



*Portrait
of the Apostles*

Bethel AME Church, Carlisle, PA

Bible Study Group

Portraits of the Apostles

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Peter (Son of Jonah) *Greek from Aramaic: Rock*

Original name in Greek (Simon): Hearing

Simon Peter, the son of Jonah of Bethsaida (Matthew 16:17), lived in Capernaum (John 1:42) as a skilled fisherman of Galilee. While Peter may have spoken colloquial Greek, his native tongue would have been Aramaic. According to Mark 1:30, Peter had a wife whose mother was healed by the Lord from a terrible fever. Both he and his brother, Andrew, were fishing partners with the sons of Zebedee (Mark 1:16), James and John.

As seen in Matthew 4:18-19, Christ had called these men into a new service - to be "fishers of men." From this righteous command, Peter and the others learned to pick up their cross and follow Christ, the Son of the living God. Beforehand, Peter had been discipled by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (John 1:35-42). Peter was instrumental in the proclamation of the Good News after the resurrection of Christ. After a full life of spreading the beloved gospel, tradition holds that Peter was martyred in Rome between AD 60-69. He was crucified upside down, considering himself unworthy to die the same death of his Lord. He has been considered the first traditional bishop of Rome and his tomb is believed to be under the high altar in the Basilica of St. Peter of Rome.

Unlike many of the disciples, we can identify well with Peter. His shortcomings of little and faltering faith in Christ are all too common in our own lives (Matthew 14:28-30). However, throughout scripture, he is known as the Rock (Matthew 16:18). From Pentecost onwards, he would become a "Pillar Apostle" (Galatians 2:9) and a foundational stone for the other apostles.

Before Christ entered his life, he had been considered arrogant boasting and a man of rash action. But then, from the moment of his calling by Jesus to his denial of Christ, he became a man of impulse and childlike simplicity mixed with much insecurity. These character flaws began to change after two influential interactions with Christ.

Both the appearance of Jesus after the resurrection (Luke 24:34) and Christ's commission to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15) brought a new light to the life of Peter. He was often singled out by Jesus (Mark 8:29-33) and was present for many miracles and amazing experiences (e.g. the raising of Jarius' daughter to life (Mark 5:25-41), the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8), and the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:43-50).

Peter took the leadership role of the early church and became known for his numerous miracles in the name of Jesus Christ. Throughout history, Peter has been particularly remembered for his threefold denial, his repentance, and the threefold commission of Christ.

Although Peter was a diamond in the rough, God faithfully used him to show the beautiful grace found in Christ and the simplicity of faith in the Omnipotent God.

Andrew *Greek: Manly*

As the brother of Simon Peter, Andrew was also a disciple of John the Baptist and was the first follower of Jesus to be identified by name. His interaction with Christ caused him to immediately leave and tell Peter of the Messiah, the Son of God (John 1:35-42). Eventually, he and Peter left their fishing business to follow their beloved Saviour. Within the glorious ministry of Christ, Peter and Andrew witnessed amazing marvels and miracles. Among them, Christ used five loaves of bread from a boy, brought forth by Andrew, to feed the five thousand people who had gathered to hear the word of God (John 6:8).

We find the last appearance of Andrew before the Passover festival in Jerusalem, and after the triumphal entry on the first Palm Sunday. Men from Greece approached Philip and Andrew hoping to see the Christ: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Both Philip and Andrew returned to Jesus and told Him of these men (John 12:21).

Later in his ministry, Andrew preached the gospel to the Scythians, Sogdians, and the Sacae in Sebastopolis, Ethiopia, in AD 80. Because he would not submit to the Roman idols, he was crucified by Aegeas, the governor of the Edesenes, and buried in Patrae, in Archaia.

James and John (Sons of Zebedee) *Greek: Sons of Thunder*

While mending their fishing nets, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were called by Jesus to be "fishers of men." The two brothers and Peter formed the innermost circle of Jesus' closest companions. They became the eyewitnesses of the life, work, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. They were present to attest to the resurrection of Jarius's daughter, to the transfiguration of the Lord, and to the events in the garden of Gethsemane. They became known as the "Sons of Thunder" for their high spirits and zeal as seen in their desire to destroy an unfriendly Samaritan city (Luke 9:51-56). However, they were also dedicated to the purpose of their Lord and played a significant part in the church.

Fifteen years after hearing the call of the Lord upon the shores of Galilee, James was killed under the rule of King Agrippa I. "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of

the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:1-2). The martyrdom of James is the only biblical and reliable account of a death of one of the twelve apostles.

John was referred to as "one of the disciples, whom Jesus loved," in the gospel of John and is said to be the author of the fourth gospel. John is the only disciple to be recorded as being present at the crucifixion of Christ. After the death of Jesus, he took the Lord's mother, Mary, as his own. He was also the first to see the glorious sight of the empty tomb. John was one of the early leaders of the church and thus became known as a "Pillar of the Church" (Galatians 2:9). According to tradition, John was banished to the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9) after he survived being thrown into boiling oil under Domitian. On that desolate Island, John received visions of the future and words from the Lord to seven churches. The compilation of these visions and letters formed the Book of Revelation. John Foxe also adds that he was released from Patmos and allowed to return to Ephesus in the year of A.D. 97.

Philip

Philip is mentioned in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as the man from Bethsaida who was a disciple of John the Baptist. Both Philip and Andrew appear together in the listings of the apostles found in the gospels and in the Book of Acts. In the Book of John, he is portrayed as one who had a deep understanding of the Old Testament prophecy and of the coming Messiah; as well, he demonstrated a heart for missions (John 1:43-46; 12:21-22). However, he struggled with spiritual insight evidenced in his converse with Christ at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:5-7; 14:7-9).

There is some dispute over the events of Philip's later life and ministry. A second century Ephesian tradition believes he died at Hierapolis, roughly one hundred miles inland of Ephesus. Another tradition says Philip was crucified; and as a result, medieval art often depicts Philip on the cross.

Bartholomew *Greek from the Aramaic: Son of Tomai*

Bartholomew is found in all four lists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts) of the apostles and was present during the selection of Matthias. Many scholars associate Bartholomew with the surname "Nathanael." If the identification of Bartholomew with Nathanael is correct, Philip brought Bartholomew (Nathanael), a native of Cana of Galilee (John 21:2), to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, Jesus was already familiar with Bartholomew as seen in John 1:48-51: Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe ? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

In the Gospel of John, he is mentioned with the seven apostles during the Lord's last post-resurrection appearance (John 21:2). However, little information is revealed about his life and ministry with Christ. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, he has been said to have preached throughout India and

translated the Gospel of Matthew into their tongue. Later in his ministry, Bartholomew was beaten, crucified, and beheaded in Albinopolis, Armenia for the sake of his Master.

Thomas *Hebrew: A twin*

Known as "Doubting Thomas," he was the pessimistic, loyal, and practical disciple whose suspicions of the resurrection vanished as he touched the wounds of his risen Master. He was present in the upper room during Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers). However, very little of the New Testament mentions him again. It seems that there are three significant occurrences involving Thomas and Christ.

The first occasion begins when Jesus was hounded out of Jerusalem and was seeking a quiet and secluded town for safety. When word came of Lazarus's illness, Jesus waited two days before leaving for Bethany that the Father would be glorified. Although Thomas was frightened, he was loyal to his Master and accompanied Him during the dangerous travels. We come to understand the threatening situation and the loyalty of Thomas in John 11:16: "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

A second reference to Thomas's interaction with Christ can be found in the upper room, during the Last Supper, before the arrest of Jesus. Jesus sat among his disciples and told them of His coming departure: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." And Thomas responded with, "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" From this simple question came the beautiful answer that many Christians cherish today. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Indeed, He is the way and the life. By His grace, Christ is our daily strength and satisfaction. By His redeeming blood, we have access to the Almighty God.

Third, we rejoin the disciples in the upper room after the crucifixion of Christ as they hid from the Jews. Then Christ appeared to them in all His glorious magnificence; yet Thomas was not among the disciples (John 20:19-24). Being the practical man that he was, Thomas did not believe the other disciples when they had told him of their risen Lord. One week later, the followers of Christ hid once more from the Jews in the upper room. It was then when Christ appeared a second time and Thomas realized his Saviour had indeed raised from the dead. "Thus saith He to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." As Thomas came to grips with the glorious understanding of his risen King, he cried, "My Lord and My God!"

According to tradition, Thomas traveled to Persia and South India, where he founded the ancient Mar Thoma Church, in Travancore and Cochin, now called Kerala. He has been recognized for writing an apocryphal book that may have been written in the second century. It has also been said that Thomas was martyred near Madras at Mount St. Thomas.

Matthew *Greek: Gift of God*

Originally named Levi, Matthew, was a Jew from Capernaum (Mark 2:14). In Matthew 9:9, responding to Christ, he immediately "arose and followed Him" and began a new life serving the Lord. Many biblical scholars see this as a representative of how Christians should react when Jesus Christ exhorts them to seek the path of righteousness (Matthew 16:24).

The call of Matthew is told in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) as Jesus makes an unexpected choice to call forth a tax collector to be His disciple. As a tax collector, or publican, Matthew transferred taxes from both local merchants and farmers to the Roman state. In that day, tax collectors were seen as thieves because they often took taxes for personal gain.

Immediately after he rose to follow the Lord, Matthew gave Jesus a large banquet in which he invited many tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:29). The Pharisees criticized Jesus for dining with such an appalling group of wretched sinners; yet Jesus rebuked them saying, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Indeed, He came to save sinners from all condemnation and eternal destruction. What a wonderful comfort to cherish! May we immediately rise up and seek Christ with all our hearts and souls. Thus, we will spend eternity in His everlasting and glorious presence!

Within his gospel, Matthew reveals the Messiah to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament law: for the Son of God is the true sacrificial lamb (Hebrews 10:10). Based upon the work of Mark, Matthew portrays the life of Christ in a more complete manner through long dissertations, as seen in the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout his book, Matthew emphasizes the teaching of Christ as a source of guidance for the church. In his later ministries, Matthew preached to Ethiopia and all of Egypt and was later killed with a spear under the leadership of King Hircanus.

James (Son of Alphaeus)

While his name appears in the four New Testament listings of apostles, little is known about James. He is usually identified with "James the Younger," the son of Mary (not the mother of Jesus), and the brother of Joses (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56). This distinction of "younger" or "less" (Greek *ho mikros*) differentiates him from James the brother of Jesus and James the son of Zebedee. The terms "younger" or "less" refer to his younger age, smaller physique, and less significance. His mother, Mary, was among the crowd at the crucifixion of Jesus and the discovery of the empty tomb (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1; Luke 24:10).

Simon the Zealot

Before his calling to follow Christ, Simon was a zealous nationalist who wanted to drive out the Romans from the cities; his group tactics often resulted in bloody conflict.

Both the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts link Simon with Judas (not Iscariot) throughout their writings. Little is known about the lives of both Simon and Judas (not Iscariot). According to the apocryphal book, *The Passion of Simon and Jude*, we are told their lives ended in martyrdom in Persia.

Thaddaeus *Greek: "Large Hearted" and "Courageous"*

Unlike the other apostles, Thaddaeus claims three separate names: Thaddaeus (Matthew 10:3), Judas, son of James (Mark 3:18), and Labbaeus (not found in the Revised Standard Version). However, little is known about the life and ministry of Thaddaeus. The New Testament records only one event involving Thaddeus: his question to Jesus during a message to the disciples after the Last Supper:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him (John 14:22).

Judas Iscariot

Some believe the name "Iscariot" identifies Judas's place of origin, since his father is described as "Simon Iscariot" (John 6:71; 13:2, 26). After his calling to seek the Lord, Judas Iscariot became the treasurer for the twelve disciples (John 12:4-6; 13:29). Because this position is not given to one of greedy and irresponsible conduct, it may be assumed that he showed positive characteristics before the other followers of Christ. However, the Gospel of John tells us that during his time as treasurer, Judas had become a thief, stealing from the treasury funds (John 12:6). Judas has become infamous for his betrayal of Jesus. Both Luke and John render him to be under the influence of Satan himself (Luke 22:3; John 13:2). It may have been his greed that motivated him to betray Jesus for a worthless amount of thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas led a band of soldiers to Jesus and identified Him with a kiss (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12).

Yet when Jesus was condemned to death, Judas was filled with great remorse and returned the pieces of silver to the priests. Then Judas departed from the temple and committed suicide by hanging himself (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19). After the resurrection of Christ, Matthias replaced Judas within the circle of the twelve apostles (Acts 1:26).

(Replacement) Matthias *Greek: Gift of Jehovah*

Before 120 followers of Christ, Peter gave an account of the life, ministry, and the death of Judas Iscariot. Because of the loss of Judas, a replacement was in order to fill the gap within the original twelve apostles. It was necessary to select one who had known them since the Lord's baptism by John to the resurrection of the Son of Man. These twelve witnesses would represent the twelve tribes of

Israel. Thus, these followers of Christ gathered together to cast lots between two candidates: Joseph called Barsabas (Justus) and Matthias. "And they drew lots for them, and the lots fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26). Many believe that Barsabbas and Matthias were among the seventy disciples who were sent out to proclaim the gospel (Luke 10:1). However, neither one is mentioned again in Scripture, nor is there any account for their later ministries.

(After Death) Paul of Tarsus *Greek from Latin: Little*

Paul, the author of thirteen New Testament Epistles, was born as an Israelite in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5). His original name was Saul. He studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3) and became a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). He was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1) and later became a persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1-3; Philippians 3:6). While he was seeking to have Christians bound, he was converted on the road to Damascus as Christ appeared to him (Acts 9:1-9).

He went into Damascus (Acts 9:10-19) and then to Arabia for a period of time (Galatians 1:17) before returning to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Galatians 1:18). Eventually, he met with Barnabas and ministered with him in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Soon he began to go on various missionary journeys to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was then imprisoned in Rome on two occasions and was martyred under Caesar Nero.

(Please visit the timeline of Paul the Apostle for a detailed chronology of Paul's life.)

Barnabas *Greek from the Hebrew: Son of Exhortation*

Originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36), Barnabas settled Jerusalem. Both he and Paul of Tarsus (whose close friend he would become) shared similar Jewish roots (Acts 4:36) and Hellenistic backgrounds of the Jewish Diaspora. The first appearance of Barnabas in the New Testament can be found among the earliest converts, selling his lot of land and giving the profit to the apostles (Acts 4:36). He quickly became well liked and a respected leader within the apostolic circle.

Paul and Barnabas began a close partnership within the work of ministry. Their common background in the Diaspora and their traditional training as a Pharisee and Levite may have brought about the strong companionship. Because of the heavy persecution of the Hellenized Christians, many believers were scattered as far as Phoenicia and Syria. Thus the church of Antioch was established in Syria, which would become the future headquarters of Paul's journeys. The leaders in Jerusalem soon elected Barnabas to be the superintendent of the church and he, in turn, chose Paul to be his assistant.

Barnabas accompanied Paul on a mission trip that covered approximately 1,400 miles of territory as they proclaimed the gospel and encouraged the body of Christ. During the first tour, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus with John Mark. Acts 12:25 and 13:5 imply that John Mark was in Antioch and later teamed with Paul and Barnabas. However, when Paul and Barnabas decided to climb the mountains to Antioch of Pisidia, John Mark turned back. During this first tour, Paul became the spokesperson, and

even engaged in vigorous discussions within the council. Barnabas was also given recognition and even a divine title in Acts 14:12. Unlike Paul, he never experienced violence or stoning while ministering to others.

Following their first journey, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to settle the controversial issue of the law and circumcision. After a stimulating debate, it was decided that gentiles could be given admittance to the church if they conform to certain social customs of the Jews. After a successful trip, Barnabas suggested that John Mark join them on the next journey. Yet Paul felt otherwise and the team divided. Paul traveled with another entourage and Barnabas and John Mark journeyed to Cyprus.

In any case, the dispute did not end the friendship between Paul and Barnabas. In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul uses both he and Barnabas as an example of apostles who still maintain a working trade while serving in ministry and they refused to accept charity from churches. Indeed, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark all make vital contributions to the Christian faith and the New Testament.

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