

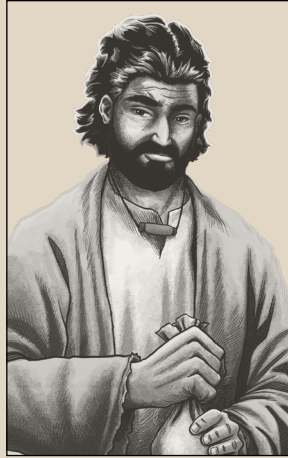
The Twelve Apostles

Introduction

The Twelve continue to be a source of inspiration, emulation, and even devotion. Because of this, names like James and John are still popular today, not to mention Philip, Peter, Matthew, and Thomas. As we pause to get acquainted with them, we may be surprised to find them ordinary. They were nothing special. They were not high achievers or decorated graduates of ivy league schools. But neither were they asleep. When the Messiah arrived, they were paying attention. They were available and willing to alter their lives in order to follow him.

These are the twelve he appointed: *Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:16-19).*

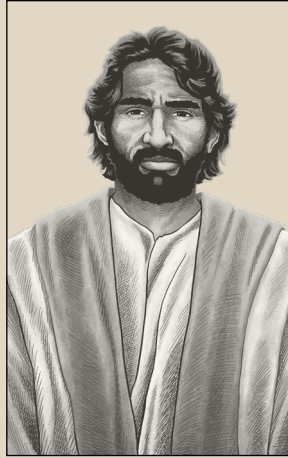
Jesus chose them to be on the team, to travel with him and support his itinerant teaching ministry. They could not have known when they signed up what was in store for them. They could not have known that his plans far exceeded their wildest dreams. The Messiah was establishing his kingdom on the planet, and these twelve men would lay the foundation of his church, establishing what would become the single most influential enterprise in human history, the Christian Church.



Judas Iscariot

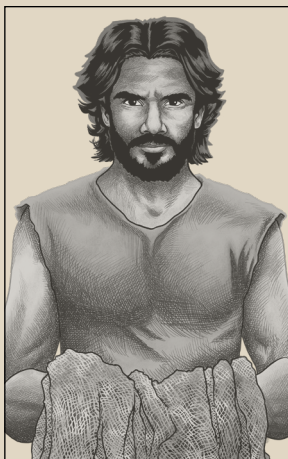
The Traitor

Here is a truly tragic character. Every time his name is mentioned, the description “the one who betrayed Jesus” or “the traitor” is added. His name refers to the village he was from, Kerioth. He was the only apostle who was not from Galilee. It is likely that Judas had political hopes for Jesus, wanting him to fulfill the image of the Messiah that most Jews were anticipating; a triumphant military leader who would win the nation’s autonomy back. Sadly, when Jesus disappointed his expectations, he chose to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. After the crucifixion, and before the resurrection, he took his own life.



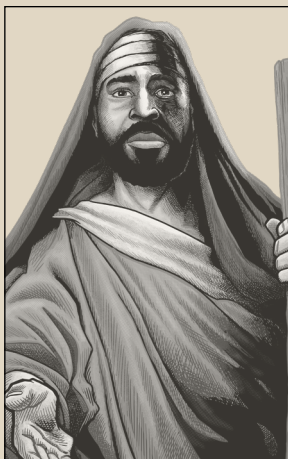
Andrew

About half of the disciples were fishermen by trade, and Andrew, Peter's little brother, was among the first to follow Jesus. Something about the profession seemed to have prepared these men for the task Jesus had for them; *"Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:19). Andrew was actually following John the Baptist when he first encountered Jesus, and he was excited to tell his older brother, *"We have found the Messiah!"* Once Peter joined the group, he took center stage among the disciples, and Andrew seemed happy to slip into the shadows. Tradition tells us Andrew took the Gospel north, maybe as far as Russia, before he was crucified on an X shaped cross. He is the patron saint of Scotland, and St. Andrew's Cross is the official symbol of that country.



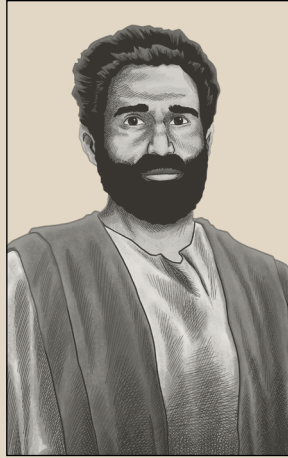
Peter

Simon Peter was the undisputed leader of the group. Jesus sensed an exceptional quality in him and directed him through a process of spiritual awakening, testing, and developing the blend of humility and audacity necessary to launch the church in Jerusalem. From there, the mission of the church would proceed as Jesus predicted, to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Peter is well known for his blunt talk style, which preceded his thoughts every time. This was painfully demonstrated on the night before the crucifixion, when he ardently rejected the claim that he would deny Jesus three times. Peter took his own ministry from Jerusalem to Antioch and eventually on to Rome. Early church historians report that he was martyred in Rome under the reign of the Emperor Nero.



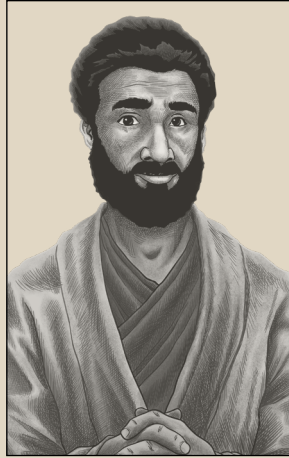
John

John, who referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” wrote a large portion of our New Testament including his own gospel, three letters to the early church, and most likely, the book of Revelation. John and his older brother, James, abandoned their father’s fishing business to follow Jesus. He was the only disciple who stayed with Jesus in his darkest hour, comforting his mother Mary at the foot of the cross. According to legend, John took Mary with him to live in Ephesus sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem. Apparently the only disciple who was not martyred, he lived a long life, suffering persecution and even exile on the Island of Patmos. There he received the vision of the “apocalypse,” or “Revelation” in English.



Philip

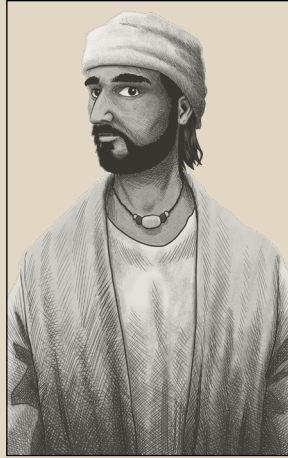
Also from the town of Bethsaida, Philip had probably attended synagogue with Peter and Andrew from childhood. When Jesus called him to become a disciple, he immediately found his friend Nathanael, and invited him to meet Jesus as well. Because his name is strikingly Greek, and he is later approached by some Greek people who want to meet Jesus, some historians wonder if his family had been more open to a Hellenistic influence. Apocryphal stories abound of Philip's mission work as far afield as France, before he ended up in Hierapolis in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), where he was martyred. Archeologists discovered what is believed to be his tomb in 2011, though his remains have long since been removed.



Bartholomew

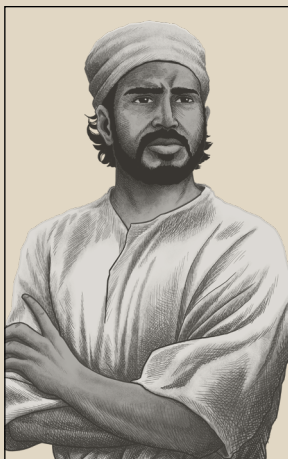
aka Nathanael

Nathanael's surname was Bartholomew, meaning "Son of Tolmai," and his friends often used that name for him. When Philip first told him that he had found the Messiah, he replied, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Bartholomew was from Cana, a town very close to Nazareth, and he may have been alluding to a bit of hometown rivalry, probably with a smile. Philip's reply may have sounded like a challenge; "Come and see." So he did. But instead of seeing Jesus, Jesus saw him. "*Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!'*" (John 1:47). After the ascension, Bartholomew is said to have taken the Good News eastward to Armenia, with a copy of Matthew's gospel in hand.



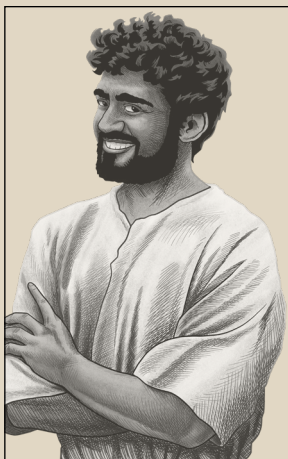
Matthew

Also known as Levi, Matthew was a tax collector, employed by the Roman government. As a well-educated and probably wealthy man, he is a unique character in the group. He was eager to introduce Jesus to his friends, so he hosted a dinner party with “tax collectors and sinners.” Even though his own countrymen would have despised him because of his collaboration with Rome, he wrote his Gospel in Aramaic with the Hebrew people in his heart. He wanted them to embrace Jesus as the one about whom the prophets were speaking. His missionary career took him to Persia to establish the church there. Very little is known of his death, but it was almost certainly a violent martyrdom.



Thomas

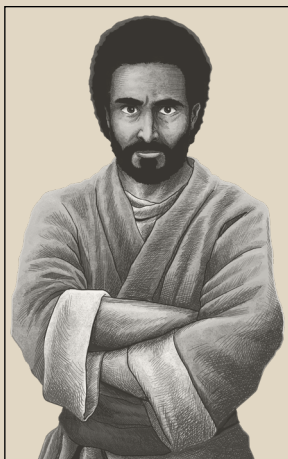
At the last supper, when Jesus was trying to explain his departure, he said, *"You know the way to the place where I am going,"* It was Thomas who raised his hand politely and asked, *"Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"* (John 14:5). When Jesus first appeared after his resurrection, Thomas somehow missed it. He had witnessed the crucifixion and saw the dead body, so resurrection simply defied all logic. When Jesus appeared another time, he invited "Doubting Thomas" to touch his wounds. Thomas' response in that moment became his testimony, *"My Lord and my God!"* This conviction fueled his missionary efforts to the east as far as India before he was martyred there.



James the Less

son of Alphaeus

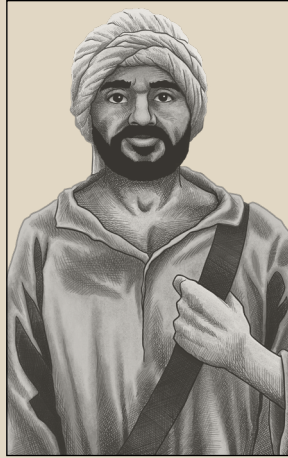
James is one of the most common names in the New Testament, so readers have always struggled to keep them straight. “The less” or “the younger” was probably used to distinguish this James from the brother of John. Some scholars wonder if he was quite young, maybe even a teenager, when he became a disciple. Before he was martyred, he is believed to have carried the gospel to the lands north of Israel. In addition to the two disciples named James, Jesus himself had a half brother by the same name, who later became the leader of the Jerusalem church. This man, not the disciple, was almost certainly the author of the New Testament letter, James.



Simon

the Zealot

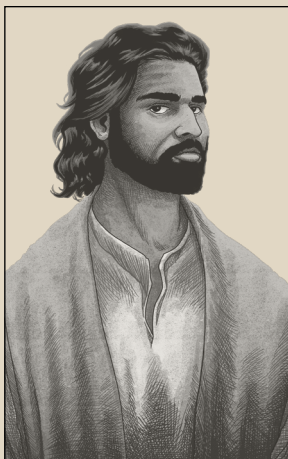
Simon may have been part of a group called “the Zealots” who were dedicated to overthrowing Rome. Like anyone who follows Jesus, Simon must have radically rethought all of his beliefs—political, religious, and social—under the gravity of the personal presence of Jesus. Tradition follows Simon’s path west from Jerusalem, through Egypt, northern Africa, and Carthage. But the most interesting legend is of a long trip to the British Isles, possibly preaching in London itself, along with his friend, Joseph of Arimathea. He was not there for long, arriving as he did when they were involved in a revolutionary battle against Rome. Some years later, he ended up in Persia where he was martyred and buried with his dear friend Jude.



Judas Thaddeaus

Jude

Judas, or Jude, is the Greek form of the name Judah, and one of the most common names at the time. It is not surprising then, that it was shared by two disciples and many other men of the same era. Jude was also called Thaddeaus, and If the historians are correct, he is the son of the apostle James and the grandson of Zebedee. He was probably a teenager when he followed his father into discipleship with Jesus. Early church tradition suggests he ministered in Syria before becoming a patriarch of the Armenian Church.



James

James was the elder brother of John, together known as Boanerges, the “Sons of Thunder.” Jesus gave them this nickname, possibly after they asked him about a Samaritan village who refused hospitality; *“Lord, shall we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?”* Along with Peter and John, James was privileged to witness the transfiguration, so he knew exactly who Jesus was. James was martyred under the rule of Herod Agrippa, probably in the year 44 AD. James is the patron saint of Spain, and tradition tells us his body was eventually taken from Jerusalem to be buried at Compostela de Santiago. To this day, the Camino de Santiago is a popular Christian pilgrimage.