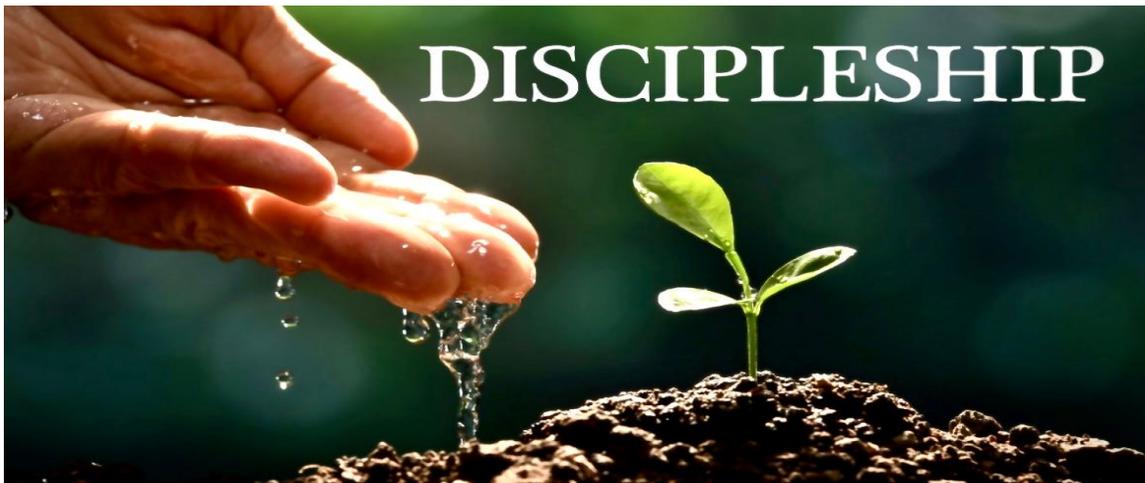


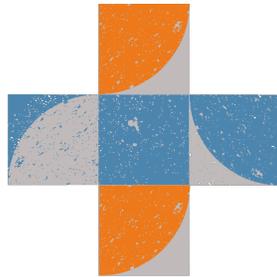
Who Were The 12 Apostles?

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Who Were The 12 Apostles?

BIBLE STUDY

Everything we do at Set Free Ministries is a direct result of God's influence in others, in us, and many times through us. Much of what we prepare as Bible Studies, teachings, and writings are a direct result of these great men and women of God and their influence in our lives.

What we do, teach, write and share is a reflection of the influence of other authors in and through us. Amen!

Our prayer is that through these Bible Studies, *you will find more hope and faith in the One Who is faithful, Jesus Christ.* He is the Giver, and we are the receivers.

May God Bless you as you are a blessing to others...

Tim

Pastor Dr. Tim Parker and the team at Set Free!
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CONGRATULATIONS! You are about to embark upon one of the most exciting quests of a lifetime. The Bible says to “renew your mind daily.” In participating with this Bible study, you are going to be doing just that: renewing your mind. The excitement comes in when you realize all the amazing things you’ve learned about the Bible along the way.

By studying God’s Word, we grow in many ways. *First*, we get to know God Himself. *Next*, we get to know His Word. *Finally*, the Bible stories and the people in those stories become real to us. The lessons they learned become as important to us now as they were to them back then.

This Shame and Honor Bible Study has an innovative question and answer format that has you searching for and finding Bible answers, even if you’ve never studied the Bible before!

Understanding and knowing God better helps you share what you’ve learned and enriches your own walk with the Lord. So, thank you for taking this step in getting to know God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit better and more intimately.

GOD BLESS!

Tim

PASTOR DR. TIM PARKER TH.D.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

We are so grateful you have chosen to do this study.

Each study guide has been laid out so that you can read through the material without worry of missing any answers. Just take your time and read through the material.

NEXT, read through the first five (5) questions following the material you have just read.

NOW, go back and slowly re-read the material again. You will find that the questions follow the reading. So, as you re-read the materials, the answers to the questions just pop out at you. When the worry of having to find the answers is removed, we soak in and learn what we have read.

As long as we are always trying to find the answers, we tend to miss much of the materials. Our goal is that we not only learn what we read, but that we let it change our lives for the better.

Our prayer is that you will have more than just a desire to learn and implement the materials that you read, but that you will want to share it with others.

So, go and make disciples that you lead to Jesus one person, one day, and one study at a time.

BE ...AMAZED

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...INSPIRED

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...ENGAGED

...CELEBRATED.....BY CHRIST JESUS

Our Statement of Belief

This Bible study has looked at, considered and evaluated each of the Apostles and others and we stand fully confident in “*The Word of God.*”

The reason we do this is because “*God is God and we are not!*”

“*God is the Creator and we are the created.*” The Creator always governs the created, not the other way around!

Even our best minds, translators and educators are just that, “*our best.*” They are “*no comparison*” to the Almighty God, the Creator of everything, the One who has “*always been and will always be!*”

The Bible we have today is “*exactly correct and right for us*”, today, yesterday and yes, even tomorrow.

The more we “*Trust God’s Word*” the more “*we will experience*” His beautiful Peace, Love and Healing in and through our lives.

2 Peter 1:21

(NIV) “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

(AMP) “But understand this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of or comes from one’s own [personal or special] interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

(NIV) ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(AMP) “All Scripture is God-breathed [given by divine inspiration] and is profitable for instruction, for conviction [of sin], for correction [of error and restoration to obedience], for training in righteousness [learning to live in conformity to God’s will, both publicly and privately—behaving honorably with personal integrity and moral courage]; so that the man of God may be complete and proficient, outfitted and thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Who Were The 12 Apostles?

The Complete Guide

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By Ryan Nelson

<https://overviewbible.com/12-apostles/>

An Introduction

The 12 apostles, also referred to as the 12 disciples or simply “the Twelve,” were Jesus Christ’s 12 closest followers. Each of them were major leaders in the movement which became Christianity and helped spread the gospel throughout the world.

The names of Jesus’ 12 main disciples are:

Peter (Also known as Simon)	Andrew (Peter’s brother)	James (Son of Zebedee)	John (James’s brother)
Philip	Bartholomew	Thomas	Matthew (the Tax-Collector)
James (Son of Alphaeus)	Jude (Also known as Thaddeus)	Simon (The Zealot)	Judas Iscariot

Matthias the apostle is technically also one of the Twelve, but usually not included in lists for a couple reasons:

- He was appointed after the death of Judas Iscariot
- He wasn't called into the group by Jesus, [but was voted in by casting lots. **Acts 1:26**]
- [There was another man that was put forward along with Matthias to be considered an apostle in place of Judas. His name was Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus)] **Acts 1:23**.

Four passages in the Bible list the names of all 12 apostles (technically the last one only lists 11, because Judas Iscariot was dead). Some of the apostles play key roles in well-known Bible stories. Others are only mentioned in the lists of apostles, or they have a single line of dialogue in the gospels.

A few of the apostles were known by multiple names, which can make these lists and other references to them confusing. In some cases, disciples with common names have been mistakenly identified with other biblical figures that had the same name.

(For example, Philip the Apostle is definitely not Philip the Evangelist, who appears in **Acts 6:5**, **Acts 8:5–6**, and **Acts 21:8**.)

Much of what we “know” about the apostles comes from church tradition. Unfortunately, tradition often embraced legends alongside facts, and it can be difficult to discern details about [1] **where the disciples went**, [2] **what they did**, and [3] **how they died** without assuming the legends surrounding them are rooted in truth. This is especially true for the more obscure disciples.

Today, many Christians simply accept tradition (and therefore the legends) at face value. But if we care about truth and claim to represent it, we have a duty to examine this information more critically, and we need to be willing to accept when we simply don't know something.

In this guide, we're going to look at what the Bible says about each of Jesus' 12 main disciples and explore the ambiguities and unknowns surrounding them. If you want to learn more about any of the disciples, follow the links below to jump into an in-depth guide on each person.

For starters, let's take a look at the *four lists of apostles*.

The four lists of the 12 apostles

Four passages in the Bible give us the names of the apostles: **Matthew 10:2-4**, **Mark 3:16-19**, **Luke 6:13-16**, and **Acts 1:13**. While the order the names appear in is generally about the same, these lists don't actually include all the same names, and some of them provide details the others don't.

In some cases, early Christians and modern scholars have assumed this meant some of these apostles went by multiple names—such as Judas son of James, who may be listed by the nickname Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark to avoid confusing him with Judas Iscariot, the infamous traitor.

The lists found in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) appear when Jesus calls these 12 disciples aside for a special purpose and officially appoints them as apostles. The list in Acts occurs after Jesus ascends to heaven, and the believers decide to replace Judas Iscariot while waiting for the Holy Spirit.

The apostles are generally listed in order of importance and paired according to their associations. The main exception is Andrew. His brother Peter was the most prominent disciple, but Andrew was less important than James and John, who were part of Jesus' most inner circle.

To help you see the differences between the lists, here are the names in the order they appear in each passage.

Matthew 10:2-4

Simon (Peter)
Andrew (Peter's brother)
James son of Zebedee
John (James' brother)
Philip
Bartholomew
Thomas
Matthew the tax collector
James son of Alphaeus
Thaddeus
Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot

Mark 3:16-19

Simon (Peter)
James son of Zebedee
John (James' brother)
Andrew
Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James son of Alphaeus
Thaddeus
Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot

Luke 6:13-16

Simon (Peter)
Andrew (Peter's brother)
James son of Zebedee
John
Philip

Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James son of Alphaeus
Simon the Zealot
Judas of James
Judas Iscariot

Acts 1:13

Peter
John
James
Andrew
Philip
Thomas
Bartholomew
Matthew
James son of Alphaeus
Simon the Zealot
Judas of James
[Matthias]

The biggest difference between the lists is that Luke (author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts) lists one disciple as Judas son of James (or Jude, depending on the translation), while Mark and Matthew list someone named Thaddeus. Church tradition has always assumed these were two names for the same person, with Thaddeus being a nickname for the disciple known as Judas, perhaps because the name Judas carried such strong negative associations.

Interestingly, the Gospel of John never lists all 12 apostles, and several of the names in these lists never appear in John. Additionally John appears to introduce a disciple not listed in the other gospels or acts: Nathanael, who is closely associated with Philip. Since Bartholomew is also closely associated with Philip and never appears in John, many traditions assume Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person. But that may not be true.

While it doesn't give us a handy list, the Gospel of John is still useful for learning more about some of the disciples. John records dialogue not found in the other gospels, and sometimes gives us unique details about their relationships and other additional information.

Now let's take a closer look at the disciples.

Jesus' inner circle

Jesus had a lot of followers. At times, thousands of people gathered to hear him teach and see what he would do. The 12 apostles were some of his closest disciples. But three members of the Twelve were closer than anyone else: Peter, James, and John.

Together, they witnessed miracles and moments the other apostles weren't privy to, including:

The time Jesus raised a girl from the dead (**Mark 5:35-43**)

The Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1-13**)

Jesus' moment of weakness in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:36-46**)

Lets take a closer look at each of the twelve apostles and some of the other writers of the books in the New Testament.

TEST QUESTIONS • AN INTRODUCTION

1. The 12 apostles, also referred to as the 12 disciples or simply “the Twelve,” were Jesus Christ’s 12 closest what?

2. What were each one of them?

3. What are the names of the 12 main disciples?

4. Who is named as technically one of the twelve apostles?

5. When was Matthias appointed as an apostle?

6. Was Matthias called into the apostle group by Jesus?

Yes ____ No ____

7. There was another man that was put forward along with Matthias to be considered an apostle in place of Judas. What was his name?

8. How many passages in the bible list the names of the apostles?

9. Where does much of what we “know” about the apostles come from?

10. Unfortunately, tradition often embraced _____ alongside _____.

11. What 3 things can it be difficult to discern details about?

12. Today, what do many Christians simply accept?

13. Where do we find the four passages in Scripture that list the names of the apostles?

14. What are the listed synoptic gospels listed when Jesus calls these 12 disciples aside for a special purpose and officially appoints them as apostles?

15. The list in _____ occurs _____ Jesus ascends to _____, and the believers decide to _____ Judas Iscariot while waiting for the _____.

16. Who is listed as the most prominent disciple?

17. Who of the disciples was the nickname Thaddeus used for?

18. Three members of the Twelve were closer than anyone else to Jesus. Name them.

19. Together, these three witnessed miracles and moments the other apostles weren't privy to, including....?

PETER IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER ONE -

The Apostle Peter (also known as Saint Peter, Simon Peter, and Cephas) was one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus Christ, and along with James and John, he was one of Jesus' closest companions. After the resurrection, Peter became one of the most influential Christian leaders in the first century, and according to Catholic tradition, he was also the first pope.

Based on **Matthew 16:19**, Peter is sometimes referred to as the “gatekeeper” of heaven, and over the last two millennia, countless pieces of art and literature (and jokes) depict him waiting at the Pearly Gates to decide who gets in and who doesn't.

Peter was a fisherman by trade, along with his brother Andrew (also a disciple of Jesus), but he grew into a gifted preacher and bold leader. In the gospels, he's portrayed as impetuous, always speaking his mind and acting on impulse. In the Book of Acts, Peter's decisiveness transformed him into someone the early Christians constantly relied on and turned to.

While Peter didn't write any of the four gospels himself, he plays a major role in all of them, and tradition holds that the Gospel of Mark records Peter's account of Jesus' ministry through his companion, John Mark.

Most of what we know about Peter comes from the Bible itself, with some additional material from early Christian writers.

In this post, we'll cover everything you need to know about this prominent disciple, including:

- Who was Peter?
- Was Peter the first Pope?
- Peter in the Bible
- Did Peter write part of the Bible?
- Apocryphal books about Peter
- Is Saint Peter waiting at the Pearly Gates?

For starters, here are some quick facts about Peter.

Who was Peter?

Peter is known by several other names in the Bible. It's common for Bible characters to go by two names, use a nickname, or like the Apostle Paul, to have one name in Hebrew and another in Greek.

Peter's original name was Simon, but Jesus called him Cephas (**John 1:42**), which is an Aramaic word that translates to Peter (*Petros* in Greek). As a result, Peter is also referred to as Simon, Simon Peter, and Cephas.

Here are the main things to know about Peter based on the gospels, the Book of Acts and the epistles.

Peter was married

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record that Jesus came to Peter's house, where his mother-in-law was sick with a fever. The account is incredibly brief, but it *does* tell us that Peter had a wife, a detail which is somewhat corroborated by Paul in **1 Corinthians 9:5**:

"Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?"

Peter's brother Andrew is the only family member we see regularly in the gospels, but the Bible doesn't have a lot to say about him, either.

A fisherman

Like many of the disciples, Peter was a fisherman. According to the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus first met him, Peter was fishing with his brother Andrew. Jesus famously said, *"Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,"* and Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed him.

The Gospel of Luke gives a slightly different account. It says they were *cleaning their nets*, not casting them, and that Jesus actually boarded their boat and led them to a miraculous catch that nearly sank their boats. (Luke also adds that James and John were their partners.)

Interestingly, the Gospel of John has a very different version of how Peter met Jesus. His brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and heard what John said about Jesus, so he brought Peter to meet him (**John 1:40-42**). It's worth noting though: John is the only one who records *another* miraculous catch of fish which takes place after Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus and his disciples frequently travelled by boat, and it's likely that they relied on the experience of Peter and the other fishermen during these times. When the group encountered a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee, knowing Peter's trade makes it more significant that the disciples thought they were going to die (**Luke 8:22-25**). As fishermen who worked on the Sea of Galilee, storms wouldn't have been new to Peter and the others, but they couldn't rely on their experience to save them this time, and everything they knew about boats and water and weather led them to believe this was the end.

After the resurrection, Peter decided to go back to fishing (**John 21:3**), and several other disciples joined him. Without Jesus physically there to follow, they returned to what they knew before they met him.

Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other disciples were fishing when Jesus appeared to them a second time after the resurrection. According to the Gospel of John, when Peter learned it was Jesus on the shore, he dove into the water and swam to him. **John 21:1-20**

Fun fact: All three of Jesus' closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) were fishermen.

Another fun fact: Peter's father was named John or *Jonah* (**Matthew 16:17; John 1:42**) . . . so as a fisherman, he probably got more than his share of "big fish" jokes.

"The Rock"

The Gospel of John records that when Jesus first met Peter (who was originally called Simon), he says, "*You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas*" (**John 1:42**). Cephas is Aramaic for "stone," and the gospel writer adds that this means Peter when translated. This is why Peter is sometimes referred to as "*the rock*."

This name has led to much debate about what Jesus meant in **Matthew 16**. After Peter correctly identified Jesus as the promised Messiah, Jesus said:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah [John], for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." —**Matthew 16:17-18**

Catholics argue that the phrases "*on this rock I will build my church*" and "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" are an explicit promise to make Peter the leader of the church—the first pope. Others argue that "this rock" referred to a physical location, or that Jesus simply meant he would be an *important* leader, and that he wasn't necessarily establishing the papacy or giving Peter "primacy" (authority) over the other apostles, which the New Testament may or may not support.

Part of Jesus' inner circle

There are three occasions in the gospels where Jesus only allows Peter and the sons of Zebedee (James, and John) to witness things none of the other disciples saw, including the first time He demonstrated His power over death, the most powerful revelation of His true identity, and His most desperate moment.

Jesus raises a dead girl (Mark 5:35-43)

As the crowds were pressing around Him, Jesus received word that the girl He was on His way to heal (Jairus' daughter) had died. He went to her house anyways, and

“He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James” (Mark 5:37). In the house, only the girl’s parents and the three disciples watched as Jesus raised her from the dead.

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13)

The second time Jesus invites these three to see something special is a few days after He first predicts His own death. He takes them to a mountain, where they see something unlike anything Jesus had done before:

“Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.” —Matthew 17:1-3

Upon seeing this, Peter says, *“Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You wish, I will put up three shelters—one for You, one for Moses and one for Elijah” (Matthew 17:4).*

But Jesus had no intention of staying on that mountain. They weren’t going to set up camp and chat with Moses and Elijah for a few days. This moment helped solidify Jesus’ true identity, which could be why *while Peter was still speaking*, God interrupted to say that Jesus was His son (**Matthew 17:5**).

Not long before this moment, Peter called Jesus the Messiah (**Matthew 16:16**). Now he knew: God hadn’t just sent His people a savior. He sent them His son.

The Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46)

On the night He knew He would be captured, Jesus took His disciples into Gethsemane, as He often did (**John 18:2**). He told them to keep watch while He prayed, and then He took Peter, James, and John with Him.

While the three of them struggle (and fail) to stay awake, Jesus prays fervently, asking God to find another way to save His people.

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.” —Matthew 26:39

Peter, James, and John are the only ones who see Jesus suffer in the garden, and His desire to be vulnerable with them but not the others further demonstrates their privileged relationship with Him.

A pillar of the early Christian church

In the Book of Acts, the church continually leans on the leadership of Peter, James the Just [Jesus half brother] (not the “inner circle” James), and John. When major decisions needed to be made, these three weighed in. That’s why when Paul wanted to demonstrate his authority to the Galatians; he appealed to the authority of Peter, James, and John, calling them *“those esteemed as pillars”*:

“On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas [Peter] and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.” —Galatians 2:7-9

Paul argued that if not even Peter, James, and John had nothing to add to the gospel he preached, why would the Galatians accept someone else’s teaching that *did*?

Martyr

According to church tradition, Peter was killed by Emperor Nero around 64 AD, after the Great Fire of Rome which he famously blamed Christians for starting. A second-century apocryphal text called *Acts of Peter* was the first record claiming Peter was crucified upside down because he didn’t consider himself worthy of dying the same death as Jesus.

In the last chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Peter, “*when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go*” (**John 21:18**). The author then remarks, “*Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God*” (**John 21:19**).

Clement of Rome, an early church father that personally knew the apostles, wrote in his famous letter known as *1 Clement*, “Let us take the noble examples of our own generation. Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most just pillars of the Church were persecuted, and came even unto death. . . . Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labours, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him.”

Eusebius, the father of church history, quotes Origen (a second/third-century scholar) as saying; “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer” (*Church History*).

In *Jewish War*, Josephus, a first century Jewish-Roman historian, notes that Roman soldiers didn’t always crucify people “rightside up,” and that they would try different positions for entertainment.

Was Peter the first pope?

The Catholic Church regards Peter as the first pope, and argues that the Bible supports this position as well as early church writings.

One of the primary arguments for this position comes from Jesus’ own words in the Gospel of Matthew. After Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus says:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah [John], for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this

rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” —Matthew 16:17-19

For Catholics, the “rock” Jesus intended to build his church on was Peter, but that’s not how Protestants read this declaration. For them, Jesus was merely stating that the church would be built upon the rock of confessing Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

By giving Peter “*the keys to the kingdom of heaven,*” it is believed that Jesus gave Peter the authority to allow others access to his kingdom—to open the door or gate so that others can enter. In Acts, Peter is the first to “open the gate” for Jews (**Acts 2**), Samaritans (**Acts 8**), and Gentiles (**Acts 10**).

Catholics argue that by saying “*the keys to the kingdom,*” Jesus is intentionally echoing **Isaiah 22**, in which “*the key to the house of David*” carries a far greater significance than “*opening doors.*” And since Jesus also said “*on this rock I will build my church,*” they claim Jesus clearly established Peter’s *primacy*—his authority over the whole church. For a very long time, they’ve referred to Peter (and those whom they believe held this position after him) as the “pope.”

Catholics and Protestants debate about whether Scripture and church history show that early Christians recognized Peter (and the bishops who succeeded him) as a higher authority than other apostles and bishops.

Peter doesn’t claim a special authority in the gospels, Acts, or epistles, and beyond Paul’s nods to Peter being a pillar of the church; we don’t see him personally elevated above the others. In fact, when the church needed to make a major decision in **Acts 15**, the apostles appear to defer to another pillar of the church: James the Just (brother of Jesus and author of the Book of James). Not to mention, in **Galatians 2**, Paul says he publicly corrected Peter, which would be difficult if Peter had total authority over the church.

Ultimately, Protestants believe that Peter was clearly *not* the first pope, and Catholics believe he clearly was.

What we can agree on is that the Bible’s authors give Peter more attention than any other member of the Twelve. In the lists of the Twelve, Peter is always listed first, and Matthew explicitly refers to him as “first” (Greek: *protos*) among the apostles (**Matthew 10:2**).

Peter in the Bible

Peter is one of the most prominent figures in the gospels and Acts, and Paul refers to him throughout his letters. Peter is often the first one to state the obvious and say what everyone else is thinking (or at least what *he’s* thinking), and he takes center stage in numerous biblical accounts.

Here are some of the highlights of Peter's unique role in the gospels and the early church.

Peter walks on water (Matthew 14:28–33)

After Jesus fed the five thousand, he told the disciples to get into their boats and head to the other side of the lake. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Jesus later walked on water to catch up with their boats (**Matthew 14:22–36, Mark 6:45–56, John 6:16–24**), but Matthew adds an exchange between Peter and Jesus:

*“‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’
‘Come,’ He said.*

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ He said, ‘why did you doubt?’

*And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” —**Matthew 14:28–33***

Peter's bold reactions often get him into trouble, but in this case, it allowed him to *participate* in a miracle the other disciples merely witnessed.

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah (Matthew 16:13–20)

Peter wasn't actually the first disciple to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. The Gospel of John actually records that Peter's brother Andrew told him that before they even became disciples (**John 1:41**). Andrew was there when John the Baptist declared that Jesus was God's Chosen One (**John 1:34**).

But Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Peter *was* the first to call Jesus the Messiah to his face:

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’

They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’

“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”

*Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” —**Matthew 16:13–20***

Jesus responds by telling Peter *“on this rock I will build my church”* and that He will give him *“the keys to the kingdom.”*

(Andrew was probably kicking himself.)

Peter disowns Jesus (Luke 22:54–62)

Before Jesus was arrested (as a result of Judas' betrayal), He predicted that Peter would deny knowing Him three times (**Matthew 26:33–35**). After Jesus' arrest, Peter followed at a distance, trying to observe without being noticed. But people recognized him.

“A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, ‘This man was with him.’

But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t know him,’ he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’

‘Man, I am not!’ Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, ‘Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.’

*Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.” —**Luke 22:56–62***

This scene is often used to highlight not only Peter’s transformation, but the validity of the gospel. Before the resurrection, in spite of all he had witnessed and believed, Peter cowered at a comment from a servant girl, fearing his own well-being for being associated with Jesus. **After the resurrection, Peter willingly gave his life for following Jesus.**

Jesus reinstates Peter (John 21:15–17)

Following the resurrection, Jesus appears to His disciples several times. One of those appearances is only found in the Gospel of John, and Jesus specifically speaks to Peter. He seems to address Peter’s earlier denial, and again positions him as a leader of His movement.

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love You.’

Jesus said, ‘Feed My lambs.’

Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you love Me?’

He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love You.’

Jesus said, ‘Take care of My sheep.’

The third time He said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love Me?’

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ He said,

‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’

*Jesus said, ‘Feed My sheep.’” —**John 21:15–17***

It’s often assumed that Jesus asks Peter “*Do you love Me*” three times to counter the three denials, but nothing explicitly tells us why Jesus asks this question three times.

Some find it significant that Jesus and Peter use different Greek words for love. The first two times Jesus asks Peter for *agape* love and Peter responds with *phileo* love. The third time, Jesus asks for *phileo* love. While it’s commonly believed that these words for love were viewed as hierarchical, with *agape* being unconditional love and *phileo* being “brotherly love,” others argue that these words are used interchangeably throughout the Gospel of John, and that it isn’t significant.

Regardless, Jesus specifically asks Peter to “feed His sheep,” giving him the responsibility of shepherding His followers. Jesus formally forgave Peter and restored him to his position.

Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:14–41)

After the disciples received the Holy Spirit, Peter preached a sermon to the Jews, explaining how their history and Scriptures all pointed to Jesus.

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” —Acts 2:37–41

At Pentecost, Peter demonstrated himself to be a “pillar of the church,” building on the movement Jesus began and converting thousands of Jews into followers of Christ.

While Peter would later recognize that the gospel was for Jews and Gentiles alike, the majority of his ministry was spent reaching Jewish communities, which is why Paul would later say, “they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised” (Galatians 2:7).

Peter’s vision of the sheet with animals (Acts 10:9–48)

Paul is known as “the apostle to the Gentiles,” and he had a huge impact on the spread of Christianity . . . but before Paul started preaching to the Gentiles, God spoke to Peter in a vision, which he understood to mean that the gospel was for the Gentiles, too, not just the Jews.

Peter went to pray on a roof:

“He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’

The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.” —Acts 10:10–16

Shortly after, Peter was invited to stay with Cornelius the centurion—a Gentile—who God had told to find Peter and listen to him. Here, surrounded by “a large gathering” of Gentiles, Peter explains what was revealed to him through the vision:

“You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.” —Acts 10:28–29

While Peter was speaking to them, the Holy Spirit descended on “all who heard the message,” confirming that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:1–19)

In **Acts 12**, King Herod arrested a group of believers, including the Apostle James. He had James executed (**Acts 12:2**), and when he saw that this pleased the Jews (whom he was trying to win favor with), he arrested Peter, too, and assigned 16 guards to watch him.

The night before Peter was going to stand on trial, an angel appeared, woke Peter up, loosed his chains, and led him to safety. All the while, Paul thought he was having a vision, and that it wasn’t really happening. After he escaped, he went to John Mark’s house (John Mark is believed to be the author of the Gospel of Mark).

Paul confronts Peter (Galatians 2:11–21)

Despite the vision and experience he had with the Gentiles in **Acts 10**, Peter struggled to disentangle himself from the cultural prejudice and favoritism of his fellow Jewish believers.

So Paul called him out on it:

“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.” —Galatians 2:11–13

Paul goes on to explain how he lectured Peter in front of the others. This passage is often used to illustrate that even Peter was clearly capable of making poor decisions, and received correction from other apostles.

Did Peter write part of the Bible?

Two epistles in the Bible bear Peter’s name. Both of them claim to have been written by him (**1 Peter 1:1**, **2 Peter 1:1**). Tradition has held that Peter is the author of these books.

But before he met Jesus, Peter was just a fisherman, presumably with no formal education.

So did he write these letters?

Did Peter really write 1 Peter?

While **1 Peter** claims to be written by Peter, its style and language suggest the author had a formal Greek education.

Acts 4 specifically tells us that Peter had no such education, which made his boldness as a teacher all the more impressive:

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” —Acts 4:13

It’s possible that Peter said what he wanted to communicate in this letter, and that someone helped him write it, and then he signed it. In the closing remarks, the author clearly indicates that a man named Silas helped write the letter:

“With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.” —1 Peter 5:12

Dictating letters wasn’t uncommon, and it wouldn’t be at all surprising if a leader who was poorly educated solicited help from someone who had formal education.

Did he write 2 Peter?

Peter would’ve had to write this letter before 68 AD—when most scholars believe he died. In **2 Peter 1**, the author clearly refers to his impending death, which *would* fit with Peter:

“I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.” —2 Peter 1:13-14

It says Peter wrote it. It’s in the Bible. For most Christians, that settles it.

Is Saint Peter waiting at the Pearly Gates?

Peter is often portrayed in art and literature as the gatekeeper of heaven, deciding who does and doesn’t get in. This trope comes from **Matthew 16:19**, when Jesus says “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” but beyond that, this picture of Peter is only *loosely* based on Scripture.

Peter typically holds a book, which contains the names of who does or doesn’t get into heaven. This is likely “the book of life,” which Revelation connects to the judgment of the dead:

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each

person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.” — Revelation 20:12–15

John’s apocalyptic vision *does* tell us that there are twelve pearly gates in the New Jerusalem (**Revelation 21:21**), and that each is inscribed with the name of an apostle (**Revelation 21:14**), and again, John tells us that only those whose names are written in the book of life will enter the city (**Revelation 21:27**), but it doesn’t connect the apostles to the book of life or imply that they have a role in “checking the list.”

Nowhere does the Bible give us this picture of Peter. But given Jesus’ remark in **Matthew 16:19**, it isn’t surprising that this would come to be a popular picture, or that this picture would evolve into a mythology about Peter.

Peter: apostle, leader, martyr, model

Peter’s writings may or may not have made it into our Bibles. But his teachings and influence on the early Christian church are impossible to miss.

This man who was once afraid of being associated with Jesus—even if only in the eyes of a servant girl—was eventually willing to literally take up his cross and give his life for Christ. And while his teachings have likely permeated through the church over the centuries, making them hard to trace, his life still gives us a clear model of what it means to be fully devoted to Christ.

PETER • CHAPTER ONE

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best know for and where is it in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

JAMES IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER TWO -

James son of Zebedee (also known as James the Greater) was another one of Jesus' three main disciples, along with his brother John and Peter. Like many of the disciples, James was a fisherman before Jesus called him.

James son of Zebedee is one of at least three important New Testament figures named James. In fact, there's even another *disciple* named James. (It was a pretty common name.) This, plus the fact that the Bible tells us so little about *any* of these Jameses, has led to a lot of confusion about their identities over the centuries.

This James is often referred to as James the Greater to distinguish him from James son of Alphaeus, James the Less (who may be the same person as James son of Alphaeus), and James the brother of Jesus. "Greater" here could refer to height, age, or importance.

Mark tells us that Jesus nicknamed James and John "sons of thunder" (**Mark 3:17**). Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us what the nickname means or where it comes from. This has led many to assume it referred to their speech, temperaments, or ambition. In the Bible, James son of Zebedee is most known for:

- Asking Jesus if he and John should call down fire from heaven to destroy a village which failed to show them hospitality (**Luke 9:54**)
- Asking Jesus if he and John can sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven, and unwittingly promising to follow Jesus into martyrdom (**Mark 10:35-40**)
- Being martyred by Herod in **Acts 12:2**

Fisherman

When we first meet James, the writers of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us he's a fisherman. There are slight variations in each account of when James is called, but the main details are pretty consistent: he's washing or preparing fishing nets, he's with John, and he immediately drops everything to follow Jesus.

Luke mentions that James and John are working *with* Simon (better known as Peter).

"For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners." —Luke 5:9-10

Matthew and Mark both tell us that James and John are *with* their father, Zebedee, but Mark is the only one who makes a point of letting us know that when they chose to follow Jesus, they left their father "*with the hired men*":

"When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him." —Mark 1:19-20

Mark could be including the detail about the hired men to let us know that James and John didn't leave their father helpless to make a living, since a fisherman who couldn't afford to hire men would have been completely crippled if he lost two sons. Or, Mark might have wanted the audience to know that while they were fishermen, James and John were at least somewhat well off.

Brother of John the Apostle

As you probably gathered, those brief passages also tell us that James and John are brothers. Luke doesn't explicitly say that James and John are brothers, but he does say that they're the sons of Zebedee . . . so he's at least telling us that they're half brothers.

Several other passages point out the relationship between James and John. Together, these two brothers enjoyed a privileged position among Jesus' disciples. James died early, while the fledgling church was spreading its wings, but his brother John went on to become one of the pillars of the Christian church.

Son of Thunder

There are only four times in the Bible where all of Jesus' disciples are listed together: **Mark 3:13–19**, **Matthew 10:2–4**, **Luke 6:12–16**, and **Acts 1:13–14**. In **Mark 3:17**, the author includes a note about James and John, and a special nickname Jesus gave them.

“. . . James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”) . . .”

The Bible gives us no explanation of what this nickname implies or why Jesus gave it to them, and this is the only place the title appears in Scripture. Still, there are a number of passages that lead scholars to speculate that the nickname has to do with their temperament, religious fervor, or boldness.

When Jesus and His disciples are passing through a Samaritan village, the Samaritans refuse to show them hospitality, because they are heading to Jerusalem. So James and John, being perfectly reasonable people, ask Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the town.

*“When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?’” —**Luke 9:54***

This is the main passage people use as evidence that James and John had hot tempers, which could have been the source of the nickname. Still, others lean on a passage that highlights their boldness, when they ask Jesus for prominent positions in the afterlife and hastily say they can do what Jesus asks.

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’

‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ He asked.

They replied, 'Let one of us sit at Your right and the other at Your left in Your glory.'

'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?'

'We can,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at My right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'" —Mark 10:35-40

While we can infer that James and John may have had explosive personalities, neither of these passages is explicitly connected to the nickname (which again, only appears in **Mark 3:17**). So the most we can do is speculate where the name “sons of thunder” comes from and what it implies.

Jesus' inner circle

Peter, James, and John were Jesus' three closest disciples. We know this because there are three accounts in the gospel where Jesus only permits these three to come with Him, and they alone witness some of the most significant moments of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus raises a dead girl (Mark 5:37–43)

After Jesus miraculously heals a woman who had been bleeding for years, He escapes the crowds swarming around Him to visit a synagogue leader named Jairus, whose daughter has just died. (Jesus was on His way to heal her when He encountered the bleeding woman.) He only allows Peter, James, and John to come with Him to see Jairus' daughter, and they witness Jesus' power over death.

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–13)

Shortly after predicting His death in **Matthew 16**, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John onto a mountaintop, where He is transfigured, and they alone see His true identity. Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, and then a voice from a cloud tells the disciples, “This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!” Jesus tells them not to tell anyone, and He goes on to explain that “Elijah” has returned, referring to John the Baptist.

The Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36–46)

After the Last Supper, on the night of His betrayal, Jesus takes all of His disciples into Gethsemane. He tells the group to stay and keep watch, and then He takes Peter, James, and John with Him to pray. The disciples repeatedly fall asleep while Jesus prays more intensely than we see Him pray anywhere else, asking God to “*Take this cup from Me.*”

For whatever reason, Jesus allowed Peter, John, and James to see and experience more of who He was and what He was capable of than anyone else.

Martyr

James wasn't the first martyr (a guy named Stephen was), and he certainly wasn't the first of the Twelve to die (a guy named Judas Iscariot was). But he *was* the first of Jesus' apostles to die for following Him. Scholars generally believe that Herod executed the Apostle James in Jerusalem in 44 AD. The moment is recorded in **Acts 12**:

"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword." —**Acts 12:1-2**

King Herod was eager to win the favor of the Jews, and since Christianity was spreading, he believed persecuting Christians would earn the Jews' appreciation. When he killed James, the Jews approved (**Acts 12:3**), and so Herod had Peter imprisoned. The night before Peter was to go on trial, God sent an angel to rescue him, and he escaped the prison unnoticed.

In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of church history, quotes Clement of Alexandria (not to be confused with Clement of Rome) about James' death:

"It appears that the guard who brought him into court was so moved when he saw him testify that he confessed that he, too, was a Christian. So they were both taken away together, and on the way he asked James to forgive him. James thought for a moment, and then he said 'I wish you peace,' and kissed him. So both were beheaded at the same time." —Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*

Clement of Alexandria was born a little over 100 years after James died, but it's very possible that he had access to accounts and records that didn't survive. And while there are plenty of legends surrounding famous Christians, this one doesn't sound so farfetched.

James' execution wasn't the first time Christians were persecuted, and it was far from the last. But it did mark the first time that one of the apostles "*drank the cup Jesus drank*" (**Mark 10:39**), and died on account of faith in him.

Missionary to Spain?

In the first century, an apocryphal text called *The Gospel of the Twelve* suggested that when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles at Pentecost (**Acts 2**), they were each empowered to speak the language of the people they were called to reach (like the Tower of Babel, but in reverse). James' language was Latin, which was primarily spoken in the western half of the Roman Empire.

But it wasn't until hundreds of years later that someone suggested James went to Spain.

In the sixth century, a text known as the *Breviary of the Apostles* claimed that James spread the gospel to Spain, and that he was buried somewhere near the sea, west of Spain. In the seventh and eighth century, there were poems, hymns, biographies,

and commentaries repeating this assertion. And in the early ninth century, a bright star allegedly guided a shepherd to Saint James' tomb in the region of Galicia, in what is now known as the city of Santiago de Compostela.

For this to be possible, James would have had to leave Jerusalem to evangelize Spain, return to Jerusalem to be executed in 44 AD, and then have his remains transported back to Spain to be buried. This legend was widely accepted at the time, and the burial site became one of the most popular Christian pilgrimages. But most modern scholars have found little support for James' ministry in Spain, or his alleged burial there.

Even Paul makes it seem less plausible. In **Romans 15**, he says, "*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation*" (**Romans 15:20**), and he goes on to say that he plans to head to Spain next (**Romans 15:23-24**).

Paul doesn't explicitly say that nobody has taken the gospel to Spain, but it'd be strange for him to say, "I prefer to go where nobody has spread the gospel before, which is why I'm going where James went."

Most scholars don't believe James the Greater ever made it to Spain. He died early in the Christian movement, and he died in Jerusalem. There was no mention of this Spanish missionary journey until the sixth century, and the discovery of his burial site was simply too fantastical. But despite its mythical origins, this pilgrimage—known as the Camino de Santiago—has continued to be popular even today.

What is the Camino de Santiago?

The Camino de Santiago (the Way of Saint James) is an expansive network of routes leading to the shrine of Saint James in Santiago de Compostela. In the middle Ages, it was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages, just behind Rome and Jerusalem, and it has remained active since the mythical discovery of Saint James' remains in the early ninth century.

About 300,000 people make the pilgrimage every year. For many Christians, it is a religious journey or spiritual escape, but non-Christians also make the trek for fitness, recreation, and other non-religious reasons.

Fun fact: For a time, the Camino de Santiago could be assigned as penance for crimes. To this day, a region of Belgium releases and pardons a prisoner every year if they agree to take the Camino de Santiago—wearing a heavy backpack and escorted by a guard.

Apostle, martyr, legend

Saint James plays a prominent role in the story of the church. But aside from the scattered details in a handful of passages, we don't know much about him. He was closer to Jesus than anyone else besides Peter or John, but he died in Jerusalem not long after Jesus.

While James the Greater may not have lived to become a pillar of the church like his brother John (or James the Lesser), and he probably didn't travel to Spain, James *did* help Christianity thrive and spread in the years immediately after Jesus' death, and he was clearly important enough to draw attention.

As the first apostle to be martyred, James was certainly someone people were paying attention to. And while we may not know him as well as some of the other disciples, what we do know is this: Jesus saw something special in him, and perhaps we should, too.

JAMES • CHAPTER TWO

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

BONUS QUESTION: Who was the first of the twelve disciples to die?

JOHN IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER THREE -

John son of Zebedee (not to be confused with John the Baptist) was the third disciple considered to be part of Jesus' "inner circle" with his brother James and Peter. Like James, Peter, and several other disciples, John was a fisherman.

Like his brother James, John was given the nickname "son of thunder" (**Mark 3:17**). Whether it was for their explosive temperaments, speech, ambition, or something else, James and John clearly had some defining quality in common.

In the Bible, John is most known for:

- Asking Jesus if he and James should call down fire from heaven to destroy a village which failed to show them hospitality (**Luke 9:54**)
- Asking Jesus if he and James can sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven, and unwittingly promising to follow Jesus into martyrdom (**Mark 10:35-40**)
- Taking care of Jesus' mother, Mary (**John 19:26-27**)
- Beating Peter in a race to Jesus' empty tomb (**John 20:2-9**)
- Being a "pillar" of the church (**Galatians 2:9**)

DID JOHN WRITE ANY BOOKS OF THE BIBLE?

Five books of the New Testament are attributed to someone named "John." According to tradition, the Apostle John wrote all of them (more than any other member of the Twelve):

- The Gospel of John claims to have been written by the "Beloved Disciple." Many early Christians assumed this was John, the son of Zebedee—so much so that the book was named after him.
- **1 John**, **2 John**, and **3 John** simply claim "the elder" (or "the presbyter") as their author. Early Christians believed this elder's name was John, and many assumed it was the same John who was part of the Twelve.
- **Revelation** claims to be written by a man named John on the isle of Patmos. Again, through the ages Christians have commonly assumed John of Patmos and John the son of Zebedee was the same guy.

But which (if any) of these books he actually wrote largely depends on if we can identify John the Apostle with the Johns mentioned above, and scholars have come to mixed conclusions about that. Like "James," "John" is another common first-

century name, so it's unclear which (if any) of these names are referring to *this* John, and there's often disagreement and confusion about it.

Tradition says that John is "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" in the Gospel of John. John is never mentioned by name in this gospel, and "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" appears to be one of the most prominent disciples (he sits next to Jesus at the Passover meal, and Peter often defers to him). At the end of the gospel, the author makes it clear that *he* is "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*": "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." —**John 21:24**

Ancient sources may or may not refer to the Apostle John by several other names including John of Patmos (because he was banished to the island of Patmos), John the Evangelist, John the Elder, John the Presbyter, and the Beloved Disciple, though it is unclear if all (or any!) of these names do in fact refer to *this* John. It's also worth noting: John the disciple of Jesus is not the same person as John the Baptist, who was Jesus' cousin.

So who *was* the Apostle John? What do we really know about him? We're going to explore what the Bible says about him, what we can draw from other ancient sources, and the things we still don't know for sure.

For starters, here are some quick facts about this well-known biblical figure.

Who was John?

Most of what we know about John comes from the Bible itself, particularly the gospels. Interestingly, the Apostle John is mentioned by name in every gospel *except* the one named after him. According to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) John was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him. Like many of Jesus' disciples, he was a fisherman by trade.

"Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." —**Matthew 4:21–22**

A pillar of the early Christian church

When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, a false teacher had told them that in order to follow Christ, they needed to follow the Mosaic Law. This is the opposite of what Paul had been teaching them. In order to prove that he was right to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and to teach that they didn't need to follow the Law to be saved, Paul appealed to the apostles. Particularly, the three apostles who had the most authority: Peter, James, and John.

Paul makes a point of saying that even these three apostles had nothing to add to the gospel he preached—so why would the Galatians listen to someone else, and let some random teacher add the weight of the Law to the good news of Christ?

“On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas [Peter] and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.” —Galatians 2:7–9

Paul refers to Peter, James, and John as pillars of the church because they played an integral role in supporting, building up, and maintaining the Christian movement. The early church stood on their leadership. When there were disputes about how exactly Christians should behave and what following Jesus looked like, the church appealed to these three original disciples of Jesus, who had witnessed more of his personal ministry than anyone else.

Sons of thunder

Mark 3 lists the names and nicknames of Jesus’ 12 disciples, and when it gets to James and John, there’s a note found nowhere else in Scripture:

“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

This is the only place the nickname “sons of thunder” appears, and there’s no explanation as to why Jesus gave them the name.

James and John were brothers who may have had dangerous tempers, and it is often assumed that the nickname came from their “thunderous nature.” The most prominent example is recorded in **Luke 9**. A group of Samaritans didn’t welcome Jesus into their village, so James and John asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” (**Luke 9:54**)

Jesus did not, and He rebuked them. So is this nickname tongue-in-cheek for their explosive personalities? Is it an affirmation of their fervor? We will likely never know.

Part of Jesus’ inner circle

John was one of Jesus’ three closest disciples. There are three times in the synoptic gospels where Peter, James, and John get to witness Jesus do things no one else saw.

1. Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter from the dead, and he doesn’t allow anyone else to watch besides these three (**Mark 5:37**).
2. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a mountaintop, where he is transfigured before them. Jesus speaks to Moses and Elijah, and John is one of

the only three people to witness his glory (**Matthew 17:1–11, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36**).

3. On the night of his betrayal, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him to pray, and asks them to keep watch (**Matthew 26:36–46**).

These three moments capture the special relationship John had with Jesus, and according to the gospel that bears his name; John may have had an even more privileged relationship with Jesus (or maybe he's just bragging).

The one whom Jesus loved?

John (the disciple) is never mentioned in the Gospel of John. In ancient writings it was common for writers to omit themselves from an account or use third person descriptions to disguise their identity. In the Gospel of John, the author uses "*the one whom Jesus loved*" five times to refer to a disciple who was particularly close to Jesus. It appears in **John 13:23, John 19:26, John 20:2, John 21:7, and John 21:20**.

We know from context that this title isn't referring to Peter ("the one whom Jesus loved" interacts with Peter), and scholars believe James died too early to have written this gospel (he's executed in **Acts 12:2**).

The author clearly positions "*the one whom Jesus loved*" as one of the most important disciples, perhaps having the closest relationship with Jesus.

Interestingly, with one exception, whenever the beloved disciple is mentioned, it tends to be **in contrast to Peter**.

For example, at the Last Supper, Peter asks "*the one whom Jesus loved*" to ask Jesus who will betray him:

"One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask Him which one He means.' Leaning back against Jesus, he asked Him, 'Lord, who is it?'" —John 13:23-24

And once Jesus is betrayed and arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, only two disciples follow Jesus to his trial from a distance: Peter and the beloved disciple. While the beloved disciple pulls some strings to bring Peter closer to Jesus, Peter denies any association with the Lord (**John 18:15–17**).

But perhaps the most well known example of "*the one whom Jesus loved*" comes in **John 20** after Jesus died on the cross, when Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb.

“So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!’

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.” —John 20:2-9

In case you missed the *three* references to it, the one whom Jesus loved was faster than Peter. Tradition has associated “*the beloved disciple*” with John since at least the second century, but not all scholars agree that this is referring to him.

A disciple of John the Baptist?

It’s possible that John was actually a disciple of John the Baptist before he started following Jesus. The author of the Gospel of John never reveals their identity, but there are hints throughout that it could be John the Apostle, and church tradition has accepted his authorship for well over a millennia. In the Gospel of John’s account of Jesus calling the disciples, some speculate that the author omits himself from the story (as the author often does in this gospel) while also suggesting that they were a disciple of John the Baptist:

“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’

They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are You staying?’

‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’

So they went and saw where He was staying, and they spent that day with Him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.” —John 1:35-42a

In any case, we know that John was one of the closest followers of John the Baptist’s cousin (Jesus).

Did the disciple John write the Gospel of John?

In the final chapter of the Gospel of John, the author explicitly states that “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” is the author:

“Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray You?”) When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about Him?”

Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.” Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.” —John 21:20–24

This is the only gospel that claims to be written by an eyewitness. And some of the earliest Christians claimed this eyewitness was the Apostle John.

Did John write the Book of Revelation?

The Book of Revelation is traditionally attributed to the Apostle John, but Christians have contested this since as early as the fourth century.

John of Patmos

The Apostle John is sometimes referred to as John of Patmos, though some argue that John of Patmos was actually a different person. The Book of Revelation is pretty emphatic that it was written by *someone* named John, and that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the revelation from Jesus Christ.

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.’” —Revelation 1:9–11

Did Saint John write 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John?

Most scholars today believe that the same author wrote **1 John, 2 John, and 3 John**, but not everyone believes that author was John the Apostle. Tradition holds that he wrote them all, and 1 John does have a lot of correlations in content to the Gospel of John (light, darkness, etc.), but there are some differences in grammatical style, too. (Those are pretty complicated, with conditional sentences, demonstrative pronouns, etc.)

How did John die?

Church tradition holds that John was the only apostle to die of old age. The rest were martyred for their faith.

Before Jesus died on the cross, He entrusted His mother Mary to John’s care—assuming John *actually* is the beloved disciple (**John 19:26–27**). When Mary died,

John went to Ephesus and wrote his three epistles. Then he was exiled to Patmos for preaching the gospel, where he received the revelation from Christ and wrote the Book of Revelation. Eventually he made it back to Ephesus and died an ordinary death sometime after 98 AD.

Tertullian, a Christian writer from the late second and early third century, wrote that before the Romans banished John, they brought him into a coliseum and dunked him in a vat of boiling oil. When he emerged unharmed, the entire coliseum converted to Christianity.

A pillar the church still leans on

The Apostle John is a well-known gospel figure. Whether he was “*the one whom Jesus loved*” or not, he was one of Jesus’ closest followers, and he witnessed more of Jesus’ ministry than almost anyone else. That’s why the early Christian church leaned on his insight into the life and teachings of Christ, and why other leaders like Paul appealed to his authority (**Galatians 2:8**).

Centuries after his death, as the church deconstructed heretical beliefs, John’s writings would help anchor Christians in their understanding of Jesus’ preeminence (**John 1:1–4**) and his relationship to the Father (**John 3:16**).

Today, John’s gospel is one of the best tools for evangelism that Christians have—if not *the* best. Passages from his writings have become our definition of God (**1 John 4:8**), and others have become so ubiquitous that even many non-Christians know them by heart.

JOHN • CHAPTER THREE

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) or area did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

ANDREW IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER FOUR -

Andrew was Simon Peter's brother. Like his brother, he was a fisherman. According to the Gospel of John, Andrew was the first disciple Jesus called, and while Peter gets all the credit for recognizing Jesus as the Messiah (**Matthew 16:13–20**), Andrew not only brought Peter to Jesus, but he *told him Jesus was the Messiah*.

In John's gospel, it's pretty clear where Peter first got the idea that Jesus was the Messiah:

"The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus." —John 1:41–42

But that's kind of the story of Andrew's life. Whenever he and Peter are mentioned together, Andrew is *always* mentioned second, and he's referred to as Peter's brother—but Peter is never referred to as *Andrew's* brother, indicating that Andrew was either younger or less important.

Fun fact: Andrew's name is *Andreas* in Greek, and it's most often translated as "manly." It comes from the root word *aner* or *andros*, meaning "man."

Later, when a group of Greeks wanted to see Jesus, they came to Philip, and for whatever reason, Philip deferred the decision to Andrew:

"Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus." —John 12:20–22

In **Mark 13**, Peter, James, John, and Andrew share a private moment with Jesus and ask him about the destruction of the temple (**Mark 13:3–4**). Since Peter, James, and John are clearly Jesus' closest disciples, this suggests Andrew was pretty important to Jesus, too. This, plus the fact that Philip wanted Andrew to decide what to do about the Greeks in **John 12**, could indicate that Andrew held a position of leadership among the disciples.

The Bible doesn't tell us much else about Andrew. And while there's plenty of church tradition to fill in details about his life and ministry, much of it is rooted in legends and apocryphal texts that were written about him later. However, Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of church history tells us that Origen (a scholar from the second and third century) claimed Andrew was sent to Scythia (an ancient region in central Eurasia).

Facts about Andrew the apostle

From the handful of passages he appears in, we can make several observations about who Andrew was. Here are the basics.

“Manly”

Andrew is *Andreas* in Greek, coming from the root word *aner* or *andros*, meaning “man.” The name is related to *andreia*, meaning “courage,” and it’s most often defined as “manly.” That’s a strange way to describe a baby, if you ask me.

Interestingly, Andrew’s name is Greek, even though his family is Jewish and his brother’s name is Aramaic (Simon). Since no other name is ever given for Andrew, this probably means his family was at least *open to* non-Jewish cultures.

Not just the brother of Simon Peter

Andrew was probably known as the brother of Simon from the moment he was born. And nearly two millennia after his death, it’s still the most widely known detail about him. But while Andrew wasn’t nearly as prominent in the New Testament as Peter, he still clearly had an important role in the early church—so much so that heretics tried to leverage his name and authority to advance their teachings.

Each of the gospels refers to Andrew as Peter’s brother—but Peter is never referred to as Andrew’s brother. This, plus the fact that Peter is *always* listed before him indicates that Andrew was either younger or just less important.

Two lists of the disciples (**Acts 1:13** and **Mark 3:16-19**) list Andrew after Peter, James, and John. Given his relationship to Peter, it seems more likely that the writers (John Mark and Luke) are ordering the disciples based on their importance.

As Peter’s brother, Andrew was also the son of John (**John 1:42**) or Jonah (**Matthew 16:17**), a man we know almost nothing about.

And while many Christians try to infer larger details about Andrew’s personality and character from the scant passages that mention him, there’s one thing we can be confident of: long before Peter made his monumental declaration that Jesus was the Messiah (**Matthew 16:16-20**), his brother Andrew beat him to it (**John 1:41**).

A fisherman

Like his brother Simon Peter and several of the other disciples, Andrew was a fisherman. In **Matthew 4:18-20** and **Mark 1:16-20**, Jesus first encounters Andrew when he’s fishing near the shore of the Sea of Galilee with Peter. **Luke 5:1-11** gives a similar account, but doesn’t actually name Andrew among the fishermen. It does, however, add that James and John (also brothers) were Peter’s partners. From the narrative in Luke, it seems likely that Peter had a more prominent role in the business than Andrew (Luke claims Jesus gets into the boat that belongs to Peter, and the other presumably belongs to James and John). This could support the idea that Andrew was Peter’s younger brother.

In all three accounts, Jesus tells the fishermen some variation of, “*Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.*” They all drop their nets and follow Jesus.

Interestingly, the Gospel of John tells us that after the resurrection, Simon Peter went fishing with several of the other disciples—but Andrew is never mentioned: *“Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.”* —**John 21:2-3**

It’s hard to imagine that Andrew wouldn’t have been there. He and Peter fished together, their partners (James and John) were there, and even Thomas, Nathanael, and another disciple tagged along.

A disciple of John the Baptist

Before he was called by Jesus Christ, Andrew was actually a disciple of Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist:

“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’

They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means “Teacher”), ‘where are you staying?’

‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.” —**John 1:35-40**

Interestingly, the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) don’t give us this account of Andrew’s calling. Instead, they suggest Andrew was called at the same time as Peter, James, and John, when they were either fishing or cleaning their nets. (Luke never actually mentions Andrew being there, though.) Many would say this represents an obvious contradiction in the Bible, but it’s also possible for both of these accounts to be true. (One just had to happen first.)

The First Called

Since the Gospel of John records that Andrew followed Jesus before any of the other apostles (and the other disciple isn’t named), the Byzantine church referred to Andrew as the *Protoklete*, or “the First Called.” That’s pretty much his biggest claim to fame.

Missionary

While the New Testament doesn’t record much of Andrew’s personal ministry activity, other accounts claim he brought the gospel to various countries.

In *Church History*, Eusebius of Caesarea claims Origen said Andrew was sent to Scythia (an ancient region in central Eurasia). A *much* later work added that he preached in regions surrounding the Black Sea. And an ancient apocryphal text

claimed he preached in Achaëa. For centuries, church tradition has supported Andrew's ministry in many of these regions.

Andrew in the Bible

Andrew receives very little attention in the New Testament. Aside from the times where he's merely listed among the disciples and the passages recounting when Jesus first called the disciples, there are only three places where he plays any significant role.

Jesus Feeds the 5,000 (John 6)

All four gospels record the feeding of the 5,000. But only John specifically mentions Andrew's role. Jesus tells the disciples to find food for the crowd, and here's Andrew's big moment:

"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for He already had in mind what He was going to do.

Philip answered Him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'

*Another of his disciples, **Andrew, Simon Peter's brother**, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'*

Andrew is the one who finds the boy with the five loaves and two fish. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke didn't think that was important enough to be worth mentioning (**Matthew 14:17, Mark 6:38, and Luke 9:13**).

The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times (Mark 13)

In **Mark 13**, Jesus leaves the temple and tells his disciples that one day it will be destroyed—"Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (**Mark 13:2**). Later, on the Mount of Olives, Peter, James, John, and Andrew "privately" ask Jesus to tell them when this will happen, and he launches into a lengthy teaching about the end times.

This passage is one of the main arguments that Andrew was one of the more prominent apostles, because Peter, James, and John saw more of Jesus' ministry than anyone else, and here Andrew is privy to teaching they received in private.

All three synoptic gospels record this narrative, but only Mark specifies which disciples were there.

How did Andrew die?

Tradition claims Andrew was crucified in the Greek city of Patras around 60 AD, and that like Peter, he didn't consider himself worthy of dying the same way as Jesus. Instead, he was bound to an X shaped cross, which became a symbol known as Saint

Andrew's Cross. According to *Acts of Andrew* (an apocryphal text), he hung there for three days, preaching the entire time.

ANDREW • CHAPTER FOUR

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Andrew best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

PHILIP IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER FIVE -

Philip the Apostle was one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus Christ. He's one of four people named Philip in the Bible, and he's often confused with Philip the Evangelist, who plays a minor role in Acts. (The other two Philips are both sons of King Herod the Great.)

The Apostle Philip is only mentioned a handful of times in the New Testament—seven times in the gospels and once in Acts. (One tradition also claims he's mentioned in another verse, though not by name.) Four of those mentions are just lists of the apostles. Like the Apostle Thomas, Philip's only significant mentions come in the Gospel of John (and they're still not that significant).

Church tradition identifies Philip as the missionary to Greece, Syria, and Phrygia, but even early on, Philip the Apostle was frequently confused with Philip the Evangelist (also known as Philip the Deacon), which makes it hard to distinguish which details describe which Philip. Add to that the legendary accounts from the *Acts of Philip* and *Letter from Peter to Philip*, and it becomes difficult to separate fact from fiction, too.

Still, there are some things we can learn about Philip the Apostle from the Bible, and we can glean a few insights from the early church as well.

For starters, here are the quick facts.

In Acts, Philip the Evangelist is clearly distinguished from the Twelve:

"So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them." —**Acts 6:2-6**

Later, Philip the Evangelist is referred to as “one of the seven” (**Acts 21:8**), not an apostle or one of the Twelve. Still, the early church mixed them up, and their mistakes were often passed down, making it difficult to be sure which traditions actually apply to Philip the Apostle.

One of the few details the Bible gives us about Philip the Apostle is that like Peter and Andrew, he comes from Bethsaida, a town near the Sea of Galilee (**John 1:44**). Later, when some Greek men from Bethsaida want to see Jesus, they come to Philip first, presumably because they knew he was from the same town as them (or possibly because he spoke Greek the best).

Philip’s most notable moment in the gospels is his role in bringing Nathanael to Jesus. Nathanael is only mentioned in the Gospel of John, but many assume this is another name for Bartholomew because:

- John appears to consider him one of the Twelve (**John 21:2**).
- Bartholomew is never mentioned in John.
- Philip and Bartholomew are almost always listed together, and they’re closely associated in church tradition.

In any case, Nathanael follows Jesus as a result of Philip’s invitation to “come and see” him, “the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote” (**John 1:45–46**).

The only other mentions of Philip in the Bible occur in John:

- Jesus tests Philip by asking him where they should buy bread to feed the crowd of 5,000 people (**John 6:5–7**).
- Philip asks Jesus to show them God the Father, and Jesus responds by saying “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*” (**John 14:6–10**).

In **Luke 9:57–62** and the parallel passage in **Matthew 8:18–22**, an unnamed person asks to bury his father before he follows Jesus, and Jesus replies: “*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God*” (**Luke 9:60**).

Facts about the Apostle Philip

We don’t learn much about Philip from the synoptic gospels or Book of Acts—in fact, pretty much all we learn is that he’s always listed with Bartholomew. But the Gospel of John and the early church fill in some blanks and help us understand a little more about who he was.

He was one of the Twelve

The New Testament lists all twelve apostles four times—**Matthew 10:2-4**, **Mark 3:14-19**, **Luke 6:13-16**, and **Acts 1:13-16**. While there is some variations in the order the apostles appear and even the names they went by, Philip is listed in all of them. He’s also clearly one of the Twelve in the Gospel of John, though John never explicitly lists them.

This means Philip was one of the people who was closest to Jesus, and that he spent about three years living with him, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus’ divinity.

He came from Bethsaida

One of the first things we learn about Philip in the Gospel of John is that like Simon Peter and Andrew, he comes from Bethsaida, a town by the Sea of Galilee (**John 1:44**). This may seem like a trivial detail, but later, when Jesus and the disciples come to Jerusalem, some Greek men from Bethsaida want to see Jesus—and they come to Philip (**John 12:21**). It’s possible that they knew him personally, or perhaps he spoke Greek better than the other disciples (he did have a Greek name after all).

He was not Philip the Evangelist

It’s easy to read the gospels and Acts and not even notice that there are two different Philips. In fact, it’s possible that Philip the Apostle was confused with Philip the Evangelist as early as *the first or second century*. In *Church History* Eusebius quotes Papias of Hierapolis—a contemporary of the apostles—as saying that Philip was living in Hierapolis with his daughters. Papias also refers to the Philip in **Acts 21** as an apostle, and that title was usually (but not always) reserved for the Twelve.

But there’s good reason to believe there are probably two different people named Philip.

The Philip we call “the Evangelist” or “the Deacon” is first mentioned in **Acts 6** when the church selects seven people to distribute food. Luke writes:

“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’” —Acts 6:2–4

The twelve apostles opted out of this position, and then a man named Philip was chosen to be one of the Seven (**Acts 6:5**). So that would be pretty strange if that is Philip the Apostle.

Much later in **Acts 21:8–9**, Paul and his companions stay at Philip’s house in Caesarea with his four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy. This Philip is explicitly identified as “the evangelist” and “one of the Seven.” If this were Philip the Apostle, it would be odd for Luke to provide two distinguishing details and not call him the apostle. And presumably, if he did *not* use distinguishing details, the early church would’ve assumed he meant Philip the Apostle—the most well known Philip. (This is one of the main arguments for assuming that all New Testament references to Mark are talking about John Mark, the traditional author of the Gospel of Mark.)

Most scholars believe that either Papias was talking about Philip the Evangelist (due to the reference to his daughters) and using the term apostle more broadly, or else Papias confused the two. Polycrates seems to have clearly blurred the two Philips, and Eusebius never caught the mistake. As a result, the church has doubted Eusebius’ account of Philip for nearly a millennia.

He may have been a missionary

Church tradition holds that Philip preached the gospel in Scythia (a region in central Eurasia), Syria, and Phrygia (Turkey).

Philip in the Bible

Aside from the lists of apostles in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts, Philip appears in four narratives in the Gospel of John. They don’t tell us much, but they’re all we really have to go on.

Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43–51)

After Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John, he finds Philip:

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law, and about Whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’

‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.

‘Come and see,’ said Philip.” —John 1:43–46

Like Andrew, Philip’s first reaction after meeting Jesus was to go tell someone about Him. He played an active role in leading another apostle to Jesus.

Some scholars speculate that Philip may have also been a disciple of John the Baptist, since:

- Two of John’s disciples followed Jesus (**John 1:35–37**)
- The Bible only tells us that one was Andrew (**John 1:40**)
- The accounts appear side-by-side
- The encounters seem to happen in the same location
- Jesus may have been actively looking for Philip

Jesus Feeds the 5,000 (John 6:1–15)

Before Jesus famously fed the crowd of more than 5,000 people, he decided to test Philip:

“When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, ‘It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’” —John 6:5–7

Jesus already knew exactly what He was going to do, but He asked Philip what it would take to feed these people—perhaps as a joke, or possibly, to illustrate that it would take a miracle to feed this many.

In the synoptic gospels, the writers simply tell us these exchanges took place between Jesus and “the disciples,” and the dialogue cuts to the chase a little more. John seems more interested in telling us who said what, and using Philip’s answer to set up Jesus’ miracle.

Fun fact: John’s desire to tell us who said what is the reason Thomas got stuck with the infamous moniker, “Doubting Thomas.” For some reason “Practical Philip” didn’t catch on, though.

Philip refers some Greeks to Jesus (John 12:20–36)

When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, some God-fearing Greeks want to see Him, so they come to Philip:

“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.” —John 12:20–22

As we discussed earlier, these Greeks may have come to Philip because they knew him, or simply because he had a Greek name and spoke Greek the best.

Jesus the Way to the Father (John 14:5–14)

Frequently, the disciples have no idea what Jesus is talking about, and someone has to stick their neck out and ask a clarifying question (or often in Peter’s case, make a foolish statement). After Jesus tells the disciples He’s preparing a place for them and that they know where He’s going, Thomas asks, “How can we know the way if we don’t know where You’re going?”

That’s where we pick up:

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.’

Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’

Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me?’” —John 14:6–10

Jesus has just told them that His Father's mansion has many rooms and He's going to prepare a place for them and come back and get them.

Thomas says, "*We don't know where You're going. How can we get there.*"

The disciples think they're going to the Father's house *soon*, and Jesus responds, "*If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well.*"

Philip's basically trying to demonstrate his faith by saying, "I don't even care about the details. Just seeing the Father will be enough for us."

Whether Philip's statement was foolish or simply bold, it gave Jesus another opportunity to directly assert His divinity, and help us understand His relationship to the Father.

The Cost of Following Jesus (Luke 9:57–62, Matthew 8:18–22)

In Luke and Matthew, an unnamed disciple asks Jesus if he can bury his father before following Him. Jesus responds (seemingly harshly), "*Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:60).

Clement of Alexandria, who lived in the second and third century, claimed that this unnamed disciple was Philip:

"If they quote the Lord's words to Philip, "Let dead bury their dead, but do thou follow me . . ." —*Stromata*

How did Philip the Apostle die?

It's hard to say how Philip died, especially since he was confused with Philip the Evangelist early on, and there are conflicting accounts. One record says he died of natural causes. Another says he was beheaded. Or stoned to death. Or crucified upside down.

Philip died sometime in the first century, possibly around 80 AD.

A lesser-known apostle

What we do know is this: as one of the Twelve, Philip certainly held an important role in the early church, and he likely played a key part in spreading the gospel *somewhere* in ancient Eurasia.

PHILIP • CHAPTER FIVE

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?
_____ Bible Verse
5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

BARTHOLOMEW, IS HE THE SAME PERSON AS NATHANAEL?

- CHAPTER SIX -

Bartholomew is one of the most obscure apostles. His name *only* appears in the four lists of Jesus' 12 main disciples, and he's never listed with any titles or descriptions. All we really know is his name, and that he's closely associated with Philip (aside from the list in **Acts 1:13**, Bartholomew is always listed alongside Philip, which perhaps indicates some sort of relationship).

Bartholomew's name most likely comes from the Aramaic name, *Bar-Talmai*, meaning "son of Talmai." If that's the case and this is a patronymic name (meaning a name that derives from a person's father), it stands to reason that Bartholomew would've been known by another name.

In this case, most would argue that this other name is Nathanael, since Nathanael appears to be an apostle in the Gospel of John, is closely associated with Philip (Philip calls him to meet Jesus, after all), and Bartholomew doesn't appear in John. But others argue that Bartholomew is a standalone name, and that the Greek text normally represents patronymic names differently:

"The name 'Bartholomew' may stand by itself in the apostolic lists as a proper name. It is not necessarily a patronymic. The patronymic is normally expressed in the lists by the Greek genitive, not by the Aramaic *bar*." —Professor Michael Wilkins, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*

That's not to say Bartholomew was *not* also known as Nathanael, just that this isn't necessarily why he would've been known by two names. Many modern scholars prefer to take a neutral stance on Nathanael and Bartholomew, suggesting that it's *possible*, but not verifiable.

If Bartholomew *is* Nathanael though, John gives us two additional passages to learn about this disciple. When Philip first tells Nathanael about Jesus, he's skeptical:

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46)

But after seeing Jesus demonstrate his divinity, he says:
"Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the king of Israel" (John 1:49)

Toward the end of John's gospel, Nathanael comes up again. This time, he's merely listed among seven disciples who went fishing (**John 21:1-3**). We *know* several of these disciples are fishermen—Peter, James, and John, plus Andrew if he's one of the unnamed disciples in the passage—so either Nathanael was a fisherman, too or he's just taking the opportunity to learn a new trade, since at this point it seemed like the whole disciple thing didn't work out.

Bartholomew was one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus Christ. In the entire New Testament, his name *only* appears in the four lists of the twelve apostles (**Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:14–16, Acts 1:1–13**). He’s never given any distinguishing qualities or titles, so aside from his name; we know almost nothing about him.

Since Bartholomew is never mentioned in the Gospel of John, and a man named Nathanael (who doesn’t appear in the synoptic gospels) appears to be an apostle (**John 21:1–2**), some traditions have assumed Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person.

Facts about Bartholomew the Apostle

While the Bible only gives us his name, there are some details we can glean from his inclusion in the New Testament, and early church writings may give us a little bit more information.

He was one of the Twelve

Only four passages in the Bible explicitly name all twelve of the apostles (**Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:14–16, Acts 1:1–13**). Bartholomew appears in all of them. Even though he isn’t mentioned by name in any other passages, his inclusion in this group tells us he was present in most of the significant events recorded in the gospels, as the gospel writers frequently refer to the disciples as a group, and their presence is often implied from the moment Jesus called them.

As an apostle, Bartholomew personally witnessed most of Jesus’ miracles and heard most of his teachings. He lived with Jesus for about three years. When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles, Bartholomew (possibly paired with Philip) was given the power to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons” (**Matthew 10:8**).

After Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven, Bartholomew received the power of the Holy Spirit along with the other apostles (**Acts 2:1**).

His father’s name was probably Talmi

The name “Bartholomew” most likely comes from Aramaic (*Bar-Talmi*), meaning “son of Talmi.” Patronymic names—meaning names that come from the name of a person’s father, like how Johnson in English originally meant “son of John”—were common in ancient Israel. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus refers to Peter by his patronymic name, *Bar-Jonah* (**Matthew 16:17**), meaning son of Jonah (or in some manuscripts, John).

If Bartholomew *is* a patronymic name, it tells us his father was someone named Talmi (or Tholami or Tholomaeus in English). That isn’t very useful, since it was the name of a couple different Old Testament figures—one of the nephilim (**Numbers 13:22**) and a king of Geshur (**2 Samuel 3:22**)—and there’s no one named Talmi in the New Testament.

But if Bartholomew were a patronymic surname, he probably would've been known by another name, too. And that's why this is one of the main arguments for suggesting Bartholomew and Nathanael were the same person: Nathanael Bartholomew.

He is traditionally associated with Philip

In three of the four lists of apostles, Bartholomew appears right after Philip, which appears to suggest an association of some kind between them.

He *might* have been the same person as Nathanael

John's gospel is the only one that mentions a man named Nathanael, who appears to be an apostle (**John 1:43-51**). John also never mentions Bartholomew. The Bible doesn't say Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person. But there are several reasons why for centuries, many Christians have believed they were.

It was common for people in the first century to be known by two names. Sometimes it was because they were given a new name, like Simon, also known as Peter, who was also called Simon Peter. Or, maybe they were known by one name in Hebrew and another in Greek, like Paul, also known as Saul and John, also called Mark. The Bible technically calls one apostle "the Twin" . . . which probably wasn't his actual name.

If Bartholomew was a last name meaning "son of Talmai," then we can certainly assume he was known by another name. He *could've* been Nathanael Bartholomew. (But as we discussed above, he could've also just been a guy named Bartholomew.)

Since the synoptic gospels all list Philip and Bartholomew together, many scholars believe this implies a relationship between them, as the pairings often do for the other apostles (like Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee). If Nathanael *is* Bartholomew, then the Gospel of John makes that association more clear. Philip seeks Nathanael out (implying they knew each other) and brings him to Jesus (**John 1:45-47**).

Nathanael also appears to be an apostle. Jesus doesn't explicitly call him to "come, follow me," but in their first encounter, he *does* tell Nathanael, "*Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man*" (**John 1:51**). John also seems to include him among the apostles: "*Afterward Jesus appeared again to His disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.*" —**John 21:1-2**

Still, John doesn't explicitly call Nathanael one of the apostles. But all of this, added to the fact that John doesn't mention anyone named Bartholomew and Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't mention anyone named Nathanael, makes a decent argument for Nathanael and Bartholomew being the same person.

If Bartholomew and Nathanael *are* the same person though, then the Gospel of John gives us a couple more opportunities to learn about him.

Nathanael was skeptical of Jesus because he came from Nazareth, famously saying, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (**John 1:46**). But after Jesus demonstrates his divinity, Nathanael proclaims, “*Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the king of Israel*” (**John 1:49**).

After Jesus appears to His disciples, seven of them go out fishing—and Nathanael is one of them (**John 21:1–3**). The gospels explicitly tell us that several of the disciples—Peter, the sons of Zebedee, and Peter’s brother Andrew (who may or may not have been present)—were fishermen. Thomas, Nathanael, and the two unnamed disciples in the passage were either fishermen as well, or else they were just along for the ride and learning a new trade.

Ultimately, it’s hard to say whether Nathanael and Bartholomew are or aren’t the same person. But even if they are, it doesn’t give us much more to go on. Since he only appears in the Gospel of John, Nathanael is basically as obscure as Bartholomew.

Bartholomew was probably a missionary

The Greek word we translate as “apostle” is *apostolos*. It literally means “one who is sent.” During his ministry, Jesus sent the apostles to specific regions in pairs of two (**Mark 6:7–13**), and before his ascension, he commanded them to “*go and make disciples of all nations*” (**Matthew 28:19**).

The Bible doesn’t tell us which nation each apostle went to, but for many of them, early church records were pretty consistent. However, traditions vary about where Bartholomew went.

In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that Bartholomew preached in India:

“Pantænus was one of these, and is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time.” —*Church History*

Other traditions, some of which are much less reliable (like the *Acts of Philip*), claim Bartholomew preached in places like Armenia, Ethiopia, Lycaonia, Mesopotamia, and Parthia.

An apostle is an apostle

While it would be nice if someone in the first century had taken the time to sit down and record the lives of each of the apostles, many of them were too busy racing to spread the gospel to the farthest reaches of the known world, doing their best to love as Jesus loved (**John 13:34–35**), and dying as a result.

How did Bartholomew die?

Like most of the apostles, Bartholomew was probably martyred. But there are several explanations of his death.

The most popular is also the most gruesome: Bartholomew was allegedly flayed alive and then beheaded. Most art that portrays the apostles includes some iconography related to their death, and so Bartholomew is often portrayed *wearing his skin*, or in the less grotesque portraits, holding a flaying knife.

Other accounts suggest he was:

- Beaten and then crucified
- Crucified upside down
- Crucified and taken down before he died, then flayed and beheaded
- Just beheaded
- Beaten unconscious and tossed in the sea to drown

No one claims he died of old age or natural causes, though.

BARTHOLOMEW • CHAPTER SIX

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

MATTHEW IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER SEVEN -

Matthew, also known as Levi, was a tax collector—one of the most reviled professions in first-century Judaism.

As a tax collector (or publican), Matthew collected taxes *for Rome from* his fellow Jews in Capernaum.

That in it-self would be enough to make him feel like a political traitor—his profession was a symbol of Israel’s Roman occupation. But to make matters worse, tax collectors made their money by *saying* people owed Caesar more than they did and then skimming the extra off the top—and there was nothing anyone could do about it. As a result, tax collectors were right up there with prostitutes for the go-to example of the worst sinners.

So it was a big deal that Jesus asked Matthew to follow him and be one of His disciples. Matthew’s inclusion among the Twelve presents a powerful picture of how God partners with all kinds of people—even those you’d least expect—to accomplish His purposes. And despite the fact that Matthew would have been considered a religious outsider, Jesus brought him into the inner circle of what would eventually become the world’s largest religion.

Despite the fact that Matthew is one of the better-known disciples, he’s actually only mentioned seven times in the Bible.

Matthew is one of the few apostles whose calling is recorded in the gospels. All three synoptic gospels have a version of the same account:

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.” —Matthew 9:9

“As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” —Mark 2:14

“After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.” —Luke 5:27-28

A tax collector (or publican)

As we just learned in the passages above (**Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-28**), Matthew was a tax collector, or a publican—someone who was contracted by the Roman government to collect taxes. As a Jew, stepping into this profession was essentially an act of betrayal to his people.

Tax collectors had very little accountability. They'd be told to collect a specified amount of money, but they could tell people they owed a different amount, and they had no power to dispute it. Tax collectors earned a reputation for telling people they owed more than they did and pocketing the difference. To the Jews, tax collectors were the embodiment of sin.

When tax collectors came to be baptized by John the Baptist, they said, "Teacher, what shall we do?" and he told them: "*Collect no more than you are authorized to do*" (**Luke 3:12-13**).

Interestingly, Mark and Luke don't explicitly label the disciple *Matthew* as a tax collector—we have to infer that Levi the tax collector (**Mark 3:18** and **Luke 6:15**) is the disciple named Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew leaves little room for confusion though: he's called "the tax collector" in the list of disciples:

"These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him." —**Matthew 10:2-4**

Fun fact: As a tax collector, Matthew would've presumably been great with money, and modern readers would think he'd be an ideal candidate for the group's "official treasurer." But given the reputation of tax collectors in first-century Judaism, that would've been a bad move politically—which might be why the disciples gave the job to a guy named Judas Iscariot. Think about that: they were worried about putting a tax collector in charge of their money, but Judas not only stole from the money bag (**John 12:6**), but ultimately betrayed Jesus.

A "sinner"

The Bible says we're all sinners (**Romans 3:23**), but in ancient Judaism, the label was reserved for the worst of the worst—like tax collectors.

Tax collectors were sinners by trade, lying and cheating their way into riches and robbing from even the poorest among their people. They were religious outsiders, because the way they practiced their profession openly defied the Law of Moses. The richer they were, the worse they were assumed to be.

After Jesus calls him, Matthew hosts a gathering at his house, and as he and his unsavory companions dine with Jesus, the Pharisees ask why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (**Matthew 9:11**).

Then Jesus lumps Matthew in with "the sinners":

"On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" —**Matthew 9:12**

By calling Matthew, Jesus was proclaiming that no one would be excluded from his movement—not even those society considered irredeemable.

An eyewitness to Jesus' ministry

As one of the twelve apostles, Matthew was there throughout almost all of Jesus' ministry. The only people who saw more of who Jesus was and what He was capable of were Peter, James, and John.

An evangelist

Matthew is considered one of the "Four Evangelists." This is a title reserved for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the traditional authors of the four gospels. It comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, meaning "good news." These four writers proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ with their writings.

A scribe?

As a tax collector, Matthew's job would've involved meticulously recording and documenting tax information. Some argue that Jesus referred to him in **Matthew 13:52**, because his job would've technically made him fit the description of "scribe."

"The 'scribe' of **Matthew 13:52** is, no doubt, Matthew himself, who as a tax collector had been a secular scribe. Jesus likens him to a person 'bringing forth treasures new and old'—the old being those acquired as a tax collector (such as gifts for accuracy and organization), the new being Jesus' teachings; about the kingdom of heaven.' As a man doubly equipped, Matthew is now ready for further scribal activity—the writing of the book that bears his name." —Walter A. Elwell and B.J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*

When and where did Matthew live?

In order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, Matthew obviously would've had to live at the same time. Most scholars believe Jesus lived from sometime around 4 BC to around 30 or 33 AD. Since we don't know how old he was at the time he met Jesus, we can't be certain he was born in the first century, but he certainly lived then. The date of his death is unknown.

Jesus encountered Matthew at a tax booth in Capernaum—a city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

This doesn't tell us much (other than that he was a tax collector in Capernaum, since Capernaum is where this encounter takes place), but you'll notice Mark and Luke call this tax collector Levi or Levi son of Alphaeus. Since these are parallel passages, and Levi is never referred to again, and Mark and Luke both include Matthew in the lists of apostles, it's pretty safe to assume Matthew and Levi are the same person. Most likely, "Levi" referred to the tribe Matthew was from, but it's also possible that he had a Greek name (Matthew) and a Hebrew name (Levi), similar to how Paul was also known as Saul. Since Matthew/Levi was a Jew employed by Rome, that wouldn't be surprising.

Immediately after calling Matthew to follow Him, Jesus has dinner at Matthew's house, and "*many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples.*" The Pharisees—who were always trying to trap Jesus and make Him out to be a fraud—were pretty bothered by this:

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

On hearing this, Jesus said, *'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'* —**Matthew 9:10-13**

Did Matthew write the Gospel of Matthew?

The Gospel of Matthew's author is anonymous, but Matthew the Apostle is traditionally considered the author.

Internal evidence for Matthew's authorship

Some argue that the Gospel of Matthew includes internal evidence linking it to Matthew's profession, which could indicate he was the biblical author. The Gospel of Matthew talks about money in more detail and greater frequency than the other gospels—similar to how the Gospel of Luke, written by Luke the physician, includes greater detail about ailments and uses precise medical terminology.

Gold and silver are only mentioned once in Mark, and four times in Luke. But Matthew mentions them 28 times. The famous parable of the talents (**Matt 25:14-20**) *only appears in the Gospel of Matthew*. And in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew makes a curious substitution. Compare this line in the prayer as recorded by Matthew and Luke:

"Forgive us our sins,

*for we also forgive **everyone who sins against us.**"* —**Luke 11:4** (emphasis added)

*"And forgive us our **debts,***

*as we also have forgiven our **debtors.**"* —**Matthew 6:12** (emphasis added)

Matthew also uses money-related words the other gospels don't. In **Matthew 17:24**, he tells us the precise amount of the temple tax:

"After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?'"

It seems that the author paid particular attention to Jesus' statements about money, had a greater understanding of financial matters, and saw finance as a helpful lens to understand the gospel.

The sinner turned saint

When it comes to the Apostle Matthew, there's not much to go on. But what we do have—the gospels—shows us that Matthew was one of Jesus' most powerful

examples of the forgiveness God offers everyone. This tax collector was reviled for who he was, but Jesus loved him for who he was. And despite his position as a religious outsider, Jesus gave him a prominent position within what would eventually become the largest religion in the world.

How did Matthew die?

Traditions disagree on how and where Matthew died. Various accounts say he was beheaded, stoned, burned, or stabbed. One even suggests he died of old age, like John. Most scholars believe he was probably martyred, though.

As with most of the apostles, it's hard to say exactly how Matthew died. There are several conflicting accounts about his death. The earliest records say he carried out his ministry in "Ethiopia" (not what we consider Ethiopia, but a region south of the Caspian Sea), Persia, Macedonia, and/or Syria.

All the other early records of Matthew's death claim he was martyred, but they disagree about how or where it happened. The early church fathers claim he was burned, stoned, stabbed, or beheaded for his faith. In John Foxe's famous *Book of Martyrs* (first published in 1563), the entry for Matthew states:

"The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60."

Who wrote the Book of Matthew?

The Gospel of Matthew's author is anonymous, but Matthew the Apostle is traditionally considered the author.

MATTHEW • CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

THOMAS IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER EIGHT -

Thomas, perhaps better known as “Doubting Thomas,” famously doubted the resurrection of Jesus and told the other disciples, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*” (**John 20:25**).

Jesus then appeared and offered to let him do just that.

After seeing Jesus in the flesh with his own eyes (and possibly touching the wounds), Thomas proclaimed, “*My Lord and my God!*” (**John 20:28**). Jesus responded with one of the most powerful and prophetic statements about faith in all of Scripture: “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (**John 20:29**).

Thomas’ moment of skepticism earned him the nickname “Doubting Thomas,” which evolved into a term for anyone who needs proof before they believe something.

Honestly, that’s all you really need to know about the Apostle Thomas. He’s not a major Bible character by any means—he’s only mentioned eight times in the entire New Testament, and four of those times are just lists of the twelve apostles. And while throughout church history people have been happy to fill in the details of his life, few of those details are reliable. (For example, one ancient text even claimed he was Jesus’ twin brother . . . what?!)

But while the Bible tells us little about him, Thomas’ cautious approach to believing in the resurrection laid the foundation for evidence-based faith and for the Protestant teaching of *sola fide*, or “faith alone.” And even though he lived 2,000 years ago, Thomas also serves as a foil for Christians today—those who have not seen and yet have believed.

But you can still call him Thomas.

Facts about Thomas the Apostle

Thomas is mentioned a total of eight times between the four gospels and Acts. Most of what we learn about him comes from the Gospel of John—the only book of the New Testament that gives him any specific role. Between that and a few reliable claims from the early church, here’s what we know.

One of the Twelve

The New Testament lists all Twelve apostles four times—**Matthew 10:2–4**, **Mark 3:14–19**, **Luke 6:13–16**, and **Acts 1:13–16**. While there is some variations in the order the apostles appear and even the names they went by, Thomas is listed in all of them. He’s also clearly one of the Twelve in the Gospel of John, though John never explicitly lists them all.

This means Thomas was one of the people who was closest to Jesus, and that he spent about three years living with Him, witnessing His miracles, and hearing His teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus' power—including His power to raise people from the dead—and he heard Jesus predict His resurrection, but he still didn't believe Jesus was resurrected until he saw for himself.

One other thing you should know about Thomas: The Bible didn't give him a real name.

“The Twin”

Thomas wasn't actually given a name in the original manuscripts. “Thomas” comes from the Aramaic word *tě'omâ*, which means “twin.” To help clarify whom we're talking about though, most manuscripts include the description, “called Didymus” or “called the Twin.”

Didymus is a Greek word, which means . . . “the twin.” And while *tě'omâ* is only used as a description, not a name, *Didymus* can be used as a description *or* a name. So a literal translation of **John 11:16**, **John 20:24**, and **John 21:2** would say, “the twin, called the twin . . .”

Poor guy.

We can still call him Thomas. Some early traditions called him Judas Thomas, because some Syriac manuscripts claimed his real name was Judas. But that would probably just cause more confusion for us today, since there are already multiple Judases in the Bible, and one of them did a pretty bad thing.

The Bible never mentions who Thomas' twin is. Interestingly, in the third century, a text called the *Acts of Thomas* emerged claiming he was Jesus' twin. And that's . . . not true.

Missionary

The earliest mention of Thomas' missionary work comes from Eusebius of Caesarea, who quotes Origen (a scholar who died in the mid-third century) as saying that Thomas was sent to Parthia (which is in modern day Iran).

But according to the more popular church tradition, Thomas travelled to India around 50 AD and evangelized the people there, possibly establishing as many as seven churches. This tradition appears to have begun with the *Acts of Thomas*, and it remains immensely popular in some churches—especially those claiming to have been established by him.

A skeptic

Thomas is most known for his role in the Gospel of John, which earned him the moniker “Doubting Thomas.” And while the nickname is often used as a critique of his lack of faith, the reality is that he wasn't the only one who had doubts about Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

According to the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the other disciples doubted the resurrection, too:

*“When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. **But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.**” —Luke 24:9-11*

Unfortunately for Thomas, he’s the only one the church labeled a “doubter,” thanks to the account in the Gospel of John. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* suggests John focused on Thomas to illustrate the doubt all the disciples shared:

“Thomas has been chosen from among the Twelve to dramatize the disbelief of the group. The refusal of the disciples to believe the testimony of those who had seen the risen Lord is a common feature of the gospel tradition (**Matt 28:17; Mark 16:11, 14; Luke 24:36-43**); the fourth Evangelist alone has chosen Thomas to represent and symbolize this doubt.”

But even if Thomas *was* the only apostle who doubted the resurrection, there’s little reason for Christians to wield doubt as some sort of insult. Even though Jesus repeatedly revealed His plans to the disciples, they never understood the cross and resurrection until after the fact. And as Jewish men, they apostles had no reason to believe the Messiah would rise from the dead.

Jesus’ resurrection defied everything the apostles understood and believed about the Messiah—and death—since they were children. It flew in the face of their tradition. And despite everything the apostles saw and heard that proved Jesus was unlike anyone who ever lived, He died just like everyone else.

So it’s no wonder Thomas—and Jesus’ other followers—doubted the resurrection until they saw the evidence for themselves. And Jesus’ willingness to engage Thomas in the midst of his doubts encourages Christians today to bring their doubts to Him, too. It’s important to recognize that in Jesus’ response to Thomas, he recognized how much harder it would be for those who had never seen His miracles to believe.

A fisherman?

The Bible doesn’t explicitly say Thomas is a fisherman, but in the Gospel of John, *he does go fishing with fishermen*. After Jesus appears to the disciples, Peter gets antsy and decides to go fishing, and some of the other disciples tag along:

“Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ‘I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’ So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” —John 21:2-3

Nobody said he was a *good* fisherman.

The passage doesn’t technically call him a fisherman, but Peter, the sons of Zebedee (that’s James and John), and Peter’s brother Andrew—who’s presumably one of the two unnamed disciples here—all were.

Thomas in the Bible

Aside from the four lists of disciples, Thomas is mentioned four more times in the Bible—all of which occur in the Gospel of John. Here are the passages where we actually learn something about him.

The Death of Lazarus (John 11:1-16)

When Jesus learns that his friend Lazarus has died, he tells his disciples that they must return to Judea. They try to talk him out of it, because the last time they were there people were ready to stone Jesus to death. He insists. And then Thomas boldly speaks up:

“Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” —John 11:16

Here Thomas almost takes on a Peter-like quality and, perhaps ironically, appears to have more faith in Jesus than the other apostles. Thomas’ is often quoted with a cynical, Eeyore-type tone, but he may have been one of the more courageous disciples.

Jesus the way to the Father (John 14:1-14)

After predicting His betrayal and Peter’s eventual denial of Him, Jesus comforts His disciples by telling them He is going to prepare a place for them, and that they know the way to the place He is going.

Reasonably, Thomas points out:

“Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?” —John 14:5

This sets up one of Jesus’ more famous quotes, which only appears in the Gospel of John:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.” —John 14:6-7

The gospel writers frequently use the disciples’ questions to tee up Jesus’ teachings. Some Christians use this passage to read into Thomas’ character, but that’s probably not the point. Philip has a similarly blunt line after this to set up another one of Jesus’ important monologues.

Jesus appears to Thomas (John 20:24-29)

John is the only one who records Thomas’ special encounter with Jesus, which appears to mirror the encounter Jesus had with the others in **John 20:19-23**. For some unknown reason, Thomas wasn’t with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them the first time, and Thomas refuses to believe his friends, so Jesus declares a do-over.

Here’s the entire passage:

“Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’

But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’

A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.’

Thomas said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’

Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” —John 20:24-29

The Bible doesn’t tell us whether or not Thomas physically touches Jesus’ wounds. Interestingly, Catholic tradition holds that Thomas *did* touch them, which has historically supported the idea of using physical rituals and pilgrimages to bolster faith, while Protestant tradition generally holds that Thomas did *not* touch them, which has been used to reinforce the idea that faith alone is enough for people to be saved. This theological difference is often represented in Catholic and Protestant art portraying Jesus and Thomas.

Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-14)

As we’ve already mentioned, after the resurrection, Peter declares that he’s going fishing, and Thomas is listed among the six disciples who comes with him. Thomas doesn’t play any major role in this passage—which mirrors the miraculous catch in the synoptic gospels and primarily serves to set the scene for Jesus to reinstate Peter.

How did the Apostle Thomas die?

The Acts of Thomas says that he was martyred in Mylapore, India, where he was stabbed with spears. Syrian Christian tradition specifies Thomas was martyred in Mylapore on July 3, 72 AD, noting that he was killed with a spear. An early ecclesiastical calendar entry reads:

“3 July, St. Thomas who was pierced with a lance in ‘India’.”

No other tradition exists regarding his death.

Doubting Thomas

Since the Gospel of John makes Thomas the scapegoat for doubt, it’s easy to forget the other apostles doubted the resurrection, too. Christians often treat his skepticism as a weakness, but it’s important to remember: Jesus welcomed Thomas’ skepticism and challenged his doubts with evidence of his resurrection.

Thomas the Apostle is a famous symbol for doubt, but if we’re to learn anything from him, it should be this: our doubts may lead us to a deeper, richer faith. Jesus

specifically says, “*blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (**John 20:29**), but he also doesn’t ask all of us to blindly put our faith in Him. Instead, we’re invited to investigate the truth of the resurrection, and explore the way, the truth, and the life.

THOMAS QUESTIONS • **CHAPTER EIGHT**

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus’ 12 Disciples?
Yes ___ No ___

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle’s profession?

4. What is this Apostle best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle’s death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

JAMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- CHAPTER NINE -

James son of Alphaeus is *only* mentioned in the four lists of apostles. So all we can say for sure about him is that he had a really common name and he was the son of someone named Alphaeus. Pretty much everything else we “know” about him is speculation, and there are a number of details that can’t be proven one way or the other.

The main question surrounding James son of Alphaeus is *can we assume he is the same person as one or two of the other Jameses in the New Testament?*

He’s obviously not the same person as James son of Zebedee (also known as James the Greater). Their names appear in the same lists and they have different fathers. But there are two other Jameses mentioned in the New Testament:

1. James the Less (**Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10**)
2. James, brother of Jesus (**Galatians 1:19, Galatians 2:9, Acts 15:13**)

The early church (most notably, Jerome) assumed both of these Jameses were all the same person as James son of Alphaeus. The strongest link is arguably between James the Less and James, brother of Jesus, so if James son of Alphaeus could be linked to one or the other, it would be reasonable to associate all three.

We know from the gospels that Jesus had at least four brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (**Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3**). And we know that James the Less has at least one brother named Joseph (**Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40**).

Some argue that Mark’s attempt to distinguish James the Less suggests there was only one other James to distinguish him from. The word translated as “the Less” or “the younger” could refer to height, age, or importance, but this kind of contrast makes the most sense if there are two people the audience would associate with the name James, not three or four.

If it turned out that James son of Alphaeus was the same person as James the brother of Jesus, that would make him one of the most important leaders of the early church (**Galatians 2:9**). But many modern scholars take a more cautious position: It’s possible that they’re the same person, but it’s also possible that they’re not.

One more thing about James son of Alphaeus. There’s another son of Alphaeus mentioned in the New Testament: Levi the tax collector (**Mark 2:14**). This has led some to assume Matthew and James are brothers.

But the Bible doesn’t say this, and while the lists of apostles make it clear James and John are brothers, and Peter and Andrew are brothers, there’s no mention of a

relationship between James and Matthew. In fact, in two of the lists their names aren't even next to each other (**Mark 3:16-19** and **Luke 6:13-16**).

So who was James son of Alphaeus, and what do we know about him? In this guide we'll cover the facts and the ambiguities, looking at what the Bible says and what the church has concluded.

Here's a quick look at what we know.

Who was James son of Alphaeus?

"James son of Alphaeus" is only explicitly mentioned in the four lists of disciples. But there are three people named James in the New Testament, and plenty of people in the Bible were known by multiple names or had multiple monikers. So it's possible that *this* James is also another James, which would give us more passages to go on and more early Christian writings to reference.

Here's what we can say about James son of Alphaeus.

One of the Twelve

Some of the disciples' callings receive special attention in the gospels. Jesus calls Andrew, Peter, James, and John while they're tending to their fishing boats. And he calls Matthew the tax collector from his tax booth.

James son of Alphaeus doesn't get this kind of attention. But he *is* one of the Twelve. The New Testament lists all twelve apostles four times—**Matthew 10:2-4**, **Mark 3:14-19**, **Luke 6:13-16**, and **Acts 1:13-16**. While there are some variations in the order the apostles appear and even the names they went by, James son of Alphaeus is listed in all of them. He's never mentioned in the Gospel of John, but John never explicitly lists all the apostles.

This means James son of Alphaeus was one of the people who was closest to Jesus, and that he spent about three years living with Him, witnessing His miracles, and hearing His teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus' divinity.

Even though the Book of Acts and the epistles never describe James son of Alphaeus' ministry, he would've been one of the most important leaders of the early church.

Just how important, though, depends on if he can be identified with any of the other Jameses.

Possibly James the Less

James the Less, also referred to as the Lesser, the Younger, the Little, and the Minor, is mentioned four times in the gospels, always in relation to his mother, Mary, whom John refers to as Mary of Clopas in **John 19:25**.

Technically, the moniker "the Less" is only used once, in **Mark 15:40**, but early Christians used it widely to distinguish which James they were referring to. The moniker is ambiguous, but it's clearly intended to distinguish this James from James son of Zebedee, who was one of the most prominent disciples. It could mean he was younger, shorter, or less significant.

Some scholars believe the fact that the gospel writers used “the Lesser” here implies there were only two Jameses they needed to distinguish between, and Jerome and other early Christian writers were quick to identify James the Less as James son of Alphaeus *and* James, the brother of Jesus (although Jerome and others argued “brothers” must’ve meant “cousins,” to maintain the perpetual virginity of Mary). One of the key arguments for why James the Less should be identified with James son of Alphaeus depends on whether or not you consider him an apostle, and how you define apostle. Many early Christians reserved the title for members of the Twelve, or the Seventy, but it technically just means “one who is sent,” and has been applied to other early Christians.

Here’s what Jerome suggests in *The Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary*:

“Do you intend the comparatively unknown James the Less, who is called in Scripture the son of Mary, not however of Mary the mother of our Lord, to be an apostle, or not? If he is an apostle, he must be the son of Alphæus and a believer in Jesus, *‘For neither did his brethren believe in him.’*”

“The only conclusion is that the Mary who is described as the mother of James the Less was the wife of Alphæus and sister of Mary the Lord’s mother, the one who is called by John the Evangelist ‘Mary of Clopas’.”

Despite Jerome’s certainty, that is *not* the only conclusion. And while the church and many modern scholars take Jerome’s assertion for granted, some are more critical. Scripture doesn’t make these connections explicit, and while it’s certainly possible, the early church doesn’t offer much more clarity.

James the Less is as obscure and unknown as James son of Alphaeus, so little if anything is gained by their association. But if James son of Alphaeus can be identified as James, the brother of Jesus, suddenly we learn a lot more about the role he played in the early church.

And there’s a decent link between James the Less and James the brother of Jesus: Jesus had brothers named James and Joseph (see **Mark 6:3** and **Matthew 13:55**), and James the less has a brother named Joseph (**Mark 15:40**). This is likely why Jerome was so confident all three Jameses were the same.

Possibly James, brother of Jesus

James, brother of Jesus, also known as James the Just, was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and is the traditional author of James. Paul mentions him in **Galatians 1:19**, while describing a visit to Jerusalem:

“I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother.”

Some argue that by including *this* James as one of the apostles, Paul is identifying him as James son of Alphaeus, because “apostles” usually referred to the Twelve. James son of Zebedee wouldn’t have been described as “the Lord’s brother,” and by this point he’d already been martyred, so by default, Paul would be referring to

James son of Alphaeus. (Unless Paul used the title apostle for more than just members of the Twelve, as he appears to do in **1 Corinthians 15:5-8**.)

Paul continued in **Galatians 2**, recounting a second visit to Jerusalem, where the Council of Jerusalem took place to discuss whether Gentile believers would have to follow the Law of Moses. In Acts, James presided over this council. Here, Paul describes him as a pillar of the church, along with Peter and John:

“James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.” —**Galatians 2:9**

Paul doesn't refer to this James as “the Lord's brother” again, and he doesn't introduce any other distinction from other Jameses. This likely means he's discussing the same James (though it's also possible that the **James in 2:9** was so well-known that it would've been obvious who Paul meant).

The Mary described as James' mother in **Mark 15:40**, **Mark 16:1**, **Matthew 27:56** and **Luke 24:10**, is believed to be Mary of Clopas in **John 19:25**. These parallel passages list women who were at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. So the synoptic gospels all describe this Mary as the mother of James (and Joseph, according to Matthew and Mark), and the Gospel of John calls her Mary of Clopas and describes her as the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother.

It's unclear if “of Clopas” means she was married to Clopas or the daughter of Clopas. Traditionally, it was assumed Alphaeus was married to Mary, the daughter of Clopas, but some scholars argue that Alphaeus and Clopas are the same person. In either case, these assumptions led to Jerome's conclusion that all three Jameses: James the Less, James son of Alphaeus, and James, brother of Jesus are the same person.

A missionary?

All of the apostles were sent to be missionaries *somewhere*. But since the church has often assumed that James son of Alphaeus, James the Less, and James, brother of Jesus were all the same people, where James son of Alphaeus went gets a little fuzzy.

If he *is* Jesus' brother, then he was “sent” to Jerusalem, where he led the church. But the Orthodox chronicler Nikephoros suggests James son of Alphaeus wound up in Egypt, in the ancient city of Ostrakine (*Historia Ecclesiastica* II:40).

There's no way to be sure where he went. But we can be confident he *was* sent to spread the gospel somewhere.

How did James son of Alphaeus die?

Since the early church often assumed James son of Alphaeus was the same person as Jesus' brother James and James the Less, the details of his death and ministry are impossible to separate from the other Jameses.

Tradition says James the Just (Jesus' brother) was shoved from the pinnacle of a temple, beaten with a fuller's club, and then stoned to death.

Another tradition says James son of Alphaeus was crucified in Egypt, where he was preaching. Another just says he was stoned to death in Jerusalem.

However he died, odds are pretty good he was martyred.

JAMES • CHAPTER NINE

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

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9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

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JUDE IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER TEN -

Jude the apostle, also referred to as Jude of James, Judas of James, Thaddeus, Judas Thaddeus, and Lebbaeus was one of the twelve main disciples of Jesus Christ. Some scholars believe he is the same person as Jude, brother of Jesus, who is traditionally regarded as the author of the Epistle of Jude.

While his name is sometimes translated as Judas (Jude and Judas are English forms of the same Greek name), he is *not* Judas Iscariot, the infamous disciple who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Jude came from an important family:

- The Lord Jesus Christ was his brother
- Mary was his mother
- James, the church leader was also his brother

Jude hadn't always believed in Jesus (**John 7:5; Mark 3:21**), but after He rose from the dead, things changed. The world changed (**Acts 17:6**). His brother changed. Jude changed.

Now he shared this glorious salvation with people all over the world: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female—all united in Christ. He wanted desperately to write about it. But he couldn't.

The church was facing a more pressing issue: people were creeping into the church unnoticed (**Jude 4**). These were not "seekers," nonbelievers who were genuinely curious about Christianity. They claimed to be believers. But they denied the exclusive authority of Jesus, twisting His grace into a license to sin all they wanted. They were infiltrators. They indulged in sexual immorality, greed, and grumbling. They rejected the authority of the apostles, angels, and the Lord. They caused churches to split up into opposing factions.

The children of God needed to keep their eyes open for this kind of behavior in the churches. So instead of writing about the salvation they shared, Jude wrote a brief, hard-hitting letter to the churches of the world.

In just 25 verses, Jude covers a few important points for Christians to remember:

- The threat to the faith. The ungodly people are perverting the grace of God and denying the only Master, Jesus (**Jude 4**). God will judge them, just like He has judged the unbelievers in the past (**Jude 5**).

- Characteristics of the ungodly. Jude compares these unrestrained, divisive people to unruly angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain the murderer, the profit-hungry Balaam, and the rebellious Korah. Jude brings in examples from both the Old Testament and other nonbiblical writings.
- The apostles' warnings. The church had been dealing with false teachers for a while—some people were even pretending to be apostles of Jesus, with the authority of Peter, James, Paul, and John (**2 Corinthians 11:13**). The apostles had warned that “mockers” would arise, causing doubt and division in the church.

Jude the apostle is only mentioned a handful of times in the New Testament. Exactly how many times depends on if we consider him the same person as Jude, brother of Jesus. Either way, the Bible doesn't give us much to go on.

In this guide, we'll cover all the ambiguities and facts about this lesser-known disciple (and possible biblical author).

Who was Jude the apostle?

At best, Jude has one line of dialogue in the gospels—and that depends on which Jude John is talking about in **John 14:22**. He doesn't play a special role in any part of the gospel narrative (other than possibly being *mentioned* as one of Jesus' brothers). In fact, the name *Jude* only appears in two of the four lists of Jesus' 12 disciples. Here's what we know about him from mentions in the Bible and insights from the early church.

One of the Twelve

One of the few concrete facts about “Jude of James” is that he was a member of the Twelve, making him one of Jesus' closest disciples and confidants. While there are four lists of the Twelve apostles in the Bible, only two of them include Jude (or Judas, depending on the translation):

*“When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, **Judas son of James**, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.” — **Luke 6:13-16***

*“When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and **Judas son of James**.” — **Acts 1:13***

Interestingly, both of these lists were written by Luke. The other two lists appear to replace Jude with someone named Thaddeus, and there are mixed theories as to

why. In any case, his inclusion among the Twelve means Jude spent about three years living with Jesus, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus' divinity.

Even though the Book of Acts and the epistles never describe Jude's ministry, as one of the Twelve, he would've been one of the most important leaders of the early church.

Definitely *not* Judas Iscariot

Depending on the translation you use, you may see Jude listed as Jude or Judas. These are two variations of the same Greek name, which is derived from the Hebrew and Aramaic name, Judah. Some scholars believe "Jude" first worked its way into our English translations to help avoid confusion with Judas Iscariot, whose name practically became a synonym for traitor in art, literature, and popular culture.

A man named Judas—presumably Jude the apostle—appears in **John 14:22**, and John makes a point of telling us this is *not* Judas Iscariot.

Some suggest this aversion to the name Judas is the same reason why Matthew and Mark replaced Jude with Thaddeus in their lists of disciples. But this is speculation. Most other languages use a single name for both of these disciples and let their descriptions make the distinction.

Jude AKA Thaddeus?

The lists of disciples we find in Matthew and Mark don't include Jude. Instead, we find a disciple named Thaddeus:

*"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**

*"These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him." —***Matthew 10:2-4**

Some manuscripts say, "Lebbaeus who was surnamed Thaddaeus." Since his place on these lists is so close to Jude's placement in Luke and Acts, and it was common for people to be known by two names in the first century, tradition has always assumed that these were two names for the same person. This is why Jude is sometimes referred to as Jude Thaddeus or Judas Thaddeus.

Thaddeus even appears to have been used as a nickname, which meant "courageous heart." Since the name "Judas" was so infamous within the Christian church, it wouldn't be surprising if Matthew and Mark decided to use a different name for Jude.

In any case, the early church generally accepted that Thaddeus and Jude were one and the same.

Possibly the author of Jude

The author of the Book of Jude claims to be written by someone named Jude:

*“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,
To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus
Christ...” —Jude 1*

Again, Jude was a common name, so we can't be certain this is referring to the same person as the disciple listed among the Twelve. The biggest clue comes from the association with James, which we'll get into more below. Since the author doesn't make any effort to describe *which* James he's referring to, and James was such a common name, most scholars assume this is referring to James the Just—one of the main leaders of the early church believed to be the brother of Jesus. If he were referring to another James, the author would've likely made a distinction, since James the Just was so well known within the church.

But whether or not the Jude who claims to be the author of this letter is the same person as the Jude listed among the Twelve largely depends on how we interpret the description “of James,” which Luke used to distinguish Jude from Judas Iscariot. Either James' brother . . . or son

A literal translation of how Luke describes Jude is “Jude of James.” This usually denotes that Jude is the *son* of James, but it *is* ambiguous, and considering that another church leader named Jude explicitly describes himself as the *brother* of James, it's easy to assume “of James” must mean brother here.

Jesus' brother?

If we accept that Jude the apostle is the same person as Jude, the author of Jude, and we accept that the James referred to in **Jude 1** is James the Just, then Jude the apostle is also the brother of Jesus.

That may sound like a bit of a stretch, but keep in mind: *the Bible says Jesus had a brother named Jude*. Matthew and Mark both record that when Jesus preached in his hometown, people doubted him because they knew his family, which included his brother, Jude/Judas:

“Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?” —Matthew 13:55

Again, these are common names, but it's definitely possible that the “Jude of James” Luke listed among the disciples was also one of Jesus' brothers.

But that could also make things pretty complicated—because Jesus’ family didn’t believe him at first.

Possibly a skeptic

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus’ brothers encouraged him to go perform miracles in Judea, and it suggests a reason why they wanted him to go:

*“Jesus’ brothers said to him, ‘Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.’ **For even his own brothers did not believe in him.**”* —**John 7:3-5** (emphasis added)

One of those brothers who didn’t believe in Jesus may have been Jude. At this point in the gospel narrative, Jesus had already performed many miracles and called His disciples. So it would be a little odd for Jesus to be this far along in His ministry and still have a disciple who didn’t believe in him.

It’s worth noting though, Jesus had at least four brothers, and John doesn’t specifically say that *all* of them didn’t believe in Him. So it’s possible that His brother Judas believed, but the others didn’t. It’s also possible that Jesus’ brother Judas wasn’t the same person as the apostle Judas.

A missionary

As an apostle, Jude would have been sent somewhere to spread the gospel, just as the other apostles were. The word we translate as apostle (*apóstolos*) literally means “one who is sent.”

The Golden Legend—a thirteenth-century text containing biographies of saints—records that Judas started preaching in Mesopotamia, then partnered with Simon the Zealot:

“Judas preached first in Mesopotamia and in Pontus, and Simon preached in Egypt, and from thence came they into Persia, and found there two enchanterers, Zaroes and Arphaxat, whom S. Matthew had driven out of Ethiopia.”

Other traditions claim he preached throughout Judea, Samaria, Idumaea, Syria, and Libya. Due to confusion surrounding whether Jude the apostle was the same person as Jesus’ brother Jude, it’s hard to say which journeys can be attributed to one or the other. Regardless, Jude the apostle surely preached the gospel *somewhere*.

How did Jude the apostle die?

It’s traditionally believed that Jude was martyred in Syria on his missionary journey with Simon the Zealot. But it’s unclear how reliable this tradition is, because it comes from the account found in *Acts of Simon and Jude*, a questionable text full of legendary stories.

In art, Jude is often portrayed holding an axe, because he got . . . axed.

Jude of James

“Jude of James” is one of the least-known members of the Twelve. He may have been one of Jesus’ brothers. He may have been the author of the Epistle of Jude. Or not. He had a common name, and the only description we have just links him to another common name.

JUDE • CHAPTER TEN

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus’ 12 Disciples?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle know by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle’s profession?

4. What is this Apostle best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle’s death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

SIMON THE ZEALOT IN THE BIBLE - CHAPTER ELEVEN -

Simon the Zealot is one of the most obscure apostles. He was one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus Christ, but he plays no particular role in the gospels and is only mentioned by name in lists of the apostles (**Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, Acts 1:1-13**).

We know almost nothing about Simon the Zealot. Even his moniker, “the Zealot” is ambiguous enough that we can’t be sure what it means—though there are several strong possibilities. He may have belonged to a Jewish sect known as the Zealots, who were bent on revolution and looking for a Messiah to violently overthrow Rome. Or he may have simply been zealous for the Mosaic Law or even zealous for Jesus and His teachings.

Simon is mentioned occasionally in early church writings, but centuries after the gospels were written, Saint Jerome and others mistranslated Simon’s title, believing that Matthew and Mark referred to him as Simon the Cananite or Simon the Cananaean. They assumed he was from Cana—a town within Galilee—or possibly Canaan, an ancient region in the near east, which was frequently mentioned in the Bible. This mistake led to the idea that Simon was present at the wedding in Cana in **John 2**, where Jesus performed his first miracle and turned water into wine, *and* that he was the same person as Simon, the brother of Jesus (**Matthew 13:55**).

Some Bible translations preserve Jerome’s mistake out of respect for tradition, calling Simon “the Cananite” or “the Cananaean” in **Matthew 10:3** and **Mark 3:18**. So who *was* this person the Bible calls Simon the Zealot, and what do we actually know about him? In this guide, we’ll dig into the ambiguities surrounding this lesser-known biblical figure, address some common confusion, and look at how he may have died.

First, the facts.

Who was Simon the Zealot?

Since the Apostle Simon is only *listed* among the apostles (and he’s completely absent from the Gospel of John), there’s not much we can say about him. But here’s what we know.

One of the Twelve

The New Testament lists all twelve apostles four times—**Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, Luke 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13-16**. While there is some variations in the order the apostles appear and even the names they went by, Simon is listed in all of

them. He's never mentioned in the Gospel of John, but John never explicitly lists all the apostles.

This means Simon was one of the people who was closest to Jesus, and that he spent about three years living with him, witnessing his miracles, and hearing his teachings. He saw numerous demonstrations of Jesus' divinity.

Even though the Book of Acts and the epistles never describe Simon the Zealot's ministry, as one of the Twelve, he would've been one of the most important leaders of the early church.

"The Zealot"

The moniker "the Zealot" comes from the Greek word *zēlōtēs*, which the Apostle Luke used in both his gospel and Acts to distinguish this Simon from Simon Peter. Matthew and Mark give him the title *kananaios*, which most scholars believe comes from the Aramaic word *qan'an*, meaning "zealous one."

So what does this title mean? It *could* mean he belonged to a Jewish sect known as the Zealots. The Zealots were associated with violent uprisings (including, later, the First Jewish-Roman War), and expected the coming Messiah to overthrow Rome using force.

If that's what "the Zealot" refers to, then like Matthew the Tax Collector, the Apostle Simon's presence among the Twelve represents a powerful picture of the gospel. Jesus' teachings (such as turning the other cheek and loving your enemies) were often the complete opposite of the ideology the Zealots embraced. Although it's worth noting, in the *Talmud*, Jewish rabbis advocated for peace as well, and the Zealots ignored them.

Zealousness is a quality that frequently comes up in Scripture, so it could have easily been a description of a positive quality Simon possessed, rather than a sect he belonged to—especially if that group wasn't known by that name at the time.

Professor Rhoades explains it this way:

"Zeal is behavior motivated by the jealous desire to protect one's self, group, space, or time against violations. In the biblical tradition, human acts of zeal punished idolatrous violations of God's right to exclusive allegiance from Israel. As expressed in the First Commandment, God is a jealous/zealous God who requires the allegiance of the people. Because God's holiness will not tolerate idolatry or other violations against the covenant (**Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9**), God will punish the whole nation for such offenses unless someone acts on behalf of God—zealous with God's jealous anger—to kill or root out the offenders."

When Jesus cleanses the temple in the Gospel of John, his disciples recall **Psalm 69:10**, implying that Jesus was motivated by zeal:

"His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

The Apostle Paul talks about his own zeal and the zeal of the Israelites on multiple occasions (**Philippians 3:6, Galatians 1:13-14, Acts 22:3, and Romans 10:1-4**).

On Paul's third missionary journey, Jews and Jewish Christians who were "zealous for the Law" wanted to kill Paul (**Acts 21:20; 23:12-14**).

Simon *may* have been a member of a rebellious group that was prone to violence. Or, he may have simply been zealous for the Law—or even zealous for Jesus or his teachings. In any case, the gospel writers used this description to distinguish *this* Simon from Simon Peter—and the other Simons in the New Testament.

Not *that* Simon

There are nine people named Simon in the New Testament. Two of them are among Jesus' Twelve Apostles—Simon the Zealot and Simon Peter.

- Judas Iscariot is the son of Simon Iscariot (**John 6:71**).
- Simon is the name of one of Jesus' brothers (**Mark 6:3**), who's traditionally believed to succeed James as head of the church in Jerusalem.
- A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus over for dinner, where a sinful woman famously poured perfume on Jesus' feet (**Luke 7:40**).
- Simon the Leper hosts Jesus for dinner in Bethany (**Mark 14:3**).
- When Jesus was carrying his cross on his way to be crucified, a man named Simon from Cyrene was forced to help him (**Mark 15:21**).
- In Acts, a man known as Simon the Sorcerer attempted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter (**Acts 8:9-24**).
- When Peter had his vision of unclean food, he was staying at Simon the Tanner's house (**Acts 9:43**).

Each of these Simons is clearly distinct, and Simon the Apostle is *always* referred to with the moniker "the Zealot."

Most scholars today believe *kananaios* comes from the Aramaic word *qan'an*, meaning "zealous one," which effectively makes Simon's moniker the same in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts.

A missionary?

As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Simon the Zealot would have been sent *somewhere* to spread the gospel, just as the other apostles were. The word we translate as apostle (*apóstolos*) literally means "one who is sent."

The Golden Legend records that Simon preached in Egypt, then partnered with Judas, the brother of Jesus:

"Judas preached first in Mesopotamia and in Pontus, and Simon preached in Egypt, and from thence came they into Persia, and found there two enchanters, Zaroes and Arphaxat, whom S. Matthew had driven out of Ethiopia."

There are no early church records of Simon the Zealot's ministry, so it's hard to say where he spread the gospel—but presumably, he did.

How did Simon the Zealot die?

There are numerous accounts of Simon the Zealot's death, but the earliest records come centuries after his death. Like many of the apostles, it's hard to conclude exactly which tradition (if any) can be trusted:

- In the fifth century, Moses of Chorene wrote that Simon the Zealot was martyred in the Kingdom of Iberia.
- *The Golden Legend* says he was martyred in Persia in 65 AD.
- Ethiopian Christians believe he was crucified in Samaria.
- Another account says he was crucified in 61 AD in Britain.
- In the sixteenth century, Justus Lipsius claimed he was sawed in half.
- Eastern tradition claims he died of old age in Edessa.

The zealous apostle

But what we do know is this: he passionately believed in . . . something. Liberty, the Law, and/or the Lord. And Jesus saw in him the potential to spread the kingdom of heaven throughout the earth, not by force, but with the revolutionary power of love.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Simon the Canaanite? Or Simon the Zealot?

Charles Spurgeon

Simon called the Zealot has apparently two surnames in Scripture, but they mean the same thing. He is called *Simon the Canaanite* in Hebrew—not because he was an inhabitant of Cana or a Canaanite, but that word, when interpreted, means precisely the same as the Greek word *Zelotes*. He was called Simon the Zealot. I suppose that he had this name before his conversion. It is thought by some that he was a member of that very fierce and fanatical political sect of the Jews called the Zealots.

But this does not seem very probable, since the sect of the Zealots had scarcely arisen in the time of the Savior. And therefore we are inclined to think with Hackett, in his exposition of the Acts, that he was so called because of his zealous attachment to his religion as a Jew. There were some in the different classes of Jewish society who were so excessively full of zeal as to gain the name of *zealot*. But it strikes me

that he must have been a zealot after conversion, too, for within that sacred circle that surrounded our Lord, every word was truth and the Master would not have allowed any of His disciples to have worn a surname which was not expressive or truthful.

He was Simon the Zealot before he knew not the Messiah. He surely could not have been less Simon the Zealot when, gifted with the Holy Spirit, he went forth to cast out demons, heal the sick, and to proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. I should be glad if many among us would earn the same title by so living that men would call us zealots, or even “fanatics,” for this is so sleepy an age concerning religious things, that to be called fanatic, nowadays, is one of the highest honors a man can have conferred upon him! May we so act and live that we might truthfully wear the title of Christian zealots...

If you would see crowns put upon the head of the Savior and His Throne lifted high—and I know this is your great ambition! If you would see Jehovah, your Father, glorified even to the ends of the earth—then be filled with zeal! Under God, the way of the world's conversion must be by the zeal of the Church. Simon the Zealot must lead the van. The rest may follow in their places—knowledge, patience, courage, prudence, every grace shall do exploits—but this shall be first, this shall bear the standard high! Zeal for God, zeal for His Truth—this shall be in the van, and may you stand side by side with the most zealous in the day of conflict, that you may be there in the hour of victory.

Some of you have sought for the conversion of souls. When I look upon some of you I know you are spiritual mothers and fathers in Israel—not to ones or twos, but scores! Shall your zeal relax? We have, by God's Grace, lived to see many of our enemies clothed with shame. We have preached the Word till that Word begins to tell and make the solid rocks of error shake. Will you draw back? Will you lose your force? Will you slacken in prayer? Will you refuse to receive the blessing, which awaits you? Will you take your heads from the crown when it is ready to descend? I pray you do not so! Let us be banded together as one man! Let us contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints! Let us pray with fervor! Let us live in holiness! Let us preach constantly and preach with fire! And let us so live that we may impress our age and leave our footprints on the sands of time.

As for some of you who never were zealous—who are the fathers of no spiritual children? As for some of you—whose religion gets into a very narrow compass and is good for very little when it gets there—I pray you bestir yourselves. If your religion is a lie, do not profess it! If it is a farce, do not enslave yourselves to it!

But if there is anything in religion, it is worth everything! It cannot sit second at the table—it must have the first place. The Christian man is to be, first of all, a Christian man! Next to that a tradesman or what you will—but first of all a Christian man. The first thing with the Believer is his Lord. Christ will be nowhere if He is not first and

chief and that religion is vain and void which does not fill the soul and take up the throne of the heart.

May God allow us, then, to wear the character, if not the name of Simon the Zealot, and then we will wait at His footstool and serve Him after such sort as He shall help us to do and His shall be all the praise. But, ah, we must be converted first! So let the sinner remember that his first business is with this text—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"—that is, trust Jesus, for it is written, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned." God grant you Divine Grace to trust Christ and then to be zealous for Him. Amen.

Adapted from Spurgeon's Sermons, Zealots (No. 639), by Charles Spurgeon.



SIMON • CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle know by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

ADDITIONAL NOTES OR THOUGHTS

Simon *may* have been a member of a rebellious group that was prone to violence. Or, he may have simply been zealous for the Law—or even zealous for Jesus or his teachings. In any case, the gospel writers used this description to distinguish *this* Simon from Simon Peter—and the other Simons in the New Testament.

Simon the Apostle is *always* referred to with the moniker “the Zealot.”

The Kingdom of God is at hand. The Four Elements of a Kingdom

Four key concepts are involved for a human government to exist. These are:

1. Territory. A civil authority must have land over which it exercises its authority. Borders separate nations for the purpose of determining jurisdiction.
2. Subjects. Every government must have subjects over which it rules.
3. Laws. All nations have laws that their citizens are expected to obey. Furthermore, compliance with these laws is enforced through courts of law set up by the government. If laws have been broken, punishments are determined and enforced upon the offenders.
4. Ruler. Every government must have a ruler. No matter the form of government, someone must lead the subjects and oversee the government.

The Kingdom of God that will be established on the earth when Jesus Christ returns will have all four elements:

1. The territory that the Kingdom of God will rule over includes the entire earth.
 2. Its subjects will include all humans who are alive.
 3. The laws of the Kingdom will be those of God found within the Bible.
 4. And the ruler will be Jesus Christ.
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JUDAS ISCARIOT IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER TWEELEVE -

Judas Iscariot is one of the most widely known disciples. He infamously betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, which lead to Jesus' death on the cross. Today, "Judas" is virtually synonymous with "traitor."

Judas appears in several New Testament stories, and while the Gospel writers are in unanimous agreement that he betrayed Jesus, they present various takes on his motives and the circumstances surrounding his death.

Judas Iscariot may have been considered "good with money" or trustworthy, because somehow he wound up being the designated treasurer for Jesus and his disciples. Ironically, the first passage that tells that he was in charge of the group's money also tells us that he was completely *untrustworthy*. (Granted, Judas was long dead after this was written, so maybe this is John's hindsight talking.)

"But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it." —John 12:4-6

This is part of the reason many people believe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus out of greed. (But there may have been several other motivations at play as well.)

During the Last Supper, Jesus claims one of the disciples will betray Him, and then tells Judas, "*What you are about to do, do it quickly*" (**John 13:27**). Somehow none of the other disciples picked up on that though. They assumed it had something to do with him being in charge of the money (**John 13:28-29**).

Each of the gospels gives a slightly different version of the moment Judas betrayed Jesus, but the main thread goes like this:

- Judas meets with the chief priests and agrees to betray Jesus (**Matthew 26:14-16**).
- Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and the disciples keep falling asleep (**Matthew 26:36-44**).
- Judas arrives with an armed mob sent from the chief priests, and points out Jesus by greeting him with a kiss (**Matthew 26:47-49**).
- Shortly after, Judas regrets betraying Jesus, tries and fails to return the money the chief priests gave him (**Matthew 27:3-4**).

What does Iscariot mean?

People in ancient Israel didn't have last names like we do. In the Bible, the "last names" you see are *epithets*—or descriptions—which generally refer to where someone comes from, a title, their father's name, or a group they're identified with. Unfortunately, scholars aren't totally sure what Iscariot refers to.

Most scholars believe Iscariot means that Judas came from the town of Kerioth, which could make him the only disciple from Judea (the others were from Galilee). But there have been a number of other theories, including the possibility that it identifies him with the Sicarii—a group of Jewish rebels who were trained as assassins.

Whatever it means, "Iscariot" helps us distinguish Jesus' betrayer from the other people named Judas.

Speaking of which, let's make sure we've got the right guy.

Which Judas are we talking about?

"Judas" seems to have been a common name in Jesus' time. That makes sense, considering that it's the Greek form of the Hebrew "Judah," the tribe of the heroic King David and the coming Messiah.

There are three people named Judas in the gospels (and eight total in the New Testament). Two of them were disciples of Jesus, and one of them was Jesus' half-brother, which probably made family gatherings a little awkward after Jesus' death. It's also possible that Jesus' brother Judas *was* one of the Twelve.

The Judas is distinguished from the others as Judas Iscariot.

Who's that other disciple named Judas?

The other disciple named Judas is only listed as Judas in the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Book of Acts*. (See **Mark 3:18**, **Matthew 10:3**, **Luke 6:16**, and **Acts 1:13**.) Matthew and Mark both mention a disciple named Thaddeus instead of a second Judas, while Luke mentions a Judas son of James—which is possibly a mistranslation, as he might actually be *the brother* of James.

Early Christians began calling this disciple Jude Thaddeus (Jude is a variation of the same name) or Judas Thaddeus. Thaddeus may have been a nickname, which Mark and Matthew graciously used here instead of Judas, since the name would have been especially tainted in early Christianity.

The only other place we see this Judas is in **John 14:22**:

"Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, 'But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?'"

Some scholars suggest that this Judas is Jude the brother of Jesus, the traditional author of *Jude*. (Jude and Judas are variations of the same name.) This is possible if

this Judas is *the brother* of James and not the son of James, since Jesus clearly has a brother named James and a brother named Judas (**Mark 6:3**). Other scholars believe Judas the disciple and Jesus' brother Judas are two separate people.

Judas the brother of Jesus

Two of the gospels mention that Jesus has a brother named Judas. When Jesus returns to teach in his hometown, the crowds don't respect him, because they know him as a carpenter and not as a great teacher, and they know his whole family: "*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?*" —**Mark 6:3**

The author of the epistle, *Jude*, also identifies himself as Jude the brother of Jesus (**Jude 1:1**), and again, Jude is a variation of the same name as Judas.

Despite having two or possibly three people named Judas in the gospel, it's easy to tell when the Bible is talking about *the* Judas, because he's always identified as Judas Iscariot.

Now let's get back to what we know about Judas Iscariot.

Judas Iscariot was one of the 12

While the Bible tells us how Jesus called some of the disciples, that's not the case with Judas Iscariot. He's simply listed among the 12. It might seem like a huge oversight on Jesus' part to call someone who was so fatally flawed and would eventually betray Him, but each of the disciples were flawed.

Leading up to his betrayal of Jesus, not much is said about Judas, but there are a handful of details we can gather from the passages he appears in.

The disciples' treasurer

Interestingly, the Gospel of John tells us that Judas Iscariot was in charge of the group's money. You might think that a tax collector like Matthew (also known as Levi) would've been the natural choice for managing the group's finances. However, tax collectors had a well-deserved reputation for being dishonest with money in Jesus' day, so while Matthew was financially savvy, the other disciples may not have trusted him, or perhaps Jesus didn't want to give him the temptation.

In any case, Judas Iscariot may have been considered "good with money" or trustworthy, but the first passage that tells that he was in charge of the group's money also tells us that he was completely *untrustworthy*. (Granted, Judas was long dead after this was written, so maybe this is John's hindsight talking.)

A thief

The Gospel of John tells us that Judas used his position as treasurer to steal. In the famous account of Mary and Martha, Mary anoints Jesus feet with a pint of expensive perfume, and Judas speaks up:

“But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” —John 12:4-6

This is part of the reason why people believe Judas was at least partially motivated by greed when he betrayed Jesus. He had a history of theft, so when he saw an opportunity to “earn” 30 pieces of silver for handing over Jesus, he took it.

But there are worse things than being a thief. And Judas was some of those, too.

Son of perdition

Before he is arrested, Jesus prays. In His prayer, He asks God to protect His disciples and says that none of them have been lost while He was with them—with one exception: the “son of perdition,” Judas Iscariot. This ominous title comes from the Latin Vulgate, so you won’t find it in translations that rely more on the original Greek.

The NIV translates the phrase this way:

“While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave Me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.” —John 17:12

However you translate it, Jesus is saying that Judas was totally lost. “Son of perdition” essentially means he was eternally damned, doomed to hell, and trapped in unrepentant sin (and thus would never receive forgiveness).

[Who else had been trapped in unrepentant sin?]

- King David and Bathsheba child after David murders her husband Uriah the Hittite. Though God Himself removed this transgression from David but took the life of the child. **II Samuel 12:13**
- The Pharaoh of Egypt in **Exodus 9**.

The same Greek phrase is only used one other time in the Bible, in **2 Thessalonians 2:3**, where it refers to the “man of lawlessness”—a figure many Christians traditionally identify as the antichrist. Not somebody you want to have a lot in common with.

When Jesus says “so that Scripture would be fulfilled,” there are a few passages he could be referring to. Many scholars suggest **Psalm 41:9**:

*Even my close friend,
someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread,
has turned against me.*

Others suggest it’s **Psalm 109:8**:

*“May his days be few;
may another take his place of leadership.”*

In **Acts 1:20**, Peter suggests **Psalm 109:8** was about Judas, and the 11 remaining apostles appoint someone to take Judas Iscariot's place.

Judas betrayed Jesus

More than anything else he ever said or did, Judas Iscariot is defined by his betrayal of Jesus. Before the Last Supper, the chief priests plot to arrest and kill Jesus, and Judas offers to hand him over:

"Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over." —**Matthew 26:14–16**

During the Last Supper, Judas leaves early, and Jesus and the rest of the disciples head to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Jesus asks the disciples to keep watch, but they keep falling asleep. When they finish, Judas approaches with an armed crowd and points Jesus out to them.

"Then He returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'

While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest Him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him.

Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend.'

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him." —**Matthew 26:45–50**

Jesus' opponents had been looking for opportunities to arrest and/or kill Him from almost the beginning of His ministry, but they feared the crowds of people who hung on Jesus' every word, and Jesus always slipped away before anyone could harm Him (**John 8:58–59**).

Luke mentions that Judas specifically looked for an opportunity to hand Jesus over "*when no crowd was present*" (**Luke 22:6**). John adds that Judas was familiar with the garden "because Jesus had often met there with His disciples" (**John 18:2**).

Jesus frequently retreated into solitude to pray. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, late at night, removed from the safety of the crowds who loved Him, He was especially vulnerable—and Judas knew that. He led Jesus' enemies straight to Him, and through this betrayal, Judas inadvertently triggered the crucifixion, Jesus' resurrection, and ultimately the salvation of humanity.

Why did he betray Jesus?

After watching Jesus heal people, cast out demons, command storms, and forgive sins for three years, why would Judas be willing to betray him?

Mark doesn't tell us Judas' motive. In Mark's version of events, Judas appears to offer to betray Jesus without even asking for money, but the chief priests promise to

pay him. The other gospels provide us with two motives, one natural, and the other supernatural, which worked together to turn Judas against Jesus.

He was motivated by greed

Luke and Matthew are more precise about Judas' financial incentive. In Matthew, Judas straight up asks the chief priests, "*What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?*" (**Matthew 26:14-15**) Luke tells us that the chief priests "*agreed to give him money*" (**Luke 22:5**), implying that Judas suggested it, or there was some discussion about it.

John doesn't mention the money at all, but like Luke, he does give us another reason why Judas betrayed Jesus.

Satan "*entered him*"

Luke and John both write that Satan entered Judas and influenced him to betray Jesus. At the end of Jesus' temptation in the desert, Luke tells us that the devil left Him "*until an opportune time*" (**Luke 4:13**). Judas provided both the time and the opportunity.

Luke records that it happened just before he spoke with the chief priests (**Luke 22:3**), and John writes that the devil *prompted* him to betray Jesus before the Last Supper (**John 13:2**), but that Satan *entered him* in the moment Judas touched a piece of bread:

"Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him." —**John 13:26-27**

This almost seems to shift some of the blame from Judas, perhaps suggesting that he was "doomed to destruction" because he was most vulnerable and available to Satan's influence.

So why did Satan do this, if Jesus' sacrifice was part of God's plan to redeem humanity? ***Because he didn't know that.*** Satan thought killing Jesus would ruin everything.

Perhaps, like the Jews, Satan thought the Messiah was supposed to restore God's kingdom by conquering the physical and political powers of this world. So by killing the Messiah, Satan thought he would prevent that restoration from happening.

But the crucifixion was part of God's plan all along. Paul puts it this way in his first letter to the church in Corinth:

"No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." —**1 Corinthians 2:8-9**

Perhaps that's a reason the Old Testament prophets were cryptic in their oracles about the death and resurrection of the Messiah: God kept it vague so *Satan* wouldn't see it coming.

He thought something else would happen

Like the rest of the disciples (and most first-century Jews), Judas likely thought that the promised Messiah would physically overthrow Israel's enemies and restore the kingdom through force. And all Jesus' talk of "the kingdom of God" may have added to the confusion.

After all Judas Iscariot witnessed, it's hard to imagine that he *couldn't* believe Jesus was the Messiah. He may have genuinely thought that by creating conflict, he'd be tipping Jesus' hand and accelerating his movement.

The Bible doesn't tell us that, but when Jesus is eventually handed over to Pilate (and thus at the mercy of the Roman government), Judas expresses remorse (**Matthew 27:3**), which could be a sign that he expected a different outcome.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus dropped regular hints to His disciples that He was going to die. But during the Last Supper, the gospel writers tell us that Jesus also knew exactly *how* He was going to die—and who would betray Him.

In some accounts, Jesus even blatantly tells the disciples which one of them would betray Him, but somehow they miss it:

"After He had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray Me.'

His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them He meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask Him which one He means.'

Leaning back against Jesus, He asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'

Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, 'What you are about to do, do quickly.' But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor." —John 17:21-29

The disciples often failed to understand what Jesus was really saying, and here it seems that Judas' role as the group's treasurer contributed to the confusion. It's plain as day to us, reading John's account after the fact, where every mention of Judas Iscariot is colored by hindsight but clearly, the disciples had no reason to suspect Judas more than anyone else. He had been with them for three years, and despite his dishonesty, each of them wondered if *they* might be the eventual traitor.

But Jesus knew what Judas was going to do all along. And He didn't stop him, because it was all part of God's plan for redemption.

Did Judas regret betraying Jesus?

Once the chief priests found Jesus guilty of blasphemy and handed Him over to Pilate, Judas had a change of heart. Some debate about whether or not Judas

was *repentant* or *simply remorseful*, but it's clear that he was consumed by guilt after seeing the consequences of his actions.

He tried and failed to return his “reward,” and openly acknowledged the sin of his betrayal:

“When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’

‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.” —Matthew 27:3–5a

Ultimately, Judas’ remorse led to his death, which is why many scholars make a point of distinguishing his *regret from repentance*. He acknowledged Jesus’ innocence, but not his Lordship, and he sought other ways to cope with his guilt, rather than pursuing forgiveness from the only One who could deliver it—even after three years of witnessing Jesus freely offer that forgiveness.

How did Judas die?

The Book of Acts and the Gospel of Matthew each give an account of Judas’ death. Matthew records that Judas hung himself immediately after the chief priests refused to take their money back:

“So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” —Matthew 27:5

The chief priests then used the money to buy a field, which Matthew connects to prophecies from Zechariah and Jeremiah:

“The chief priests picked up the coins and said, ‘It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.’” —Matthew 27:6–10

Interestingly, Acts (traditionally attributed to the Apostle Luke) gives a different account:

“(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)” —Acts 1:18–19

Luke’s account of Judas’ death doesn’t *necessarily* contradict Matthew’s. He *could* simply be referring to something that happened after Judas hung himself. But that still leaves us with the question of who bought the field—Judas, or the chief priests? And they appear to have different reasons for why the field was called the Field of Blood.

Matthew’s account is the only one that tells us Judas felt remorse, and he directly connects that remorse to Judas’ suicide. Luke’s account almost seems to paint a

picture of Judas as being “doomed to destruction,” as though a sudden gruesome death was simply his fate for betraying Jesus.

Still, both accounts appear to be in agreement that Judas died around the same time as Jesus. And it certainly wasn't from old age.

Who replaced Judas?

The Book of Acts opens after the resurrection of Jesus, and while the apostles wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, they get together and talk about the best way to replace Judas Iscariot. The number 12 carried a lot of significance to the Jewish people (and thus the early Christians), and Peter urges the group to fulfill a prophecy in **Psalm 109:8**:

“May another take his place of leadership.”

The apostles wanted to choose someone who had been with them from the time John baptized Jesus until the time he ascended to heaven, and they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

They prayed and cast lots, and then Matthias became the new 12th apostle. There's no further mention of Matthias in the New Testament, but using other ancient texts and the writings of early Christians, there's been a lot of speculation as to who Matthias was. Clement of Alexandria appears to possibly suggest this was Zacchaeus (the famous vertically-challenged tax collector), and a pseudepigraphal text claims he's Barnabas, and some believe he's Nathaniel. But all we really know is that someone named Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot, and that he'd been following Jesus at least since his baptism.

In Conclusion

With a kiss, Judas Iscariot sealed his own fate and became one of the most reviled characters in all of literature, and at the same time, he accidentally triggered the most celebrated event in human history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?
Yes ___ No ___
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?
 - _____

 - _____

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

MATTHIAS IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER THIRTEEN -

Matthias wasn't one of the original members of the Twelve. He's also the only one who wasn't personally called by Jesus. Instead, he was appointed by the apostles to replace Judas Iscariot.

Several of the disciples are pretty obscure. But Matthias takes the cake: **he's only mentioned two times in the entire Bible (Acts 1:23 and Acts 1:26)**. All we really *know* about Matthias from Scripture is that he met Peter's requirements for selecting a new member of the Twelve (**Acts 1:21-22**):

1. He'd followed Jesus since his baptism by John the Baptist.
2. He witnessed Jesus' ascension to heaven.

While the Bible doesn't explicitly say this, the fact that Matthias was clearly following Jesus early on and he was significant enough to be selected makes it possible that he was among the Seventy" (or "Seventy-Two," depending on the translation) who Jesus sent out ahead of him in **Luke 10:1-24**.

Jesus gave these disciples the power to heal and drive out demons, and he sent them in pairs to test the hospitality of the places he was going and to spread the gospel. There are numerous lists of the Seventy, but they emerged so late it's hard to say if any can be trusted. Some include Matthias, and some don't. Almost all of the believers on these lists became bishops.

Eusebius of Caesarea (the father of church history) wrote in the fourth century that there was no official list of the Seventy, but that many believed Matthias was among them.

Since Matthias was such an obscure biblical figure that took on a prominent role in the church, some traditions claimed he must have been someone we encountered in other narratives: such as Nathanael, or even Zaccheus. It *was* pretty common for people to be known by multiple names (like Peter, Matthew, and Jude), but there isn't enough evidence to support assumptions about Matthias' identity.

Was he supposed to be one of the Twelve?

One of the biggest questions surrounding Matthias is whether or not God intended for him to replace Judas Iscariot. Some argue that his appointment was more the result of Peter's restlessness than God's plan—especially since Paul was personally called by Jesus to be an apostle later.

To choose someone to replace Judas, about 120 believers nominated two people (Matthias and Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus), and then they cast lots. Scholars can't say for sure what was meant by "casting lots" here—it could've just meant voting, drawing a name from a jar, or something else—but

the *principle* of casting lots goes back to the Old Testament. It was a process the Israelites used to discern God's will, seek his wisdom, or learn the truth.

Before they cast lots in **Acts 1**, the disciples pray: "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs" (**Acts 1:24-25**).

Their intent was clearly to learn God's will. But the problem here is that everything leading up to that moment appears to have been *Peter's* will.

Peter *assumed* it was their duty to select someone to replace Judas, but that doesn't mean it was, and the fact that God chose Matthias *when given the choice between Matthias and Joseph* doesn't mean that the entire process was God's will. He would've had to do something pretty dramatic to prevent a selection or communicate that he had other intentions.

So was Matthias *supposed to be* one of the Twelve? Maybe. But regardless, he *was* one, and God used him. As one of the Twelve, Matthias played a key role in helping spread the gospel and lead the church when it was most fragile.

Here's what we *do* know.

Matthias began following Jesus early in his ministry; from the day Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. He wasn't a member of Jesus' inner circle, like the other members of the Twelve, but he did live with Jesus and the apostles, witnessing Jesus' miracles and teachings. Before the apostles chose Matthias, Peter declared:

"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." —**Acts 1:21-22**

As one of the Twelve, Matthias would have been among the first Christians to receive the Holy Spirit, and he played an important role in launching the movement, which became the world's largest religion.

Since Matthias was with Jesus from the beginning, and clearly was well-known among the disciples (the 120 or so believers mentioned in **Acts 1:15** nominated him, after all), this has led some to speculate that Matthias must've been among the 70 (or 72) apostles Jesus sent out in **Luke 10**.

Chosen by casting lots

Luke tells us that Matthias was chosen by "casting lots":

"Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles." —**Acts 1:26**

Scholars disagree about what exactly is meant by "cast lots" here. It could mean they voted. Or they put each candidate's name on rocks, put them in a pot, and shook it

until one came out. (That's what casting lots entailed in the Old Testament.) It's also possible that "cast lots" was simply used here to communicate that the community chose Matthias, and the exact means by which they chose him wasn't important.

In the Old Testament, casting lots was seen as a method of getting answers from God. In **1 Samuel 14**, for example, Saul used lots to ask God who had sinned, and discovered that his son Jonathan had led his soldiers astray, first by breaking an oath Saul made which cursed anyone who ate before evening (**1 Samuel 14:24, 1 Samuel 14:27**), and then by leading the soldiers to break God's law by eating food that was *always* forbidden (**1 Samuel 14:32-33**):

"Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim.' Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared. Saul said, 'Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.' And Jonathan was taken.

Then Saul said to Jonathan, 'Tell me what you have done.'

So Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!" —1 Samuel 14:41-43

It sounds pretty silly out of context. But Jonathan also basically said it was the food in their bodies and not the favor of God, which made them victorious (**1 Samuel 14:29-30**).

So whatever Luke meant by "cast lots," the process was rooted in Scripture, and intended to learn what God's choice was, not for the disciples to make a choice of their own. And the distinction is important, because some argue that by choosing Matthias, the apostles were interfering with God's plan to make Paul the twelfth member of the Twelve. (More on that later.)

"Gift of God"

Matthias is a diminutive form of the same name Hebrew as Matthew: *Matityahu*. They both mean "gift of God." Since Matthias and Matthew were notable biblical figures and their names were forms of the same name, it's not surprising that some early church traditions mixed them up.

Professor A.F. Walls notes in *The New Bible Dictionary*:

"His name was often confounded with that of Matthew, a process doubtless encouraged by the Gnostic groups who claimed secret traditions from him . . ."

Missionary?

As one of the Twelve, Matthias was an apostle, which meant he was charged with preaching the gospel and helping it spread throughout the known world. The word we translate as apostle (*apostolos*) literally means "one who is sent," and all of the apostles were sent *somewhere*.

But where exactly Matthias went depends on which tradition you follow. Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos was a fourteenth century historian who built on the work of his predecessors and had access to important texts that no longer exist. He claimed Matthias preached in Judea, then Aethiopia (modern-day Georgia).

Other traditions suggest Matthias preached in Jerusalem.

How did Matthias die?

Similar to Matthias' ministry, the nature of his death varies. Some traditions claim he was stoned at the end of his ministry to cannibals in Aethiopia (Georgia). Another that he was stoned by Jews in Jerusalem and then beheaded.

The backup apostle

The Bible tells us almost nothing about Matthias. But what we *do* know is that he'd been following Jesus from the beginning—despite not receiving a personal invitation, like the original members of the Twelve.

MATTHIAS • CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

SAUL/PAUL IN THE BIBLE

- CHAPTER FOURTEEN -

Paul was an apostle, but he was *not* one of the Twelve. Paul—also known as Saul—is easily one of the most widely-known biblical figures (he **wrote the most New Testament books**, after all), and he often appears on lists of the most influential people who have ever lived. Paul did more to help spread the gospel throughout the world than anyone else in the early church.

But he wasn't one of the Twelve, and he probably never encountered Jesus during his earthly ministry. Before his dramatic conversion, Paul was a member of the Pharisees—a group of religious elites who opposed Jesus and persecuted his followers. Acts even records that Paul watched and approved while people stoned the first Christian martyr (Stephen) to death (**Acts 8:1**).

On the road to Damascus, where Paul intended to arrest Christians, Jesus appeared to him, asking: “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*” (**Acts 9:4**) Then the Lord told Paul, “*Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do*” (**Acts 9:6**). Paul was struck blind, and Jesus used a man named Ananias to restore his sight in Jerusalem.

From that point forward, Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles (**Romans 1:13**), and claimed Jesus had specifically called him to reach non-Jewish communities (**Acts 22:21**).

Since Jesus called Paul, but didn't call Matthias, some have argued that Paul was intended to be the apostle to replace Judas Iscariot. (Which would be poetic: Satan turned one of Jesus' closest followers against him, but Jesus turned one of the strongest adversaries of the Church into one of her strongest advocates.)

Paul started more than a dozen churches, and he's traditionally considered the author of 13 books of the Bible—more than any other biblical writer. For this reason, Saint Paul is often considered one of the most influential people in history. He had a greater impact on the world's religious landscape than any other person besides Jesus, and perhaps Muhammad.

But before he was known as a tireless champion of Christianity, Paul was actually known for *persecuting* Christians. The Book of Acts tells us that Paul was even present at the death of the first Christian martyr—where he “*approved the stoning of Stephen*” (**Acts 8:1**).

Over the last two millennia, countless books have been written about Paul and his teachings. In this beginner's guide, we'll explore the basics of what we know—and don't know—about this important biblical figure.

Here's what we're going to cover:

- Who was Paul?

- Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus
- When did Paul live?
- Did Saul become Paul?
- Paul's ministry to the Gentiles
- Paul's missionary journeys
- How many times was Paul shipwrecked?
- Assassination attempts against Paul
- Paul's appeal to Caesar
- Paul's house arrest
- How much of the Bible did Paul write?
- How did Paul die?

Let's begin!

Who was Paul?

Most of what we know about the Apostle Paul (also known as Saint Paul or Saul of Tarsus) comes from the writings attributed to him and the **Book of Acts**. However, there are also a couple of writings from the late first and early second centuries that refer to him, including Clement of Rome's letter to the Corinthians.

A Hebrew of Hebrews

Before becoming a follower of Christ, Paul was a prime example of a "righteous" Jew. He came from a God-fearing family (**2 Timothy 1:3**), he was a Pharisee like his father (**Acts 23:6**), and he was educated by a respected rabbi named Gamaliel (**Acts 22:3**). His Jewish credentials included his heritage, discipline, and zeal.

In **Philippians 3**, he explains why if anyone ever had reason to believe that they could be saved by their adherence to Judaism, it was him:

"If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless." —**Philippians 3:4-6**

He goes on to say that he considers this righteousness "garbage" next to the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ (**Philippians 3:8-9**).

Paul's identity used to be rooted in his Jewishness, but after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (more on that later) his identity as a Jew became secondary to his identity as a follower of Christ. He spent much of his ministry dismantling the idea that in order to have a saving faith in Jesus, Gentiles must first "become Jewish" by adopting the Mosaic Law. Being a "Hebrew of Hebrews" lent

him credibility and expertise when speaking to Jewish audiences, and helped him speak into the Law's inability to make people righteous.

A Roman citizen

Paul was born in Tarsus—a prosperous city in the province of Cilicia—which, granted him Roman citizenship. This status gave him special privileges, and in some cases saved him from abuse (**Acts 22:25–29**).

In **Acts 25**, Paul was put on trial, and his accusers asked that he stand trial in Jerusalem, where they planned to ambush and kill him (**Acts 25:3**). Paul leveraged his Roman citizenship to demand Caesar himself hear his case (**Acts 25:11**), and procurator has no choice but to grant him this right. Unfortunately, the book ends before he gets to Caesar—because Paul's story isn't the point of Acts.

As a Roman citizen, Paul possessed a coveted status. Some, like the centurion in **Acts 22:28**, had to pay a lot of money to have it. Others served in the Roman military for 25 years to earn it. But Paul was born into this privilege. And instead of lording this status over everyone, he preached about a citizenship which everyone could *choose* to claim by accepting Jesus as Lord:

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” —

Philippians 3:20–21

A persecutor of Christians

As a Pharisee, before his conversion to Christianity, Paul saw Christians (who were predominantly Jewish at the time) as a scourge against Judaism. From Paul's perspective, these people were blaspheming about God and leading his people astray. He believed that Jesus was a mere man, and was therefore rightfully executed for claiming to be God.

And since Jesus' followers kept spreading the idea that Jesus was God, Paul thought Christians were sinners of the worst sort.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Paul made his debut in the Bible as an intense persecutor of Christians. (Though he's first mentioned by his Hebrew name, Saul—we'll get to that soon.)

When Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the gospel, *“the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul . . . And Saul approved of their killing him”* (**Acts 7:58–8:1**).

Later, Paul asked the high priest for permission to take Christians (known as followers of “the Way”) as prisoners:

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in

Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” —Acts 9:1-2

Paul’s notoriety as a persecutor of Christians made believers uncomfortable around him even after his baptism, and it took a while for them to believe that he’d really changed (**Acts 9:26**).

A leader in the early Christian church

After putting his faith in Jesus, Paul immediately began preaching publicly (**Acts 9:20**), and he quickly built a reputation as a formidable teacher (**Acts 9:22**). Throughout the rest of **Acts**, Paul is a prominent figure who plays a pivotal role in bringing the gospel to non-Jewish communities.

As we see from Paul’s own letters, he was highly respected in the increasingly scattered Christian communities, many of which he started himself. His letters frequently address problems and questions these churches wrote to him about.

An apostle to the Gentiles

While Paul’s status as a Pharisee and his intense devotion to the Law might have made him well-suited to preach to the Jews, Paul had a different calling. Before Paul ever preached the gospel, Jesus said, *“This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel”* (**Acts 9:15**).

Fun fact: Paul *did* proclaim the name of Jesus to a Gentile king. In **Acts 26**, he shared the gospel with King Herod Agrippa II while he was on trial in Caesarea.

Paul’s calling as an apostle to the Gentiles was also reinforced by the original apostles. In his letter to the church in Galatians, Paul wanted the Galatians to know that they didn’t need to follow the Law of Moses to be saved. The gospel he preached to them was enough, and they just needed to have faith in Jesus. To prove his point, he told the Galatians that Peter (also known as Cephas), James, and John had nothing to add to Paul’s rendition of the gospel:

“As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.” —

Galatians 2:6-9

And if Peter, James, and John had nothing to add to what Paul preached, then why would the Galatians listen to someone else who said there was more they needed to do to be saved?

As an apostle to the Gentiles, not only did Paul need to engage the cultures he was trying to reach, but he had to protect these new believers from the weight of obligation that Jewish Christians often tried to impose on them. He was constantly trying to prove that the Gentiles didn't need to adopt Jewish customs like circumcision in order to place their faith in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit.

A missionary

Paul established numerous churches throughout Europe and Asia Minor, and was typically driven toward regions no one had evangelized to before:

"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" —**Romans 15:20**

The Book of Acts and Paul's letters specifically record three missionary journeys to various cities throughout Europe and Asia, each lasting for several years. (We'll discuss these more later, or you can read more about them now.)

Everywhere he went, Paul established new Christian communities and helped these fledgling believers develop their own leadership. He corresponded with these churches regularly and visited them as often as he could. Occasionally, they financially supported him so that he could continue his ministry elsewhere (**Philippians 4:14–18, 2 Corinthians 11:8–9**).

A miracle worker

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised his followers they would receive power through the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:8**). The Book of Acts records that the apostles performed miracles, and Paul is no exception. He healed people, cast out spirits, and even brought someone back from the dead. (Though to be fair, if Paul hadn't talked him to sleep, the boy wouldn't have fallen out of that window to begin with.)

Here are the miracles associated with Paul:

- He made a sorcerer go temporarily blind (**Acts 13:11**).
- He healed a man who had been lame since birth (**Acts 14:8–10**).
- He casted out a spirit that was annoying him (**Acts 16:16–18**).
- He healed people and cast out spirits through items he touched (**Acts 19:11–12**).
- He resurrected a young man named Eutychus (**Acts 20:9–12**).
- He was bit by a venomous snake and nothing happened to him (**Acts 28:3–5**).
- He healed a man with fever and dysentery (**Acts 28:8**).

To those who saw and heard Paul, these miracles proved his authority from God, just as Jesus' miracles once demonstrated His (**Mark 2:10**).

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus

One of the most remarkable aspects of Paul's life is that as a young man, he was well-known for persecuting Christians, but by the end of his life, he'd *endured* significant persecution as a Christian. The Book of Acts and Paul's own letters provide an account of how this dramatic change happened.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'

'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' He replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." —Acts 9:1-9

This famous encounter is referred to as the road to Damascus, the Damascene conversion, and the Damascus Christophany (a vision of Christ distinct from his incarnation). On Paul's way to round up some Christians as prisoners, Jesus stopped him dead in his tracks and crippled him with blindness.

But while Paul now knew the true identity and power of the one he had been persecuting, he had yet to learn Jesus' grace and power to heal. And for that, he would need to meet a follower of Christ:

"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!'

'Yes, Lord,' he answered.

The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.'

'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'

But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is My chosen instrument to proclaim My Name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.'

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength." —Acts 9:10-19

9:10-19

Paul spent the next few days with the very Christians he had come to capture, and he immediately began preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ—to the confusion of Christians and Jews alike. It would take time for Paul’s reputation as a Christian preacher to outgrow his reputation as a persecutor of Christians.

In his own accounts of his conversion, Paul says that Jesus appeared to him (**1 Corinthians 15:7–8**), and he claims that Jesus revealed the gospel to him (**Galatians 1:11–16**).

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul appeals to the authority of eyewitness testimony, pointing out that Jesus appeared to many people including himself. In his letter to the Galatians, he builds the case that the Galatians can trust the Gospel he presented them because it came directly from God, and the first apostles supported his message (**Galatians 2:6–9**).

This encounter on the road to Damascus completely redefined who Paul was, and it changed the purpose of his journey from silencing Christians to speaking out in support of them. Instead of taking away from their number, he added to it. And once Jesus redirected him, Paul continued on this trajectory for the rest of his life.

When did Paul live?

Scholars believe Paul was born sometime between 5 BC and 5 AD, and that he died around 64 or 67 AD. While he was a contemporary of Jesus, they never crossed paths—at least, not before Jesus died.

The first century was a tumultuous time for Christianity. The new religion was vulnerable, and it faced opposition everywhere from the Jews who believed it was blasphemy, and from the Romans who believed it challenged Caesar’s authority and created unrest. As a leader in the Jewish community, Paul saw the rapidly spreading Christian community as a threat, and he directly contributed to the persecution early Christians faced.

But after his encounter with Jesus, instead of stamping out Christianity, Paul stoked the flames of the faith wherever he went, at whatever the cost. More than any other person besides Jesus, Paul was the reason Christianity spread so far and so fast.

Did Saul become Paul?

It’s a common misconception that Paul “used to be Saul,” and that when Jesus called him, he renamed him Paul. You may have heard something like “Saul the persecutor became Paul the persecuted.”

But there’s no verse that says that. And Paul and Saul are actually two versions of the same name.

Shortly after Saul converts to Christianity, Luke tells us he’s also called Paul (**Acts 13:9**), and for the most part the rest of the Bible refers to him as Paul. But Jesus

doesn't refer to him as Paul, and he was still called Saul 11 more times after his conversion.

It's true that in the Old Testament, God occasionally changed people's names (Abram became Abraham in **Genesis 17:5**, and Jacob became Israel in **Genesis 32:28**) to represent significant changes in their identity. But that's not what happened here.

The reality is that Saul was a Hebrew name and Paul was a Greek version of the same name. (Similar to how "James" is the Greek form of "Jacob," and "Judas" is the Greek form of "Judah.") As Paul began to evangelize Greek communities (and since most of the New Testament was written in Greek), it makes sense that we see the Greek version of his name most after his conversion.

Paul's ministry to the gentiles

Of all the ways Paul affected Christianity, the biggest was arguably his role in spreading the gospel to non-Jewish communities. He certainly wasn't the only apostle to do so, but he is known as the "*apostle to the Gentiles*" because that's who Jesus specifically called him to minister to (**Acts 9:15**), he and the other apostles agreed that was his role (**Galatians 2:7**), and that was undeniably the focus of his ministry.

When Christianity emerged, it was often thought of as a Jewish sect—it built on Jewish teachings and beliefs, and because most Christians were also Jewish, many still followed Jewish customs and rituals established in the Law of Moses.

But Christianity was radically different from Judaism, and while many early Christians followed the Law, it wasn't a prerequisite for believing in Jesus. The Law of Moses and the old covenant it bound them to have been replaced by Jesus' new covenant, and the law of love (**John 13:34-35**).

For Paul, the apostles, and the early Christians, the Law (and specifically, circumcision) was one of the greatest theological issues of their day. First-century Jews had grown up believing the Law was central to their identity as God's chosen people, and they struggled to fully grasp that Jesus rendered the Law obsolete (**Hebrews 8:13**).

The apostles agree with Paul

Paul constantly wrote to Gentile Christians to tell them not to worry about circumcision (as you can imagine, uncircumcised adults were rightfully freaked out by the idea that they'd have to do this), and in **Acts 15**, the apostles met with Paul and Barnabas to officially settle the matter, because pockets of Jewish Christians were continuing to tell Gentiles to get circumcised.

Peter argued that God hadn't discriminated between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians because he'd given them both the Holy Spirit, and if in the entire history

of Judaism no one had been able to keep the Law (except Jesus), then why would they put that burden on the Gentiles (**Acts 15:7-11**)?

After listening to everyone, the Apostle James concluded:

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” —**Acts 15:19-21**

If you’ll notice, the apostles didn’t decide that Gentiles should follow “the most important” commandments, or the Big Ten, or anything like that. Instead, they essentially instructed Gentiles be *culturally sensitive* to their Jewish brothers and sisters, because the Law was respected and observed by Jews everywhere.

But despite the apostles’ agreement that Gentiles didn’t have to adopt Jewish customs to be Christian, Jewish Christians still saw law-observing Christians as superior, and even Peter let himself get pressured into playing favorites. Paul wasn’t going to let that slide.

Paul confronts Peter

After he received a vision (**Acts 10:9-16**), Peter was one of the first apostles to specifically advocate for sharing the gospel with Gentiles. But as the Gentiles joined the church, Paul noticed that Peter still treated Gentile Christians differently in order to save face with those who still valued the law.

So Paul called him out on it.

“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’

‘We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.’ —**Galatians 2:11-16**

Paul goes on to say that “if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (**Galatians 2:21**) And as he explained earlier in his epistle to the Galatians, Peter, James, and John already agreed with him: the Gentiles did not need to follow the Law of Moses, and Jewish Christians were not better or superior than Gentile Christians because they *did* follow the Law.

Not a fun fact: Even though Paul argued that Christians didn't need to be circumcised in **Acts 15**, he circumcised Timothy in the very next chapter "*because of the Jews who lived in that area*" (**Acts 16:1-3**).

Paul's missionary journeys

Acts records three missionary journeys that took Paul throughout Asia Minor, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, and Syria. Some scholars argue there was a fourth missionary journey as well. In each of these, Paul and his companions set out to bring the gospel to Gentiles, and they establish the churches Paul wrote to in his epistles (as well as many others).

In some cases, Paul spent well over a year in the cities he preached to, living with the believers there and modeling a lifestyle of imitating Christ. Over the course of his life, Paul likely traveled well over 10,000 miles to spread the gospel.

Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13-14)

Paul's first journey began in **Antioch** with a calling from the Holy Spirit (**Acts 13:2-3**). He left the church with Barnabas and a man named John (also called Mark, believed to be the author of the Gospel of Mark), and together they sailed to **Cyprus**, an island in the Mediterranean.

Here Paul performed his first miracle, perhaps inspired by his own conversion on the road to Damascus: he blinded a sorcerer who opposed their attempts to evangelize a proconsul (**Acts 13:10-12**).

Then they sailed to **Perga in Pamphylia**, where John Mark parted ways with Paul and Barnabas (this became a point of tension between Paul and Barnabas later). From there, Paul and Barnabas went to **Psidion Antioch**, a city in the mountains of Turkey.

In Psidion Antioch, Paul and Barnabas entered a synagogue during the Sabbath, and Paul preached the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. They were invited to come speak on the following Sabbath, and when they did, most of the city attended. Many of the Jews in attendance grew angry and tried to stop them, but the Gentiles were receptive to their message. Paul and Barnabas ultimately left **Psidion Antioch** due to persecution, and traveled to another Turkish city called **Iconium**. They spent "considerable time there" (**Acts 14:3**), and the city became increasingly divided: some Jews and Gentiles supported them, and others reviled them. Those who opposed Paul and Barnabas started a plot to stone them, but they caught wind of it and fled to the Lycaonian city of **Lystra**.

There, Paul performed another miracle: he healed a man who had been lame since birth (**Acts 14:8-10**). The people who saw this thought Paul and Barnabas were gods, and attempted to make sacrifices to them even as Paul and Barnabas tried to convince them not to.

Some of the people who opposed them in **Psidion Antioch** and **Iconium** followed them to **Lystra**, and they stirred up the crowd against them. They stoned Paul and left him for dead outside the city. Then he got up and went back in. The next day they left for **Derbe**, another Lycaonian city where they “won a large number of disciples” (**Acts 14:21**).

From **Derbe**, Paul and Barnabas looped back through the cities they’d already preached to, encouraging the new believers there and appointing elders for each church.

Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

After staying in Antioch for a while, Paul asked Barnabas to go with him to visit the churches they’d established together. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark again, but Paul didn’t think John Mark should come since he’d abandoned them before. So Paul and Barnabas parted ways: Barnabas took John Mark to **Cyprus**, and Paul took a man named Silas to **Syria** and **Cilicia**.

Paul and Silas travelled through **Derbe** and then **Lystra**, where they picked up a believer named Timothy (this is *the* Timothy Paul writes to in **1 Timothy and 2 Timothy**). Together they traveled from town to town and told people what the apostles had decided at the Council of Jerusalem where James told Gentile Christians not to worry about circumcision, which was pretty ironic, because Paul had *just circumcised Timothy* (**Acts 16:3**).

The Holy Spirit kept Paul and his companions from preaching in the province of Asia, so they went to Phrygia and Galatia (where they planted the church Paul would later write to in Galatians), eventually making their way to Troas.

Fun fact: “Asia” used to refer to a very specific region in part of what we know as Turkey today, but westerners began using the name to describe pretty much anything east of them, until they eventually used it for the whole continent.

Paul had a vision which led the group to Macedonia, and interestingly, here the author of Acts begins to include himself in the story “*After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them*” (**Acts 16:10**, emphasis added).

They wound their way through several provinces to arrive in Philippi, the main city in Macedonia. Here they met with a group of women, including a wealthy cloth dealer named Lydia. After they baptized Lydia and her household, she invited them to stay at her house. These were the first members of the church Paul writes to in Philippians.

During their time in Philippi, a spirit that possessed a local slave girl was bothering Paul, so he cast it out of her (**Acts 16:18**). Normally people are ecstatic when that happens, but the slave girl’s owners had been making money off of her *because of*

the spirit, so they were pretty mad. They got everyone riled up against Paul and Silas and managed to convince the local authorities to have them beaten and imprisoned.

While Paul and Silas were in jail, there was an earthquake, and the prison doors opened and everyone's chains came loose, but no one tried to escape. Paul and Silas shared the gospel with the jailer, and once they were freed, they returned to Lydia's house, and then left for Thessalonica.

For three Sabbaths, Paul taught in the synagogues and established the group of believers that he would later write to in **1 Thessalonians** and **2 Thessalonians**. He gained many followers, but those who opposed him started a riot and threatened his supporters, so the believers sent him on to Berea.

The Berean Jews "*received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*" (**Acts 17:11**). Unfortunately, some of those who opposed Paul and his companions in Thessalonica heard he was in Berea, so they came and started causing trouble. Paul left to Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed behind, but would catch up later.

The Athenians were accustomed to discussing new ideas, and they'd never heard the message Paul preached before, so they were intrigued and debated with him. Some of his listeners became believers, and then he left for Corinth.

Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, preaching in the synagogues and gaining both Jewish and Gentile followers from a range of social statuses, forming the group of believers he would later write to in **1 Corinthians** and **2 Corinthians**. He stayed with two named Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers, like him. Silas and Timothy rejoined him here.

The Jews who opposed Paul tried to bring charges against him based on Jewish law, but the Roman proconsul wasn't interested in hearing their case. Paul left with Priscilla and Aquila and journeyed to Ephesus.

In Ephesus, Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and promised to return if he could. Then he made his way back to Jerusalem and Antioch, where his second journey ended.

Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–20:38)

Paul began his third missionary journey by returning to Galatia and Phrygia, where he continued building up the churches he'd established.

From there, Paul traveled back to Ephesus, where he encountered some believers who weren't familiar with the Holy Spirit, because they'd been taught by Apollos, who didn't have a complete grasp of the gospel at the time.

Paul remained in Ephesus for more than two years, and during that time he transitioned from teaching in the synagogue to discussing the gospel in the lecture

hall of Tyrannus. Acts records that “*all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord*” (**Acts 19:10**).

During this time, Paul did many miracles, and even things he touched were reported to have healed people (**Acts 19:12**). After a dangerous evil spirit claimed to know Jesus and Paul, people flocked to Paul and his followers and the church grew quickly.

Around this time, Paul decided to head to Jerusalem, so he journeyed through Macedonia and Achaia, and made plans to stop in Rome. Meanwhile, Ephesus was in uproar, because Christianity’s explosive growth had stifled businesses that relied on idol worship.

The city was on the brink of rioting, and Paul wanted to return to help his companions, but the city clerk managed to de-escalate the situation without him. (Which was a good thing, because those business owners were pretty mad at Paul, and they probably would’ve killed him.)

Paul spent three months in Greece, then returned to Macedonia to avoid some people who were plotting against him. In Troas (a city in Macedonia), Paul was teaching in an upper room when a young man fell asleep and tumbled out the window, falling to his death. Paul revived him, and then left.

In a rush to reach Jerusalem, Paul bounced from Troas to Assos, Mitylene, Chios, and finally Miletus, where he asked the elders from Ephesus to meet him. After encouraging them, he boarded a ship and returned to Jerusalem, even after numerous Christians warned him not to go there.

Paul’s fourth missionary journey (?)

Some argue that Paul made a fourth missionary journey as well, since some of his letters refer to events and visits that may not be accounted for in Acts. This largely depends on whether Paul was imprisoned in Rome once, or twice, which his letters are ambiguous about. Paul suggested he would travel to Spain (**Romans 15:24**), but he provides no record of this journey in his letters. However, early church fathers claimed Paul did, in fact, travel to Spain.

In his letter to the Corinthians, first-century church father Clement of Rome said Paul “had gone to the extremity of the west,” which at the time presumably meant Spain. Fourth-century church father John of Chrysostom said “For after he had been in Rome, he returned to Spain, but whether he came thence again into these parts, we know not.” And Cyril of Jerusalem (also from the fourth century) wrote that Paul “carried the earnestness of his preaching as far as Spain.”

Still, scholars can’t be sure that Paul did make this fourth journey, as the primary sources for his other three journeys (Acts and the epistles) don’t give us an explicit account of it.

How many times was Paul shipwrecked?

On many of Paul's journeys, he travelled by boat. As you can imagine, boats weren't nearly as safe in the first century—especially on long voyages. In his second letter to the Corinthians, which was likely written before his final trip to Jerusalem, Paul claims he was shipwrecked three times:

“Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;” —**2 Corinthians 11:25**

There's no other record of these wrecks in the epistles or in Acts, but **Acts 27** does record a fourth shipwreck in far more detail. On Paul's way to trial in Rome, his boat encounters a brutal storm and dangerous waters. The soldiers took drastic measures, but an angel spoke to Paul, and he encouraged and advised them along the way.

Assassination attempts against Paul

During his ministry, Paul made a lot of people mad. On six occasions in Acts, Jews and Gentiles alike made plans to murder him—and one of those times, they stoned him and left him for dead.

Only counting the times the Bible explicitly says they planned to kill him, not just attack or harm him, here they in sequential order.

1. In Damascus

Just after his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul began preaching in the synagogues. After several days, people began planning to kill him, and they watched the city gates day and night. His followers smuggled him in and out of the city in a basket (**Acts 9:23–25**).

2. In Jerusalem

When Paul left Damascus, he went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples there. He began debating with Hellenistic Jews, and they tried to kill him, so the Christians took him to Caesarea and sent him home to Tarsus (**Acts 9:26–30**).

3. In Iconium

Paul and Barnabas spent a long time in Iconium, and the city was divided: some people supported them, and others hated them. Jews and Gentiles alike plotted to stone them, and when Paul and Barnabas found out, they fled to Lystra (**Acts 14:4–6**).

4. In Lystra

After Paul healed a man in Lystra, people thought he and Barnabas were the gods, Zeus and Hermes, and attempted to sacrifice to them. But then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and convinced this crowd to actually stone Paul. They thought they killed him, so they left him outside the city gate. (He was still alive.) Then he and Barnabas left (**Acts 14:8–20**).

5. In Jerusalem (again)

After Paul insulted the high priest and sparked an intense theological debate between the Sadducees and Pharisees, a group of more than 40 men took a vow not to eat or drink until they killed Paul (**Acts 23:12–13**).

Their plan was to have a centurion send Paul to the Sanhedrin for questioning, and then kill him on the way. But someone warned the centurion of the plan, and instead, he rounded up nearly 500 soldiers to take Paul to the governor in Caesarea.

6. In Caesarea

Years later, Paul was still being held prisoner, and there was a new proconsul named Porcius Festus in charge. Paul's accusers requested that Paul be sent back to Jerusalem "for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way" (**Acts 25:3**).

Festus refused, and told them to make their case in Caesarea, where Paul used his privilege as a Roman citizen to make a bold request.

Paul's appeal to Caesar

When Paul was first imprisoned in Caesarea, he made his appeal to Governor Felix, then waited two years in prison with no progress. (Governor Felix strung him along because he wanted the Jews to like him, and he hoped Paul would bribe him.)

Porcius Festus succeeded Felix and after hearing Paul defend himself, he asked Paul if would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem.

Tired of his case dragging on to appease his Jewish accusers, Paul claimed his right as a Roman to appeal to Caesar:

"I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!" —Acts 25:10–12

Unfortunately, the Book of Acts ends before Paul's trial before Caesar. But before he leaves Caesarea, another ruler—King Herod Agrippa II—hears his case, and tells Festus:

"This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." —Acts 26:32

Perhaps Paul hoped appealing to Caesar would finally put an end to his case, but unfortunately, it dragged them out even further.

Or . . . perhaps it was a strategic move on Paul's part to testify about Christ to the leaders of the Roman empire. Having Caesar's court and the Roman justice system as his captive audience might have been Paul's play all along.

Paul's house arrest (Acts 28:14–31)

By appealing to Caesar, Paul forced Festus to send him to Rome to await trial. When he finally arrived, “*Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him*” (Acts 28:16). Here, Paul preached freely to the Jews in Rome for two years. Scholars believe this is likely when he wrote his letter to the Philippians, because he references being in chains (**Philippians 1:12–13**).

The Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, and we don't learn much more about the situation from the epistles, and scholar's debate about whether or not Paul was ever released from house arrest. Some argue that his letters speak of his imprisonment in the past tense and make references to things that could have only occurred *after* his house arrest.

For example, in **2 Timothy** (believed to have been written shortly before his death) he appears to reference a recent trip to Troas (**2 Timothy 4:13**), which would've been impossible if he'd already been imprisoned in Caesarea for more than two years before his house arrest in Rome.

Whether or not Paul made a fourth missionary journey (possibly to Spain) largely depends on if he was imprisoned in Rome once or twice.

How much of the Bible did Paul write?

The Apostle Paul is traditionally considered the author of 13 books of the New Testament. While Moses still holds the title for writing the most words in the Bible (traditionally), Paul wrote the most documents. (Well, unless you count each individual Psalm as a document, in which case David wins.) The books attributed to him include:

- **Romans**
- **1 Corinthians**
- **2 Corinthians**
- **Galatians**
- **Ephesians**
- **Colossians**
- **1 Thessalonians**
- **2 Thessalonians**
- **1 Timothy**
- **2 Timothy**
- **Titus**
- **Philemon**

These books are actually letters—or epistles—, which were written to churches Paul planted and people he presumably encountered on the missionary journeys we see in the Book of Acts. The letters reference many of the events recorded in Acts, which scholars have used to construct more clear timelines of Paul's life and ministry.

But not everyone agrees that Paul wrote all of these letters. Most scholars (critical and conservative) believe that Paul *did* write seven of them: **Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon**. But the remaining six letters have raised some questions, and scholar's debate whether or not they can really be attributed to Paul.

Colossians makes some questionable references which Paul doesn't make anywhere else (he calls Jesus "*the image of the invisible God*" in **Colossians 1:15**), and which align more with later Christian theology (like that found in John's gospel), so some have argued it was written by Paul's followers after his death.

Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus all have very different styles than Paul's other letters. This could mean Paul simply had a different purpose in writing them, or that Paul's writing style changed over the course of his ministry, but the epistles to Timothy and Titus also have very different vocabulary and even theology than we see in other Pauline writings.

Many Christians would be surprised to learn that these academic debates are even happening, because these letters are all signed by Paul. But scholars argue that these epistles are actually *pseudepigrapha*: writings that claim to be written by someone who was not the actual author.

Some *pseudepigrapha* is harmless, produced out of convenience, necessity, or accepted practices of the time (such as a student writing on behalf of a teacher, with the approval and authority of the teacher). Others, like many of the Gnostic gospels, were blatant forgeries written to advance a theological position.

At worst, someone wrote these letters and deceitfully signed Paul's name to make them more authoritative. But many scholars believe it's more likely that Paul asked his companions to write them, told them what to write, and signed his name. This would explain differences in style and vocabulary without really losing the letters' authenticity.

Did Paul write the Book of Hebrews?

Almost all scholars today agree that Paul didn't write Hebrews, and the true biblical author remains unknown. However, the early church assumed the letter was written by Paul, and even included it in early collections of his writings. This was contested as early as the second and third centuries, but for more than a millennia the church largely believed Paul wrote it.

How did Paul die?

The Bible doesn't tell us how Paul died, but numerous early church fathers wrote that he was martyred—specifically, he was beheaded, probably by emperor Nero, which would mean it had to be sometime before 68 AD.

Clement of Rome provided the earliest surviving record of Paul's death in his letter to the Corinthians (known as 1 Clement), where he mentions that Paul and Peter were martyred.

Paul's remains

In 2002, archaeologists found a large marble sarcophagus near the location Jerome and Caius described. It had "*PAULO APOSTOLO MART*" (Paul apostle martyr) written on it. No one ever opened the sarcophagus, but using a probe and carbon dating, archaeologists estimated that the remains inside were from the first or second century. The Vatican claims these are in fact the remains of Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul: apostle, missionary, writer, martyr

From the moment he became a believer in Christ, Paul's life was transformed. While Jesus didn't give Saul a new name, he *did* give him a new purpose: one that redefined his life. Instead of persecuting Christians, Paul was called to *be* persecuted as one of them.

Despite never witnessing Jesus' ministry, Paul arguably contributed more to the growth of the Christian movement than any other apostle. He laid the foundation for missions work that has continued around the world today, and through his life he modeled evangelism, discipleship, perseverance, and suffering—for the Christians who knew him, and for every believer today.

SAUL/PAUL • CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Was this Apostle one of Jesus' 12 Disciples?

Yes ____ No ____

2. What other name(s) is this Apostle known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Apostle's profession?

4. What is this Apostle best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is this Apostle credited for writing?

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

6. To what country(s) did this Apostle go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of this Apostle do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?

LUKE

- CHAPTER FIFTEEN -

Luke the Evangelist—also known as Luke the Physician and Saint Luke—is the traditional author of both the **Gospel of Luke** and the **Book of Acts**. He wasn't one of the Twelve, and most scholars wouldn't consider him an apostle.

Luke appears to have been a companion of Paul. At times in Acts, he includes himself in the story:

“After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” —**Acts 16:10**

And while Luke didn't personally witness Jesus' ministry, he claims to have *“carefully investigated everything from the beginning”* (**Luke 1:1–4**) and he had access to eyewitness accounts, including the **Gospel of Mark**.

In the fourth century, a bishop claimed Luke was one of the Seventy (or Seventy-Two) disciples mentioned in **Luke 10**, but that's unlikely, especially since Luke appears to indicate he was *not* an eyewitness in **Luke 1:1–4**.

While he was certainly an important part of the early Christian church, Luke was not one of the 12 apostles.

Saint Luke, also known as Luke the Evangelist, is widely regarded as the author of both the **Gospel of Luke** and the **Book of Acts**. He wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else—even the Apostle Paul.

Luke wasn't an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, but he lived during the first century, and according to his own writings, he *“carefully investigated everything from the beginning”* (**Luke 1:1–4**). As a traveling companion of Paul, he also likely had direct access to the apostles and other accounts of Jesus' life and ministry (such as the Gospel of Mark).

While he was presumably educated as a physician (**Colossians 4:14**), today Luke is celebrated as one of the church's earliest historians. His methodical, detailed writings give us the only thorough record of what happened after Jesus ascended to heaven. Without his account in Acts, it would be hard to imagine how Christianity grew from a small, fragile movement within Judaism to what would eventually become the largest religion in the world.

So who *was* “Luke the Evangelist”? What do we really know about him? Can we trust him? In this guide, we'll explore what the Bible says about him and how we know what he wrote, and we'll answer important questions about his authority and reliability.

First, here are some quick facts about Luke.

Who was Luke?

Most of what we know about Luke comes from his own writings and a handful of mentions in Paul's letters. Some details of his life are ambiguous, and scholars debate what we can really gather from the limited evidence we have.

Not an eyewitness

Luke makes it clear that he was not an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry (**Luke 1:1–4**). He never includes himself in the gospel narrative.

A companion of Paul

From the Book of Acts and Paul's writings, we know that Luke was one of Paul's companions.

In **Acts 16:10**, Luke suddenly inserts himself into the narrative, including himself among Paul's companions.

In **Colossians 4:14**, Paul refers to a man named Luke as a "*dear friend*."

In **Philemon 1:24**, Paul refers to a man named Luke as one of "*my fellow workers*."

In **2 Timothy 4:11**, he says, "*only Luke is with me*."

It has always been assumed that these are references to the same Luke, and many of the earliest Christian writers point to this man as the author of both Luke and Acts.

A physician

Paul mentions Luke in passing in **Colossians 4:14**, but from that mention, we learn that he was a doctor:

"Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings."

This certainly would've come in handy for Paul, since he was constantly getting beat up (**Acts 14:19, Acts 16:22, 2 Corinthians 11:24, 2 Timothy 3:11**).

An early prologue to the Gospel of Luke (possibly as early as the second century), also records that Luke "*was born in Antioch, **by profession, was a physician**. He had become a disciple of the apostle Paul and later followed Paul until his [Paul's] martyrdom. He died at the age of 84 years*" (*Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke*, emphasis added).

In his own writings, Luke often uses common medical terminology to describe illnesses and afflictions. In **Luke 14:2**, Jesus encounters a man with dropsy, or "**abnormal swelling of his body**," and Luke uses the word *hudropikos*—a common term in Greek medical literature that's found nowhere else in the Bible.

Luke's precise terminology draws from his experience as a physician and sets him apart from the other biblical authors.

The Evangelist

Luke's title, "**The Evangelist**," comes from the fact that he wrote one of the four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are regarded as the Four Evangelists because their writings proclaim the "good news" (or gospel) of Jesus Christ.

A Gentile?

Many people argue that Luke was a Gentile, which would make him the only Gentile author of the New Testament. Like many beliefs about Luke, the evidence for this claim is ambiguous, and far from definitive.

The idea comes from **Colossians 4:11–14**, where Paul separates Luke from "*the only ones of the circumcision group*," which some scholars interpret as "*the only Jews*":

"Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings."

And while Luke likely was from Troas or Antioch, that doesn't mean he couldn't have been a Jew. It's entirely possible that Luke was a Hellenic Jew: biologically Jewish, but culturally Greek. Hellenic Jews adopted the customs of Greek culture, and didn't follow all the Jewish practices such as circumcision.

Since circumcision was a central issue in many of Paul's writings, it wouldn't be surprising if he intended for "the only ones of the circumcision group" to simply refer to the Jewish Christians who strictly followed the Law of Moses and believed circumcision was required for Christians.

That said many scholars still hold the position that Luke was a Gentile.

One of the seventy-two?

In the fourth century, a bishop known as Epiphanius of Salamis claimed Luke was one of the 70 (or 72) disciples Jesus sent out in **Luke 10**:

"He too was one of the seventy-two who had been scattered because of the Savior's saying. But he was brought back to the Lord by St. Paul and told to issue his Gospel." — Panarion

This is the earliest claim that Luke was part of this group, and while interesting. Especially since Luke appears to exclude himself as an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry in the opening passage of his gospel:

". . . just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." — Luke 1:2

Not to mention, Luke never speaks in first person in the **Gospel of Luke**. As one of the 72 disciples, he surely would've witnessed *some* of the events recorded in his gospel, but he never once refers to himself in any of the events he records (like he does in Acts). Presumably, this is because his gospel is entirely based on other accounts (like Mark).

Where is Luke from?

Most scholars believe that Luke was born in Antioch (as the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke* and early Christian writers claim). Acts doesn't tell us this, either, but Antioch *does* get quite a bit of attention in the book.

But there's another theory about where Luke is from. In Acts 16, Luke suddenly appears to join Paul and his companions after they reach Troas:

*"When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, **we** got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them."* —**Acts 16:7-10** (emphasis added)

However, Luke never claims to be from Troas, and while that clearly appears to be where he joined Paul, the evidence is ambiguous. (After all, we first meet Paul in Jerusalem, even though he's from Tarsus.)

Was Luke one of Jesus' twelve disciples?

Luke was *not* part of Jesus' group of disciples called "*the Twelve*." There are four passages that give the names of all 12 disciples (also called "apostles"), and Luke isn't in any of them (**Matthew 10:2-4**, **Mark 3:13-19**, **Luke 6:12-19**, and **Acts 1:12-26**). Their names are:

- Peter (also called Simon or Simon Peter)
- James son of Zebedee
- John son of Zebedee
- Andrew
- Philip
- Bartholomew
- Matthew
- Thomas
- James son of Alphaeus
- Simon the Zealot
- Thaddeus (Judas son of James in Luke and Acts)
- Judas Iscariot

While Luke wasn't an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, he certainly had access to at least the accounts of those who *were* (**Luke 1:1-4**), including the Gospel of Mark (believed to be Peter's account, handed down to John Mark).

Was Luke an apostle?

Whether or not Luke was technically an apostle depends on how you define it—but most Bible scholars would say he was *not* an apostle. (We agree.)

Some argue that “apostle” is a title reserved for the original 12 disciples, with perhaps an exception for Paul (“the apostle to the Gentiles”). Others use it more broadly to include the 72 disciples or important early Christian teachers. But *apóstolos*, the Greek word we translate as apostle, literally means “one who is sent off,” and some use this as a basis for using the title for all Christians—or at least including people like Luke.

Here's what we know about how the Bible uses the title apostle, and how the early church described Luke.

The Bible refers to more than 12 apostles

The Bible uses the title “apostle” for some people who weren't among Jesus' 12 original disciples. **Acts 14:4** refers to Paul and Barnabas as apostles:

“The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.”

1 Corinthians 15:7 appears to use apostle to refer to a group beyond the 12:

“Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles . . .”

Romans 16:7 refers Andronicus and Junia (who was likely a woman) as apostles:

“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.”

Paul refers to himself as “the apostle to the Gentiles” in **Romans 11:13**:

“I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry . . .”

Passages like these make it *possible* that Luke could've been considered an apostle, but in the three times Paul mentions him in his letters, Luke is never referred to as an apostle.

Luke probably wouldn't say he was an apostle

Luke didn't play fast and loose with titles like “apostle.” *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* notes that Luke barely even used the Greek word we translate as apostle to refer to Paul (if he really did at all):

“Luke restricts the title *ἀπόστολος* to twelve disciples and, accordingly, never calls Paul apostle (except in **Acts 14:4, 14**, and there one suspects that a pre-Lukan source is speaking; see also H. Conzelmann, *Acts [Hermeneia]* ad loc.). Luke uses the

expression ‘the twelve apostles,’ ‘the twelve,’ and (most often) ‘the apostles’ without differentiation.”

And don’t forget: Luke wrote more than one quarter of the entire New Testament—including the only canonical account of the early church’s history. He had *plenty* of opportunities to use this title for other believers who were “sent,” including himself, but he didn’t.

Bible verses that mention Luke

There are only three verses that explicitly mention Luke (although a fourth-century church father argued that there *could* be a fourth). If we accept Luke as the author of Luke and Acts, then there are also technically the “we” passages, in which the author of Acts includes himself in the narrative. However, he’s not a character of consequence in that narrative.

Philemon 1:24

In his concluding remarks, Paul basically tells Philemon “*these people said to tell you hi.*” Luke is one of them:

“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.” —Philemon 1:23–24

This passage reinforces Luke’s position as one of Paul’s close companions.

Colossians 4:14

Colossians 4:14 is the only passage that mentions Luke’s role as a physician.

“Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.”

This verse is also part of the argument that Luke was a Gentile, since in the passage (**Colossians 4:11-14**) Paul distinguishes him and Demas from “the only ones of the circumcision group.”

2 Timothy 4:11

In a section of personal remarks before his final greetings to Timothy, Paul mentions Luke again (and appears to mention John Mark, the author of Mark):

“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

This verse is one of the tenuous pieces of “evidence” that Luke wrote some of Paul’s letters, including this one. More on this later.

2 Corinthians 8:18

In **2 Corinthians 8:18**, Paul mentions someone who is coming to visit the Corinthians with Titus, and implies that this person is well-known for their contribution to the church:

“And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel.”

This certainly doesn't mention Luke by name, but early Christian writers noted that Luke was celebrated within the church for writing Luke and Acts, and in the fourth century, Saint John Chrysostom suggested there were two main theories about this unnamed brother in **2 Corinthians 8:18**:

“And who is this brother? Some indeed say, Luke, because of the history which he wrote, but some, Barnabas; for he calls the unwritten preaching also Gospel.” — Homily 18 on Second Corinthians

The “we” passages

Acts contains four passages where the author is suddenly included among Paul's companions:

- **Acts 16:10–17**
- **Acts 20:5–15**
- **Acts 21:1–18**
- **Acts 28:1–16**

It's generally believed that these passages either indicate the author was an eyewitness *or* that they used materials from someone who was. But some have also argued that it was simply a popular convention: ancient authors inserted themselves into historical narratives. Bart Ehrman—a famous secular Bible scholar—takes this a step further and argues that it was a deliberate fabrication to lend credibility to the account recorded in Acts.

However, if we accept Luke as the author of Acts, these are technically references to Luke.

How much of the Bible did Luke write?

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are generally considered a two-volume set because they're both addressed to Theophilus, appear to be written by the same person (even if it wasn't Luke), and have common themes and language, so they're often referred to as **Luke–Acts**.

Between these two books, **Luke wrote a whopping 27.5 percent of the New Testament**—that's more than anyone else, including Paul.

Did Luke really write the Book of Acts?

The opening sentence of Acts addresses the same person Luke was written to—Theophilus—and references *“my former book,”* which makes a pretty convincing case that Luke and Acts were written by the same person. Especially when you consider the similarities in style, language, and themes throughout the two.

Additionally, the early church supports that Luke wrote this volume as well.

Did Luke write any of Paul's letters?

Some believe that as a companion of Paul, Luke may have helped write some of his letters. Paul occasionally used an *amanuensis*—a professional writer who either wrote what Paul dictated or worked from his main points. (See for example **Romans 16:22**.)

None of Paul's letters claim that Luke wrote them, but similarities in language and theology between Luke–Acts and the pastoral epistles (**1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus**) have led some to argue that Luke was in fact one of Paul's *amanuensi*.

However, this argument is purely conjecture. There's simply not enough evidence to support (or necessarily refute) this claim.

Luke: Physician, evangelist, historian

For someone who wrote so much of the New Testament, we don't know very much about Luke. But while the details of his life have largely been lost to history, Luke's contribution to Christianity and the world live on in the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts.

LUKE • CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Was Luke one of Jesus' 12 Disciples or Apostles?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is Luke known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was this Luke's profession?

4. What is Luke best know for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is Luke credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did this Luke go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of Luke do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of Luke's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by Luke?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose Luke to be written through?

JOHN MARK

- CHAPTER SIXTEEN -

Mark the Evangelist, commonly believed to *also* be a man named **John Mark**, is the traditional author of the Gospel of Mark. The Bible doesn't explicitly connect these two people, and neither do the early church fathers, but it's certainly possible that they're the same person.

John Mark was a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabus (and possibly Barnabus' cousin), and a man named Mark was *also* a close companion of Paul. Interestingly, when Peter escapes from prison in Acts 12, he flees to John Mark's mother's house, which was an important gathering place for the early Christians. So Peter and John Mark *likely* crossed paths, and it wouldn't be surprising if they developed a lasting relationship as a result.

All that said, Mark, the traditional author of the Gospel of Mark was not one of the Twelve, and probably wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, either. According to tradition, Mark's gospel is based on Peter's account of his time with Jesus—which could be why Matthew and Luke's gospels appear to be based on the Gospel of Mark, even though Matthew was an eyewitness!

John Mark is a minor biblical figure who lived during the first century. He's traditionally believed to also be Mark the Evangelist, the author of the Gospel of Mark. In the Book of Acts, John Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas. While the Bible doesn't confirm or deny this, many believe he developed a close relationship with Peter, and that his gospel records Peter's account of Jesus' life and ministry.

If he was, in fact, Mark the Evangelist, then according to the early church; John Mark was also the first bishop of Alexandria and the first person to establish a Christian church in Africa.

His name first appears in **Acts 12:12**, when Peter escapes from prison and retreats to a house of Christians—which happens to be the house of John Mark's mother, Mary. Many scholars speculate that this was the start of a long-standing relationship between them, and that John Mark eventually recorded Peter's account of Jesus' life and ministry in the Gospel of Mark.

The next time we see John Mark in the Bible, he's a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 12:25**). John Mark eventually created a conflict between Paul and Barnabas, and as a result, they parted ways on Paul's second missionary journey.

The New Testament only mentions John Mark by name a handful of times—though some scholars speculate he's an unnamed character in the Gospel of Mark as well (**Mark 14:51–52**).

So who was this obscure biblical figure? And why does the church believe he wrote the Gospel of Mark—which is widely believed to have been the first gospel ever written? We’re going to examine everything the Bible says about John Mark, and what we can gather from ancient Christian writers.

First, some quick facts.

Who was John Mark?

When it comes to the details of John Mark’s life, the Bible doesn’t give us much to go on. For millennia, scholars have picked apart the passages that mention him, straining them for clues about this obscure, yet important biblical figure. Beyond a smattering of facts we can glean from Scripture and some conflicting accounts from the early church, we’re left to speculate who he was and what he did.

Here’s what we know.

John, also called Mark

The Bible never actually refers to someone named John Mark. But several passages in Acts refer to a man as “John, also called Mark.” This is the person we know as John Mark—perhaps he would be more accurately remembered as “John/Mark.” In the first century, John was the most common Hebrew name. Mark was the most common Roman name. It wasn’t unusual for someone to go by both a Hebrew and Roman name, as we see with Saul, also called Paul.

Since this person had two of the most common names of his time, it could be a mistake to assume every reference to a person named Mark is referring to the man we know as John Mark. However, some scholars argue that the fact that this name was so common is precisely *why* we should assume if the Bible says “Mark,” it means *this* Mark.

There are plenty of other common names in the Bible, and in many cases, when there are two or more people with the same name, the biblical author attempts to distinguish them. We can always tell when the Bible is referring to John the Baptist or John the apostle. While there were two apostles with the name Judas, one is referred to as Judas Iscariot, and the other is Judas son of James (**Luke 6:16**). Not to mention the numerous Marys and Jameses who are all distinct in narrative accounts.

So when Peter mentions “*my son Mark*” in **1 Peter 5:13**, he clearly assumes the churches he wrote to would know exactly which Mark this was. In some of Paul’s letters, he mentions a man named Mark with even less effort to distinguish whom he’s referring to (**2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24**).

If, as church tradition attests, there was a well-known Mark in the first-century church, it’s not unreasonable to assume that unless a biblical author says otherwise, a reference to *a* Mark was a reference to *this* Mark.

The son of Mary

John Mark is first mentioned in **Acts 12:12**, where Luke uses him to distinguish which Mary he's referring to:

"When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying."

Since Mary was a homeowner with at least one servant (**Acts 12:13**) and Christians gathered in her home, she was most likely a wealthy, reputable woman. *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* suggests she likely played an essential role in the early Christian church, and that this status has led to numerous speculations about John Mark and his family:

"Both the house itself and the household of Mary probably were significant for the early Christian community in Jerusalem, since Peter seems to have known that Christians would be gathered there for prayer. Thus the role of John Mark in early Church tradition often is associated with the presumed wealth and prestige of Mary, who was a homeowner with a maidservant (Rhoda) and who could support gatherings of early Christians for worship. The common, though most likely errant, belief that John Mark was the "young man" who escaped capture by the Romans at the arrest of Jesus (**Mark 14:51–52**) rests upon the assumption that the Garden of Gethsemane was owned and tended by the family of Mary. According to this view, John Mark perhaps would have been stationed at the garden as a guard during the night watch. Another tradition, which maintains that the Last Supper (**Mark 14**) was held in the home of Mary, assumes that the household was familiar with the work of Jesus and was receptive to his activity. Papias of Hierapolis argues against a close relationship between Jesus and the family, however, since he notes specifically that Mark "had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him" (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.39.15)."

A companion of Paul and Barnabas

Later in **Acts 12**, Luke mentions John Mark again. This time, he's hitting the road with Paul and Barnabas:

"When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark." —**Acts 12:25**

John Mark doesn't play a prominent role in any of the events on this missionary journey, but Luke does mention that he was their "helper" (**Acts 13:5**). *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* speculates he may have been something like "a recorder, catechist, and travel attendant."

When Paul and Barnabas reached Perga in Pamphylia (an ancient city in modern-day Turkey), John Mark leaves them and returns to Jerusalem.

The Bible doesn't tell us why he left, but when Paul and Barnabas were discussing their second missionary journey, they were divided about bringing John Mark along, and ultimately parted ways because of him. (More on that later.) Whatever the conflict was, if we assume Paul's letters refer to this Mark, it would seem that they repaired the relationship:

“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” —2 Timothy 4:11

Was John Mark Barnabas’ cousin?

In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul refers to a person named Mark with an interesting detail:

“My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)” —Colossians 4:10

This adds a bit of a twist to the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Paul didn’t want to bring John Mark with them on their second journey, because he abandoned them in the middle of the first one, but Barnabas wanted John Mark to come with them so badly that he was willing to go without Paul.

On the Seventy Apostles (a list of the seventy apostles from **Luke 10**), possibly written in the late second or early third century, makes a distinction between this Mark and the man we know as John Mark:

“Mark, cousin to Barnabas, bishop of Apollonia. . . . Mark, who is also John, bishop of Bibloupolis.”

However, given his association with Paul and Barnabas and the lack of support for this distinction elsewhere, many scholars trust that Mark, the cousin of Barnabas is the same person as John Mark.

Not an eyewitness to the Gospel

On the Seventy Apostles lists Mark the Evangelist among the 70 (or 72) disciples Jesus sent out in **Luke 10**. This is likely intended to present him as an eyewitness to the life and ministry, but an earlier claim by Papias of Hierapolis (who lived from around 60–163 AD) says the Mark who wrote the gospel was *not* an eyewitness:

“Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” —Church History

This is the earliest claim that Mark’s gospel was based on Peter’s account, and it’s possible that Papias is actually quoting the Apostle John here, though he calls him John the Elder.

Some scholars have speculated that Mark included himself as an unnamed character in the gospel. His gospel is the only one that makes note of a mysterious young man who escapes naked after Jesus’ arrest in **Mark 14**:

“A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.” —Mark 14:51–52

While occurrences like that were fairly common in ancient writings, this is pure speculation, and it’s not consistent with the earliest traditions.

Additionally, there are signs within the gospel itself that the author was not an eyewitness to the events recorded in Mark. There are several instances where it’s clear the author wasn’t familiar with the geography of the places they wrote about.

Was John Mark the same person as Mark the Evangelist?

John Mark is traditionally considered the same person as Mark the Evangelist—the author of the Gospel of Mark.

Again, *On the Seventy Apostles* makes a distinction between these two people: “Mark the evangelist, bishop of Alexandria. . . . Mark, who is also John, bishop of Bibloupolis.”

Conflict with Paul

The Bible doesn’t say why John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas in the middle of their first missionary journey, which of course has led to all kinds of speculation. Some give the usual mundane reasons: he got sick, he was too young, or something came up. But what the Bible *does* tell us is that whatever John Mark’s reason was, when Paul and Barnabas were talking about bringing him along for the second journey, they “*had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company*” (**Acts 15:39**).

It’s hard to imagine Paul would be that upset if John Mark left because he was sick. Some scholars suggest that as a Jewish believer, perhaps John Mark left over a disagreement about circumcision.

In any case, Paul and John Mark appear to have reconciled their relationship later on—assuming the Mark Paul refers to as a “*fellow worker*” (**Philemon 24**) and “*very useful to my ministry*” (**2 Timothy 4:11**) is John Mark.

Did John Mark really write the Gospel of Mark?

Whether or not John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark mostly depends on if you accept he was the same person as Mark the Evangelist. The early church unanimously claimed the Gospel of Mark was written by Mark the Evangelist, that he was closely associated with Peter, and that his gospel was based on Peter’s account.

The gospel itself is technically anonymous, but no other author has ever been suggested, and the earliest accounts all claim it was written by Mark.

So the real question is: is “John, also called Mark,” the same man the early church called Mark? Most modern scholars—and centuries of church tradition—say yes.

An obscure biblical figure, an important early Christian

The Bible doesn't have much to say about John Mark. Or *any* person named Mark. But it does tell us that someone named Mark was close to Peter and Paul—two of the most important leaders of the early Christian church. And the earliest sources we have tell us that despite his minor role in Scripture, this person called Mark had a *major* role in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

MARK • CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. Was Mark one of Jesus' 12 Disciples or Apostles?
Yes ____ No ____
2. What other name(s) is this Mark known by?

3. Before being called by Jesus what was Mark's profession?

4. What is Mark best known for in the Bible?

5. What book(s) of the Bible is Mark credited for writing?

6. To what country(s) did Mark go as a Missionary?

7. What characteristic of Mark do you admire most and why?

8. What are the possible ways described of this Apostle's death?

9. What is your favorite bible verse either written or quoted by this Apostle?

10. Why do you think Jesus chose this particular Apostle?
