (Judas Iscariot's Replacement) The disciple selected by lot (Acts 1:26) to replace Judas Iscariot. The qualifications necessary for being a candidate for apostleship was that *the person must have "accompanied" Jesus and the apostles from the days when John baptized to the time of Jesus' resurrection* (B. H. Throckmorton, Jr., IDB).

Fate: According to Eusebius and Epiphanius, Matthias was one of the seventy disciples. There was also another tradition that he preached in Judea and was stoned to death by the Jews. Yet another early apocryphal gospel thought he was later believed to have suffered martyrdom (cf. *Mengolium Graece* III.198).

Sources:

Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980).

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977).