

# *The Messiah's Misfits*

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# Introduction

I often ask myself, “What would I do if I were that person?” If I were a politician, I would attempt to lower taxes and raise morality. If I had influence overseas, I would try to get everyone to drive on the right (that is, the correct) side of the road. And if I were going to start a religious movement that was radically different from anything people had known, I would make sure that I had the most influential, powerful people in society on my side (and I would make sure they had plenty in common so they could all get along).

Nearly 2,000 years ago there was a virgin birth. He was the prophesied Messiah, the Son of God who brought the message of salvation. As He grew older and began to fulfill not only prophecy, but His purpose, He took 12 men under his wing and prepared them for His departure. These men were given the great task to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

I don’t know about you, but I would have chosen the best that society had to offer for this task. So who did Jesus choose? Twelve misfits. Plus, they could not have been more different. He chose uneducated fishermen, a hated tax-collector, a political fanatic, and a couple of power-hungry brothers. Not exactly the best that society had to offer.

Yet, in the eyes of men a strange thing happened. This hodgepodge of men, this motley crew, fulfilled their mission. By the time of the writing of Colossians the gospel had spread throughout the whole world (Colossians 1:6). As we embark on this journey together of studying the 12 apostles, I hope you will see that God’s mission cannot be thwarted, His people can work together, and you can be of service.

# Lesson 1: Apostles 101

## *The Definition of Apostle*

**T**he word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apóstolos* and means one sent forth.<sup>1</sup> An apostle is a messenger. Although we always associate the word with the 12, the word “apostle” is applied to other individuals. The word is applied to Jesus (Hebrews 3:1), Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Galatians 1:19), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), brethren in general (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), as well as Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). In 2 Corinthians 11:13, some are referred to as false apostles. For the purposes of our study, however, when the word “apostle” is used, it will be a reference to the 12.

## *The Apostles’ Qualifications*

When choosing someone to replace Judas, Peter made it clear that an apostle must be one who was with Jesus and one who witnessed the resurrection. “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). Also, in arguing for his apostleship, Paul posed the question, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1) Some religious groups will claim that there are still apostles today, but clearly from these passages this cannot be the case. A person must have been with Christ and seen Him resurrected to be an apostle.

## *The Apostles’ Purpose*

The apostles were witnesses. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We usually associate the word “witness” with a court setting and for good reason. A witness is one who reports

what he has seen, heard, or knows. The apostles had seen Jesus on a daily basis, they had heard His teaching, and they knew that He was the Son of God. John makes this clear in his first letter.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).

They were to go out and tell what they knew to the lost world.

### *The Apostles' Calling*

Hopefully you were not deprived as a child and you thus know the 12 apostles song. Do you remember the chorus? Yes, Jesus called them, Yes, Jesus called them, Yes, Jesus called them, and they all followed Him. Jesus called the 12 (Mark 3:13), but what does that mean? Simply put, the word “call” in Scripture means to invite.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus invited these 12 men to come along with Him and be His shadow. An apostle is a messenger. A disciple is a learner. We could accurately say that they were first disciples and then apostles. Once they had learned from Jesus they were then sent out to teach others. That is what all followers of Christ are to do. Learn from Him and then help others learn. “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

We usually think of the calling of the 12 as a one-time event. A bunch of fisherman out washing their nets and up walks Jesus. They left their nets and followed

Him, right? Well, this is true, but there is more to the story. The summoning of the 12 was not just a one-time event. Let's consider three sections of Scripture.

### *John, Andrew, and Simon*

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter) (John 1:35-42).

Two men were following John the Baptist. We know that one of them was Andrew (John 1:40). The other one is unnamed. It is likely John the brother of James because he never mentions himself in his gospel. Andrew is convinced they have found the Messiah so he tells his brother Simon.

### *Philip and Nathanael*

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered 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 him, “Because I said to you, ‘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 heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:43–51).

The next day, Jesus invites Philip to follow Him. Philip then finds Nathanael and passes on the good news.

### *Another Encounter with Andrew and Simon Plus James and John*

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him (Mark 1:16–20).

These events must have transpired after those in John 1 because John the Baptist is now in prison (Mark 1:14). In John 1:35, John the Baptist was with Andrew and John. By now, we have been introduced to seven of the apostles.

### *Matthew*

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them (Luke 5:27–29).

“And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him” (Mark 2:14).

We now know of eight of the apostles. It would fit chronologically that Matthew’s invitation was extended between the events of Mark 1 and the listing of the 12 in Mark 3, which we turn to now.

### *The Rest*

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:13–19).

It’s final. These are the twelve. We are not introduced to some of them prior to this listing, but these are the 12 apostles.

### *The Listing of the Apostles*

The apostles are listed together in 4 passages: Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:14–16, and Acts 1:13. They appear in different orders, but there are two similarities within all the lists (refer to figure). First, the names Peter, Philip, and James, are always in the same place. They occupy positions one, five, and nine respectively. Second, they are listed in groups of four, just in differing order. Some order of Andrew, James, and John always follows Peter who is always listed first. Some order of Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew always follows Philip who is listed fifth. A varying order of Thaddeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot always follows James who is always listed ninth.

The apostles seem to be listed in order of their closeness to Christ. Although the order may change somewhat as just discussed, Peter is always first and Judas Iscariot is always last.

<b>MATTHEW 10:1-4</b>	<b>MARK 3:16-19</b>	<b>LUKE 6:14-16</b>	<b>ACTS 1:13</b>
<b>Peter</b> Andrew James John	<b>Peter</b> James John Andrew	<b>Peter</b> Andrew James John	<b>Peter</b> John James Andrew
<b>Philip</b> Bartholomew Thomas Matthew	<b>Philip</b> Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	<b>Philip</b> Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	<b>Philip</b> Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
<b>James</b> Lebbaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	<b>James</b> Thaddeus Simon Judas Iscariot	<b>James</b> Simon Judas Judas Iscariot	<b>James</b> Simon Judas

Taken from John Macarthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 30.

### *Review Questions*

1. What does the word “apostle” mean?
2. Is the word only applied to the 12?
3. What two qualifications must someone meet to be an apostle?
4. What purpose did apostles serve?
5. What does the word “call” mean?
6. Describe the calling of the apostles.
7. What do you find interesting about the listing of the apostles?