

THE DISCIPLES IN HISTORY

Jesus's disciples were slow to learn some of the lessons He taught, but they eventually spread His message around the known world. Yet, as Jesus predicted in Matthew 10, they suffered greatly for their faith. Here's a quick look at Jesus's original disciples (aside from Judas Iscariot) and how various church traditions describe their ministries and persecution after His ascension.

- **Simon Peter.** In the lists of the disciples (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13), Peter always comes first. During his time with Jesus, Peter wrestled with arrogant bravado, but he later helped establish the church among both Jews (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10). He also wrote two books in the New Testament. Tradition states that he died in Rome, being crucified upside down.
- **James, the son of Zebedee.** James was another leader among the disciples. The Gospels often shows Jesus pulling James, John, and Peter aside to experience things the others did not (Matt. 17:1-2; Mark 5:36-37; 14:32-34). After the founding of the church, James's ministry was relatively brief because he was the first of the Twelve to die for his faith (Acts 12:1-2).
- **John.** The brother of James, most scholars believe John was the youngest of the Twelve. He was the only disciple mentioned at the cross when Jesus died ("the disciple he loved," John 19:25-27). After the resurrection, John often teamed with Peter to preach and face persecution. Tradition holds that while John suffered tremendously for Jesus, he did not die as a martyr. Living to the last decade of the first century, he has been associated with the church in Ephesus. He also wrote five books of the Bible.
- **Andrew.** He was Peter's brother—and the one who introduced Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42). In fact, throughout the Gospels, Andrew is portrayed bringing others to the Savior (see 6:8-9; 12:20-22). Tradition states that he took the gospel to Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and possibly Scythia (modern Russia) before being martyred in Greece.
- **Philip.** Philip also introduced others to Jesus, bringing Nathanael to meet the Messiah (John 1:43-51). Jesus also questioned Philip about how the multitude could be fed before Andrew identified the boy with the fish and bread (6:5-7). Many scholars believe Philip became a missionary to northern Africa before eventually dying as a martyr in Asia Minor.
- **Bartholomew.** Most scholars believe Bartholomew is also Nathanael, whom Philip introduced to Jesus. If so, Jesus applauded him for being a man of character. Tradition associates him with work in Asia and India. He may have died as a martyr in Armenia.
- **Matthew.** As a tax collector, Matthew was the ultimate outsider. Yet, Jesus saw something in him and refused to disqualify him from service. Matthew likely worked among the Jews early on, which explains the Jewish emphasis of his Gospel. While scholars disagree on what happened to Matthew, some stories state that he may have been stabbed to death in Ethiopia.
- **Thomas.** The Bible tells us that Thomas was a twin and that he initially doubted Jesus's resurrection (John 20:24-29). But he also was ready to die as a martyr (11:16). Eventually, he did become a martyr after taking the gospel to areas in the modern-day Middle East (Iran and Afghanistan).
- **James, the son of Alphaeus.** He was also known as James the Less (or Younger). This James mostly flew under the radar. He is not mentioned in Scripture aside from the lists of the Twelve. He may have been Matthew's brother, since Levi (Matthew) is also referred to as a "son of Alphaeus" (Mark 2:14). Little is known about his work after Jesus's resurrection. He may have ministered in Persia, but scholars are convinced that he died as a martyr for his faith.
- **Thaddeus.** He was the "other" Judas and also may have been related to Alphaeus. Some translations say he was the son of James, while others say that he was the brother of James. He did ask Jesus a question about the kingdom in John 14:22, but that is his only line in the Gospels. Details of his death are unclear. One widely accepted tradition is that he was beheaded in Syria, though some scholars believe he was beaten to death before his head was removed.
- **Simon the Zealot.** The Zealots were a radical group in first-century Israel. Despite their strict theology, their violence against the Romans moved them outside the mainstream. While Scripture does not state what convinced Simon to shift his allegiance to Jesus, we can assume the transformation was amazing. Some traditions hold that he took the gospel to Africa and possibly England. Some say he died as a martyr in Persia, but no one knows for sure.

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