

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

CALLED TO BE DISCIPLES

As Jesus walked on the shore of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Peter and Andrew, casting their fishing nets into the sea. Jesus called to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him (Matthew 4:18-20).

Jesus is still calling today for people to follow Him and be His disciples. To be a disciple is much more than professing Christ or joining a religious fellowship. It means a life change. It is being dedicated to the cause and purpose of Christ—living like Jesus, keeping His commandments, and basing life decisions on His teachings. A disciple of Christ must leave their own life behind in the same way that Peter and Andrew left their nets to follow the Lord.

The life of a true disciple of Christ is not motivated by the love of the world, its riches and pleasures, but is motivated rather by a deep love for the things of God. Goals, ambitions, plans, and purposes are shaped after the pattern of Christ.

Jesus gave specific counsel on what it would take to be a disciple. Matthew 16:24-25 says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." To be a disciple means to deny one's self of the things

of this world and follow Jesus and His way no matter what the cost. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

There is no room for half-hearted disciples. It takes total dedication and consecration of one's life to be a disciple of Christ. Peter and Andrew did not bring their fishing nets along as they followed the Lord; they had to leave them behind. Are you willing to leave behind your ways to pursue Christ? Are you a disciple of Jesus? Can



people look at the fruit of your life and see the image of Christ?

In the beginning, Jesus called twelve men to follow Him and be His disciples. Other than Judas Iscariot, His eleven other disciples dedicated their lives completely to the cause of Christ. Their mission was to help people and spread the gospel. Ten of these eleven disciples were persecuted and killed because of their faith. These early, courageous disciples of Christ should challenge us today to answer the call and leave ALL to be disciples of Jesus. ■

**"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."
Matthew 16:24-25**

Editorial



Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.... — Hebrews 12:1

This issue of the Gospel Truth is different in some ways than past issues of this publication, as it does not contain a Bible Study section and related articles. I am inspired to share a summary of the life and death of each of the twelve disciples. Their mission and sacrifice had a profound impact on the genesis of the church, and some of them were instrumental in writing the scripture as inspired by God.

The dedicated lives of these disciples still demonstrate to us two thousand years later what it means to be a disciple. Most of them were willing to suffer and die rather than recant their belief in Christ. Today, so many Christians struggle with things that pale in comparison to the challenges of these disciples. May the Lord help us to answer the call and fervently pursue the will of God. There is a need for more sacrifice and dedication. Too many hold on to Christ with one hand while holding on to the world with the other. LET GO and give it all up to follow Jesus!

My prayer is that God will encourage and challenge you to a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ as you read about “The Twelve.”

Michael W. Smith

January 2025

Disciples of Jesus

Simon (Peter)

Andrew (brother of Peter)

James (son of Zebedee)

John (brother of James)

Philip

Bartholomew (Nathanael)

Thomas

Matthew (Levi)

James (son of Alphaeus)

Thaddaeus (Lebbaeus, Judas)

Simon the Canaanite/Zealot

Judas Iscariot

[Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:13-16]



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The Twelve Disciples

The following biographical information is obtained from many sources. Outside of Scripture, there is little recorded factual evidence. Details are drawn from sometimes conflicting historical writings and traditions that paint a picture of these men's lives and deaths. The history of the twelve disciples is an inspiration and challenge. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the New Testament provides the most extensive biographical information about the most significant figure—Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. (All images are for illustrative purposes only.)

PETER

THE ROCK, IMPULSIVE LEADER OF FAITH



Peter, originally named Simon, was a fisherman from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. He later lived in Capernaum with his wife and worked with his brother, Andrew. Known for his bold and impulsive nature, Peter quickly became one of Jesus' closest disciples after being called to follow Him. Jesus gave him the name "Peter" (meaning "rock"), which later expressed the spiritual character of Peter. He is also referred to as "Cephas" (John 1:42, 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 15:5, Galatians 2:9), which is a Syriac word signifying a rock or stone.

Peter was part of Jesus' inner circle, present for significant moments like the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8) and Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-37). Though his faith was strong, Peter's journey was marked by both courage and weakness. He famously walked on water toward Jesus but began to sink when he doubted (Matthew 14:29-30). During Jesus' trial, he denied knowing Jesus three times out of fear. He repented and after the resurrection, Jesus restored Peter, commissioning him to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

After Jesus' ascension, Peter emerged as a leading figure in the early church and truly represented the firm, steadfast characteristic of a rock. He ministered particularly among Jewish believers in Jerusalem. He delivered the first sermon on Pentecost where 3,000 people repented and were converted (Acts 2). Peter performed miracles, guided the Jerusalem church, and defended the inclusion of Gentiles in the faith (Acts 10). Tradition holds that he later traveled to Antioch and ultimately to Rome, continuing his ministry despite persecution.

Peter is credited with writing two New Testament books, 1 Peter and 2 Peter, which encourage believers to endure suffering and remain faithful. It is noteworthy that John Mark wrote the gospel of Mark based on things he learned by Peter's eyewitness account. Around 64-68 AD, Peter was martyred in Rome under Emperor Nero. Tradition says he was crucified upside down at his request, as he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. His life exemplifies transformation from a fearful disciple to a courageous leader. He is remembered as a pillar of faith and a "rock" of the church. ■

ANDREW

THE CONNECTOR, BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS



Andrew, brother of Peter, was a fisherman by trade. He was born in Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Before becoming a disciple of Jesus, Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist, where he first encountered Jesus.

After John's testimony about Jesus as the Lamb of God, Andrew became one of the first disciples to follow Christ (John 1:35-40). His immediate response was to bring his brother Peter to Jesus, reflecting Andrew's mission-minded character.

After being called by Jesus, Andrew traveled with Him and participated in many significant events during Jesus' ministry. He is noted for his role in feeding the 5,000, where he identified the boy with five loaves and two fish (John 6:8-9). Following Jesus' resurrection, Andrew became a prominent leader in the early church, particularly among Jewish communities.

Tradition holds that Andrew preached in various regions, including Judea, Samaria, and the areas around the Black Sea, as well as in modern-day Greece and Turkey. According to some accounts, he traveled as far as Scythia (Ukraine/Russia) spreading the Gospel to Gentiles and establishing Christian communities.

Andrew's martyrdom is believed to have occurred around 60-70 AD in Patras, Greece. The governor's wife was healed and converted, enraging her husband, who condemned Andrew to die on a cross. At his request, he was crucified on an X-shaped cross because he felt unworthy to die in the same way as Jesus. As he hung on the cross, he preached to the people for two days.

Andrew's legacy as an evangelist and his commitment to spreading the message of Jesus are significant. His life exemplifies the spirit of discipleship and the importance of outreach, influencing many in the early church to follow Christ. ■

PHILIP

SEEKER OF TRUTH, PRACTICAL MISSIONARY



Philip was from Bethsaida, the same town as Peter and Andrew (John 1:44). He is not to be confused with Philip the evangelist (Acts 6:5). Known for his inquisitive nature, Philip was among the first disciples called by Jesus. Upon encountering Jesus,

Philip immediately recognized Him as the fulfillment of the prophecies. He brought his friend Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew) to meet Jesus, saying, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write" (John 1:45). This introduction highlights Philip's eagerness to share his faith and bring others to Christ.

Philip appears several times in the Gospels, often asking questions that reveal his desire to understand Jesus' teachings. In John 6:5-7, Philip

expressed practical concerns about feeding the 5,000, highlighting his pragmatic side. Later, he asked Jesus to show them the Father, prompting Jesus to explain His unity with the Father (John 14:8-9).

After Jesus' ascension, Philip took on a missionary role, and early traditions suggest that he preached in regions such as Samaria, Syria, Phrygia (modern-day Turkey), and possibly Greece. He is also associated with spreading the Gospel in areas that later became strongholds of the early Christian church.

Various accounts exist about Philip's martyrdom. According to some historians, he was martyred in the city of Hierapolis in Phrygia (Turkey) where he was hung upside down on a cross around 80 AD. Other accounts suggest that he was preaching in North Africa where he was stoned or hung by his ankles.

Philip's influence is felt in his role as a missionary and his dedication to spreading the Gospel to different regions. His story reflects a mix of practicality and faith. ■

JOHN

BELOVED DISCIPLE OF LOVE AND TRUTH



John, often referred to as “the beloved disciple,” was the brother of James, son of Zebedee. He was born in Bethsaida, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, and later lived in Capernaum. Before following Jesus, John worked as a fisherman alongside his father and brother. Jesus called him and James to be disciples, and they quickly became part of His

inner circle. They witnessed many key events in Jesus’ ministry, including the Transfiguration. John is notably the only apostle who remained at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion, demonstrating his loyalty and love for Jesus. In his early years, he acted somewhat ambitiously and aggressively, such as when he forbade a man from casting out demons (Mark 9:38-41), when he wanted to call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:51-54), and when he strove over being the greatest (Matthew 20:20-24). He matured into a man of great love and humility, and Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to John (John 19:25-27).

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, John played a crucial role in the early church, primarily in Jerusalem. He was instrumental in spreading the Gospel among the Jewish

population and later among Gentiles. John is traditionally believed to have preached in Asia Minor, particularly in Ephesus, where he became a prominent leader in the Christian community.

John was arrested in Ephesus and was thrown into a vat of boiling oil; God miraculously delivered him. He was then exiled to the island of Patmos by the Romans where he received the vision of Jesus Christ and wrote the prophetic book of Revelation.

John was referred to by other names: John of Patmos, John the Evangelist, John the Elder, and John the Presbyter. He is credited with writing five books in the New Testament: the Gospel of John, three epistles (1 John, 2 John, and 3 John), and the Book of Revelation. His writings emphasize themes of love, faith, and the divinity of Christ, offering a unique theological perspective.

Tradition holds that John lived to an old age, likely dying around 100 AD in Ephesus. He is said to have died a natural death, which distinguishes him from most of the other apostles who were martyred. His legacy as a theologian and evangelist has had a profound impact on Christianity, and he is often regarded as a model of faithfulness and devotion to Jesus. ■

JAMES

SON OF THUNDER, BOLD MARTYR



James, the son of Zebedee and Salome and the brother of John, was often referred to as “James the Greater” to distinguish him from James the son of Alphaeus. He was a fisherman from Bethsaida, Galilee. Alongside his brother John, he worked in his father’s fishing business before Jesus called them to follow Him (Matthew 4:21-22). Known for their zealous natures, Jesus nicknamed both James and John, “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). James quickly became part of Jesus’ inner circle, along with Peter and John, and was present for some of Jesus’ most profound moments. He was inseparable from his brother John.

James played a prominent role in the early Christian community, although little is written directly about his ministry. James’ ministry focused on preaching to Jewish audiences in Jerusalem and Judea. While more legend than documented fact, James is credited with taking the gospel to Spain. His fiery personality and zeal for the message of Jesus made him a bold witness for the Gospel. However, this passion also drew the attention of King Herod Agrippa I, who saw the early church’s influence as a political threat. Around 44 AD, Herod ordered James’ execution by sword (Acts 12:1-2). James’ martyrdom marked a turning point for the church, as he became the first apostle to seal his testimony with his life.

As one of Jesus’ closest disciples, James’ life exemplified unwavering faith and dedication, making him a prominent figure among the apostles. His boldness and loyalty to Jesus until the end have inspired Christians for centuries, representing the cost and the commitment of following Christ. ■

BARTHOLOMEW (NATHANAEL)

TRUE ISRAELITE WITHOUT GUILE



Bartholomew was from Cana in Galilee (John 21:2), possibly the same place where Jesus performed His first miracle. Bartholomew is often identified as Nathanael, and was introduced to Jesus by Philip. Initially skeptical, Nathanael asked, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46), but after meeting Jesus and hearing that Jesus had knowledge of him as an “Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” (John 1:47), Nathanael quickly believed. This moment of honest inquiry and belief marked Bartholomew’s faithful commitment to Jesus.

After Jesus’ ascension, Bartholomew spread the Gospel to regions such as India, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Persia (Iran),

Lycaonia (Turkey), Egypt, and Armenia, with some accounts placing him in Ethiopia or the Arabian Peninsula. He is said to have communicated the gospel in India in the local language, either by having it translated into writings or by speaking local dialects.

Bartholomew’s legacy is especially remembered in Armenia, where he played a significant role in the conversion of many, despite strong opposition from pagan priests. His death was particularly brutal, with widespread belief that he was flayed alive and beheaded in Armenia around 68 AD. This account highlights his unwavering faith in the face of intense opposition. ■

JUDAS ISCARIOT

THE BETRAYER



Judas Iscariot is infamous for betraying Jesus Christ. Some scholars read Iscariot to mean “man of Kerioth”, a city in Judea. This would make him the only Judean in the group and an outsider. Judas is often depicted as the group’s treasurer but is also portrayed as a thief who stole from the communal purse (John 12:6). Despite witnessing Jesus’ miracles, Judas succumbed to greed and disillusionment. He agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, facilitating His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:14-16).

After Jesus’ condemnation, Judas, filled with remorse, returned the silver to the priests and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). His tragic end highlights the consequences of his choices. Judas’ legacy serves as a cautionary tale about betrayal, greed, and moral failure, reminding us of the struggle with sin and need for redemption. His life shows that one can give Jesus their time but not their heart. ■

JAMES (SON OF ALPHEAEUS)

THE LESSER KNOWN, BUT FAITHFUL DISCIPLE



James, the son of Alphaeus, is often called “James the Less” or “James the Younger” to distinguish him from James, the brother of John, known as “James the Greater.” Little is recorded about him in the New Testament, but he was likely from Galilee.

Some traditions suggest he was Matthew’s brother; as both are referred to as “sons of Alphaeus,” though this is uncertain. He has also been mistakenly confused with James the Just, the brother or cousin of Jesus.

Because of limited details in the New Testament, much of James’ story comes from early church tradition. Some accounts suggest he preached in Judea and later took his

mission to Egypt, spreading Christianity among Jewish and pagan communities.

The exact manner of James’ death is unclear, with varying accounts. Clement of Alexandria and others describe him being stoned and beaten to death around 62 AD by a mob. Another tradition suggests he was crucified or beaten with a fuller’s club in Egypt. While the exact record of his death remains uncertain, he is remembered as a faithful, lesser-known apostle.

Though James did not write any books of the Bible, his legacy as a steadfast follower of Jesus is honored. He symbolizes humble devotion and quiet service, embodying the role of a disciple willing to spread the faith without recognition. ■

MATTHEW (LEVI)

TAX COLLECTOR, SCRIBE OF CHRIST'S TEACHINGS



Matthew, also known as Levi, was from Capernaum, a town along the Sea of Galilee, and worked as a tax collector before following Jesus (Matthew 9:9). Tax collectors were generally disliked by Jewish society, as they were seen as collaborators with the Roman authorities and often associated with corruption. However, Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, and Matthew responded immediately, leaving

his lucrative occupation. Shortly afterward, Matthew hosted a banquet in honor of Jesus, inviting other tax collectors and sinners. This drew criticism from the Pharisees but showed his gratitude and newfound commitment (Mark 2:15-17).

After Jesus' ascension, Matthew took on the role of a missionary, spreading the gospel initially among Jewish communities. According to early

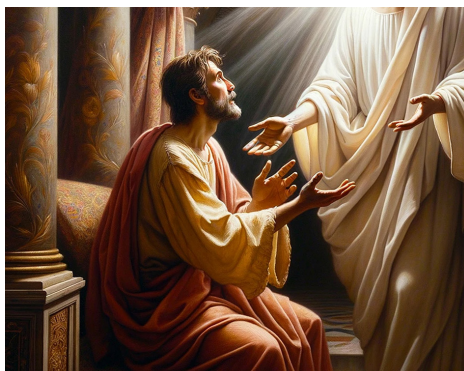
church tradition, Matthew preached primarily to the Jewish people, which aligns with the themes and references to Jewish prophecy in his Gospel. His missionary work may have also extended to other regions, including Ethiopia and possibly parts of Parthia (Iran) and Syria.

The manner of Matthew's death is not definitively recorded in the Bible, but various traditions suggest he was martyred. The most popular account holds that he was killed in Ethiopia by being stabbed. The exact details and location remain uncertain, but most traditions agree that he died for his faith between 60-70 AD.

Matthew is best known for the Gospel that bears his name, written to provide a detailed account of Jesus' life and teachings, with a focus on how Jesus fulfilled Jewish prophecies about the Messiah. This Gospel, one of the earliest Christian texts, remains a cornerstone of the New Testament and reflects Matthew's dedication to sharing the message of Christ. ■

THOMAS

THE DOUBTER, TRANSFORMED TO BOLD BELIEVER



Thomas, also known as "Doubting Thomas," is particularly known for his initial skepticism about Jesus' resurrection. Thomas was likely from Galilee, as were most of the apostles. His Hebrew name, Thomas, means "twin," and in Greek, he is also called "Didymus," which holds the same meaning. While not much is detailed about his early life, Thomas is mentioned in all four Gospels and stands out for his questioning nature and practical mindset.

In the Gospel of John, Thomas' most notable appearance occurs after Jesus' resurrection when he declares he will not believe unless he sees and touches Jesus' wounds (John 20:24-29). When Jesus later appears to Thomas and invites him to touch His wounds, Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God," affirming his faith. This encounter highlights Thomas' journey from doubt to strong belief and has made him a symbolic figure for those who struggle with faith.

According to tradition, Thomas became a courageous missionary after Jesus' ascension. He is believed to have traveled eastward, spreading the Gospel to Parthia (Iran/Iraq). He was one of the most active missionaries among the disciples, going to many foreign lands. He eventually reached India around 52 AD. Ancient Christian traditions, particularly those held by some Christians in Kerala, India, claim that Thomas established Christian communities along the Malabar Coast. These communities still honor him as the planter of their faith.

Thomas is said to have been martyred around 72 AD near Mylapore, in what is now Chennai, India. According to early Christian writings, he was killed by a spear through the heart, possibly due to opposition from local religious authorities. His legacy endures through his inspiring journey from doubt to faith and in the Christian communities in India. ■

SIMON (THE CANAANITE/ZEALOT)

PASSIONATE REVOLUTIONARY TURNED ZEALOUS FOLLOWER



Simon the Zealot was also known as Simon the Zealous or Simon the Canaanite. He is referred to as a “Zealot,” which likely indicates his association with a Jewish political movement that sought to overthrow Roman rule in Judea through any means necessary, including violence. This background suggests he was passionate about Jewish nationalism and might have had a fiery temperament.

Simon is generally believed to have come from Galilee, like many of the other apostles. In the lists of apostles found in the Gospels, Simon is sometimes referred to as “the Canaanite,” which could refer to his geographical origin rather than his ethnicity, or it could derive from the Aramaic word “qanana,” meaning “zealot.”

After the resurrection of Jesus, Simon became an active evangelist, spreading the gospel in various regions. Early

church traditions suggest that he preached in areas such as Egypt, North Africa, and possibly as far as Britain and Persia, although these accounts vary and lack strong historical documentation.

The details of Simon’s death are largely uncertain, and traditions surrounding it are inconsistent. Some sources suggest that he was martyred for his faith around 65-70 AD, possibly by being sawn in half or crucified in Britain. Other traditions hold that he was martyred in Persia alongside Thaddaeus.

Simon the Zealot is remembered as one dedicated to the teachings of Jesus and the expansion of the early Christian church. Despite being one of the lesser-known apostles, Simon’s zealous commitment to spreading the message of Christ serves as a reminder of the diverse backgrounds and motivations of Jesus’ followers. He also demonstrates to all a transformed life dedicated to peace and unity. ■

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD



THADDAEUS (LEBBAEUS, JUDAS)

ENCOURAGER, THOUGHTFUL SEEKER



Thaddaeus, known as Judas (or Jude), son of James, was also sometimes referred to as Lebbaeus. Jerome, a fourth-century scholar, called him, “Trinomious,” meaning, “the man with three names.” His name appears in the lists of apostles in the Gospels; but he is often overshadowed by other disciples, leading to limited information about his life. Thaddaeus is thought to have hailed from Galilee, like many of the apostles, although specific details about his early life remain unclear.

In the Gospel of John, Thaddaeus is noted for asking Jesus a poignant question during the Last Supper. He asked, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22), which indicates his desire to understand Jesus’ mission and the nature of His ministry.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Thaddaeus became an active proponent of the Christian faith, spreading the gospel. Church tradition holds that he preached in various regions, including Judea, Samaria, Syria, Persia (Iran), and Armenia. He is often credited with converting many Gentiles and is sometimes associated with the establishment of early Christian communities in these areas.

The details surrounding Thaddaeus’ death vary across traditions, but many accounts suggest he was martyred for his faith around 65-80 AD. Some sources indicate that he was killed in Edessa (Turkey), possibly by being clubbed to death or stoned.

Some scholars believe that Thaddaeus wrote the book of Jude, but the more widely accepted view is that Jude was written by a different Jude, the cousin or half-brother of Jesus. There is no definitive answer to this quandary as some speculate that Thaddaeus was related to Jesus. Regardless, Thaddaeus is recognized as a symbol of faith and dedication despite his lesser prominence among the apostles. ■