

An Outline History of the Twelve Apostles

The apostles of Christ were the foundation stones of His church. In Revelation 21:14 we are told that the twelve foundations of the wall of the new Jerusalem will have in them the names of the twelve apostles. It is evident, therefore, that our Lord attaches great importance to these men.

As we study these courageous first-century lives, and what apostleship meant in the time of Christ, we may expect to be aided in developing a Spirit directed twentieth-century discipleship as Christ must have meant it to be, along similar lines of vital experience, responsibility, consecration and achievement.

The information compiled herein utilizes the New Testament accounts of these men, and the most respected legends and traditions. We do not mean to infer, thereby, that legend and tradition constitute historical fact. We do feel, however, that they do have value in the study of the lives of these men who "... turned the world upside down..."

ANDREW

Andrew was the brother of Peter, and a son of Jonas. He lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum and was a fisherman before he was called by Jesus. Originally he was a disciple of John the Baptist (Mark 1 :16-18). Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Jesus (John 1:40). He is the first to have the title of Home and Foreign Missionary. He is claimed by three countries as their Patron Saint—Russia, Scotland and Greece. Many scholars say that he preached in Scythia, Greece and Asia Minor.

Andrew introduced others to Jesus. Although circumstances placed him in a position where it would have been easy for him to have become jealous and resentful, he was optimistic and well content in second place. His main purpose in life was to bring others to the Master.

According to tradition, it was in Achaia, Greece, in the town of Patra that Andrew died a martyr. When Governor Aepeas' wife was healed and converted to the Christian faith, and shortly after that the Governor's brother became a Christian, Aepeas was enraged. He arrested Andrew and condemned him to die on the cross. Andrew, feeling unworthy to be crucified on the same-shaped cross as his Master, begged that his be different. So, he was crucified on an X-shaped cross, which is still called Saint Andrew's cross and which is one of his apostolic symbols. A symbol of two crossed fish has also been applied to Andrew, because he was formerly a fisherman.

BARTHOLOMEW

Bartholomew Nathanael, son of Talmai, lived in Cana of Galilee. Tradition says he was a missionary in Armenia.

A number of scholars believe that he was the only disciple who came from royal blood, or noble birth. His name means Son of Tolmai or Talmai (2 Sam. 3:3). Talmai was king of Geshur whose daughter, Maacah, was the wife of David, mother of Absalom.

Bartholomew's name appears with every list of the disciples (Mat. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13).

This was not a first name, however; it was his second name. His first name probably was Natllanael, whom Jesus called "An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" (John 1:47).

The New Testament gives us very little information about him. Nevertheless, we have clear information that he was a great searcher of the Scripture and a scholar in the Law and the Prophets. He was a man of complete sincerity, a man earnest in prayer, a man who made complete surrender to the Carpenter of Nazareth, and one of the Church's most adventurous missionaries.

He is said to have preached with Philip in Phrygia and Hierapolis; also in Armenia. The Armenian Church claims him as its founder and martyr. However, tradition says that he preached in India, and his death seems to have taken place there. He died as a martyr for his Lord. He was flayed alive with knives.

His apostolic symbol is three parallel knives.

JAMES

James, the Elder, Boanerges, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of John the Apostle; a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem. He preached in Jerusalem and Judea and was beheaded by Herod, A.D. 44 (Acts 12: 1, 2). He was a member of the Inner Circle, so called because they were accorded special privileges. The New Testament tells us very little about James. His name never appears apart from that of his brother, John. They were an inseparable pair (Mark 1:19-20; Mat. 4:21; Luke 5:1-11).

He was a man of courage and forgiveness—a man without jealousy, living in the shadow of John, a man of extraordinary faith. He was the first of the twelve to become a martyr.

His symbol is three shells, the sign of his pilgrimage by the sea. s : ,p

JAMES

James, the Lesser or Younger, son of Alpheus, or Cleophas, and Mary, lived in Galilee. He was the brother of the Apostle Jude.

According to tradition he wrote the Epistle of James, preached in Palestine and Egypt and was crucified in Egypt. James was one of the little known disciples. Some scholars believe he was the brother of Matthew, the tax collector. James was a man of strong character and one of the most fiery type. Tradition tells us that he also died as a martyr and his body was sawed in pieces. The saw became his apostolic symbol.

JOHN

John Boanerges, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of James, the Apostle. He was known as this Beloved Disciple. A fisherman who lived in Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem, he was a member of the Inner Circle. He wrote the Gospel of John, I John, II John, III John and Revelation. He preached among the churches of Asia Minor. Banished to the Isle of Patmos, he was later freed and died a natural death.

John was one of the prominent Apostles. He is mentioned in many places in the New Testament. He was a man of action; he was very ambitious; and a man with an explosive temper and an intolerant heart. His second name was Boanerges, which means Son of Thunder. He and his brother, James, came from a more well-to-do family than the rest of the Apostles. Since his father had hired servants in his fishing business (Mark 1:20) he may have felt himself above the rest. He was close to Peter. They were acting together in the ministry. Peter, however, was always the spokesman for the band.

John mellowed with time. At the latter part of his life, he had forgotten everything, including his ambition and explosive temper, except his Lord's command of love.

It is said that an attempt was made on his life by giving him a chalice of poison from which God spared him. He died of natural causes.

A chalice with a snake in it is his symbol.

JUDAS

Judas Iscariot, the traitor, was the son of Simon who lived in Kerioth of Judah. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and afterwards hanged himself (Mat. 26:14, 16).

Judas, the man who became the traitor, is the supreme enigma of the New Testament because it is so hard to see how anyone who was so close to Jesus, who saw so many miracles and heard so much of the Master's teaching could ever betray him into the hands of his enemies.

His name appears in three lists of the 12 Apostles (Mat. 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:19). It is said that Judas came from Judah near Jericho. He was a Judean and the rest of the disciples were Galileans. He was the treasurer of the band and among the outspoken leaders.

It is said that Judas was a violent Jewish Nationalist who had followed Jesus in hope that through Him his nationalistic flame and dreams might be realized. No one can deny that Judas was a covetous man and at times he may have used his position as treasurer of the band to pilfer from the common purse.

There is no certain reason as to why Judas betrayed his master; but it is not his betrayal that put Jesus on the cross—it was our sins.

His apostolic symbol is a hangman's noose or a money purse with pieces of silver falling from it.

JUDE

Jude, Thaddeus, or Lebbeus, son of Alpheus or Cleophas and Mary. He was a brother of James the Younger. He was one of the very little-known Apostles and lived in Galilee. Tradition says he preached in Assyria and Persia and died a martyr in Persia.

Jerome called Jude "Trinomious" which means "a man with three names." In Mark 3:18 he is called Thaddeus. In Matthew 10:3 he is called Lebbeus. His surname was Thaddeus. In Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 he is called Judas the brother of James. Judas Thaddeus also was called Judas the Zealot.

By character he was an intense and violent Nationalist with the dream of world power and domination by the Chosen People. In the New Testament records (John 14:22-23) he asked Jesus at the Last Supper, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Judas Thaddeus was interested in making Christ known to the world. Not as a suffering Saviour, however, but as ruling King. We can see plainly from the answer Jesus gave him, that the way of power can never be substituted for the way of love.

It is said that Jude went to preach the gospel in Edessa near the Euphrates River. There he healed many and many believed in the name of the Master. Jude went from there to preach the Gospel in other places. He was killed with arrows at Ararat. The chosen symbol for him is the ship because he was a missionary thought to be a fisherman.

MATTHEW

Matthew, or Levi, son of Alpheus, lived in Capernaum. He was a publican or tax collector. He wrote the Gospel that bears his name. He died a martyr in Ethiopia.

The call of Matthew to the apostolic band is mentioned in Mark 2:14, Mat. 9:9; and Luke 5 :27-28. From these passages, we learn that Matthew also was called Levi. It was a common custom in the Middle East at the time of Christ for men to have two names. Matthew's name mean "a gift of God." The name Levi could have been given to him by Jesus. It is likely that James the Lesser, who was one of the twelve Apostles, was Matthew's brother, also the son of Alpheus. Although we know little about Matthew personally, the outstanding fact about him is that he was a tax collector. The King James Version calls him a publican, which in Latin is *Publicanus*, meaning engaged in public service, a man who handled public money, or a tax gatherer.

Of all the nations in the world, the Jews were the most vigorous haters of tax gatherers. To the devout Jew, God was the only one to whom it was right to pay tribute in taxes. To pay it to anyone else was to infringe on the rights of God. The tax collectors were hated not on religious grounds only but because most of them were notoriously unjust.

In the minds of many honest, Jewish men, these tax collectors were regarded as criminals. In New Testament times they were classified with harlots, Gentiles and sinners (Mat. 18:17, Mat. 21:31, 33; Mat. 9:10, Mark 2:15, 16; Luke 5:30). Tax collectors had been known to assess duty payable at impossible sums and then offer to lend the money to travelers at a high rate of interest. Such was Matthew. Yet, Jesus chose a man all men hated and made him one of His men. It took Jesus Christ to see the potential in the tax collector of Capernaum.

Matthew was unlike most of the other Apostles, who were all fishermen. He could use a pen, and by his pen he became the first man to present to the world, in the Hebrew language, an account of the teachings of Jesus. It is clearly impossible to estimate the debt that Christianity owes to this despised tax gatherer. The average man would have thought it impossible to reform Matthew, but to God all things are possible. Matthew became the first man to write down the teachings of Jesus. He was a missionary of the Gospel, who laid down his life for the faith of his Master. The apostolic symbol of Matthew is three money bags which remind us that he was a tax collector before Jesus called him.

PETER

Simon Peter, son of Jonas, was a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida and Capernaum. He did evangelistic and missionary work among the Jews, going as far as Babylon. Tradition says he was crucified, head downward, in Rome. Some scholars ascribe I and II Peter to him. He was a member of the Inner Circle.

In every apostolic list, the name Peter is mentioned first. However, Peter had other names. At the time of Christ, the common language was Greek and the family language was Hebrew. So, his Greek name was Simon (Mark 1:16; John 1:40, 41). His Hebrew name was Cephas (I Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5 and Gal. 2:9). The Greek meaning of Simon is rock. The Arabic meaning of Cephas is also rock.

By trade, Peter was a fisherman. He was a married man (I Cor. 9:5) and his home was Capernaum. Jesus probably made His headquarters there when He visited Capernaum. Peter was also a Galilean and was typical of many of the other disciples. As Josephus described the Galileans, "they were ever fond of innovation and by nature disposed to change and delighted in sedition. They were ever ready to follow the leader and to begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper and given to quarreling and they were very chivalrous men." The Talmud says this of the Galileans, "They were more anxious for honor than for gain, quick-tempered, impulsive, emotional, easily aroused by an appeal to adventure, loyal to the end." Peter was a typical Galilean.

Among the twelve, Peter was the leader. He stands out as a spokesman for all the Apostles. It is he who asked the meaning of the difficult saying (Mat. 15:15). It is he who asked how often he must forgive. It is he who inquired about the reward for all of those who follow Jesus. It is he who first confessed Jesus and declared Him as the Son of the Living God. It is he who was at the Mount of Transfiguration. It is he who saw Jairus' daughter raised to life. Yet, it is he who denied Christ before a maiden. He was an Apostle and a missionary who laid down his life for his Lord. It is true, Peter had many faults, but he had always the saving grace of the loving heart. No matter how many times he had fallen and failed, he always recovered his courage and integrity.

Peter was martyred on the cross. Peter requested that he might be crucified head downward for he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died. His apostolic symbol is a cross upside down with crossed keys. The keys represent Peter as holder of the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

PHILIP

Tradition says that Philip preached in Phrygia and died a martyr at Hierapolis. Philip came from Bethsaida, the town from which Peter and Andrew came (John 1:44). The likelihood is that he, too, was a fisherman. Although the first three Gospels record his name (Mat. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13), it is in the Gospel of John that Philip becomes a living personality.

Scholars disagree on Philip. In Acts 6:5, we have Philip as one of the seven ordained deacons. Some say this is a different Philip. Some believe this is the Apostle. If this is the same Philip, then his personality came much more to life because he had a successful campaign in Samaria. He led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:26). He also stayed with Paul in Caesarea (Acts 21:8) and was one of the major figures in the missionary enterprise of the early church.

The Gospel of John shows Philip as one of the first of many to whom Jesus addressed the words, "Follow Me." When Philip met Christ, he immediately discovered Nathanael and told him that "we have found him, of whom Moses . . . and the prophets, did write." Nathanael was skeptical. Philip did not argue with him; he simply answered, "Come and see." This story tells us two important things about Philip. First, it shows his right approach to the skeptic and his simple faith in Christ. Second, it shows that he had a missionary instinct.

Philip was a man with a warm heart and a pessimistic head. He was one who would very much like to do something for others, but who did not see how it could be done. Yet, this simple Galilean gave all he had. In return God used him. It is said that he died by hanging. While he was dying, he requested that his body be wrapped not in linen but in papyrus for he was not worthy that even his dead body should be treated as the body of Jesus had been treated. The symbol of Philip is a basket, because of his part in the feeding of the five thousand. It is he that stressed the cross as a sign of Christianity and victory.

SIMON

Simon, the Zealot, one of the little-known followers called the Canaanite or Zelotes, lived in Galilee. Tradition says he was crucified.

In two places in the King James Version he is called a Canaanite (Mat. 10:4; Mark 3:18). However in the other two places, he is called Simon Zelotes (Luke 6: 15; Acts 1:13).

The New Testament gives us practically nothing on him personally except that it says he was a Zealot. The Zealots were fanatical Jewish Nationalists who had heroic disregard for the suffering involved and the struggle for what they regarded as the purity of their faith. The Zealots were crazed with hatred for the Romans. It was this hate for Rome that destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Josephus says the Zealots were reckless persons zealous in good practices and extravagant and reckless in the worst actions.

From this background, we see that Simon was a fanatical Nationalist, a man devoted to the Law, a man with bitter hatred for anyone who dared to compromise with Rome. Yet, Simon clearly emerged as a man of faith. He abandoned all his hatred for the faith that he showed toward his Master and the love that he was willing to share with the rest of the disciples and especially Matthew, the Roman tax collector.

Simon, the Zealot, the man who once would have killed in loyalty to Israel, became the man who saw that God will have no forced service. Tradition says he died as a martyr. His apostolic symbol is a fish lying on a Bible, which indicates he was a former fisherman who became a fisher of men through preaching.

THOMAS

Thomas Didymus lived in Galilee. Tradition says he labored in Parthia, Persia, and India, suffering martyrdom near Madras, at Mt. St. Thomas, India.

Thomas was his Hebrew name and Didymus was his Greek name. At times he was called Judas. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas except his name. However, John defines him more clearly in his Gospel. Thomas appeared in the raising of Lazarus (John 11:116), in the Upper Room (John 14:1-6) where he wanted to know how to know the way where Jesus was going. In John 20:25, we see him saying unless he sees the nail prints in Jesus' hand and the gash of the spear in His side he will not believe. That's why Thomas became known as Doubting Thomas.

Thomas became certain by doubting. By nature, he was a pessimist. He was a bewildered man. Yet, he was a man of courage. He was a man who could not believe until he had seen. He was a man of devotion and of faith. When Jesus rose, he came back and invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints in his hands and in his side. Here, we see Thomas making the greatest confession of faith, "My Lord and my God." Thomas' doubts were transformed into faith.

Thomas was always like a little child. His first reaction was not to do what he was told to do and not to believe what he was asked to believe. The good news to him was always too good to be true. By this very fact Thomas' faith became great, intense and convincing. It is said that he was commissioned to build a palace for the king of India, and he was killed with a spear as a martyr for his Lord. His symbol is a group of spears, stones and arrows.