

Why Jesus Chose 12...



And Who Were They?

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Understanding Israel

Many Christians today believe that earth's final events will center around the Nation of Israel, and those who believe that are fixated on Jerusalem. The September 1, 1999 issue of *Newsweek* says, "The predominant issue in Christian prophecy is the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple."

Israel missed the Messiah when He came the first time because they wanted an earthly kingdom, and Jesus had to tell them, "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36). And yet we are doing exactly the same thing today, aren't we? We are pushing for a literal kingdom, with literal Jews, in literal Jerusalem just like they did, in spite of the fact that we still have John 18:36 with us today. In Acts 17:11 Paul praised the Gentile Christians in Berea because "*They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*"

Conditional prophecy

Prophecies that state or imply either promises or threats are considered conditional prophecy. Conditional means that the prophecies are dependent on man's actions. This conditionality is sometimes directly stated as in Exodus 19:5-6, "*Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is*

Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the Children of Israel.” Deuteronomy 8:19-20 reads, “Then it shall be, **if** you by any means forget the Lord your God...I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God.” Again in Deuteronomy 28:15 we read, “But it shall come to pass, **if** you will not listen to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe all of His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you.”

Yet it’s a sad fact that Israel did not remain faithful to God, and God predicted her rejection in many places in the Bible. Isaiah 5:1-7 reads, “Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.”

Matthew 8:11-12 says, “And I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here Jesus predicts that Israel’s rejection of Him will result in her rejection by God, and that rejection will still be in place when the saints are in the “kingdom of heaven.” Shortly thereafter Matthew

records Jesus as saying that the “*men of Nineveh*” and the “*Queen of the South*” shall stand up against Israel and condemn her “*in the judgment*” (Matthew 12:41-42). Within a space of just a few verses Matthew has Jesus cleansing the temple and cursing the fig tree (Matthew 21:12-20)—which tree obviously represents Israel (compare Jeremiah 8:13 and Micah 7:1). Hans K. LaRondelle says of the cursing of the fig tree, “This remarkable episode suggests not only Israel’s inner spiritual barrenness despite her ostentatious show of religiosity, but also her imminent withering under God’s judgment.”

In Luke 13:35 Jesus said, “*See! your house is left to you desolate...*” In Acts 13:46 Luke records, “*Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’*” Israel’s rejection was complete at the end of the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 when the apostles turned from Israel and took the Gospel to the Gentiles.

New Testament Israel

The prophecies concerning Israel were clearly conditional upon Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, and the rejection of Israel by God in the New Testament is irrefutable. So how do we understand New Testament Israel in light of these conditional prophecies? W. C. Kaiser, wrote, “The conditionality was not attached to the promise, but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises. The promise remained permanent, but the participation in the blessings depended on the individuals spiritual condition.” (*Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pages 94).

When Paul speaks of Israel, and when Israel is mentioned in Revelation, it could not possibly be talking about literal nationalistic Israel. Notice what Paul says to the Gentile Christians in Galatians 3:27-29, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither*

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The promises that were given to Israel in the Old Testament will now be fulfilled to Spiritual Israel (those who receive Jesus) at Christ's return.

Dennis Smith wrote, "These gathering promises were partially fulfilled to literal Israel following the Babylonian captivity. Yet, because of unfaithfulness and her rejection of Christ, Israel forfeited her right to the complete fulfillment of these promises." (*Israel in Prophecy*, page 20). Christ spoke of His desire to gather Israel and her refusal when He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate." (Matthew 23:37-38).

So, can a Jew be saved? Yes! The same way a Gentile is saved, by accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah sent from God to save a dying world (John 14:6). Tasker writes, "That the Gentiles were to be included in the people of God because the original Israel had for the most part rejected Jesus the Messiah, is a dominant theme of the Gospel of Matthew." (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, page 206). God will keep His promise to "gather Israel" (Romans 11:26), but that promise will not be fulfilled to literal Israel as a nation. Instead Jesus will gather New Testament Israel (Spiritual Israel), to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22) when He returns at His Second Coming.

Many believers today have accepted Dispensationalism with the deception that all Bible prophecy revolves around national Israel, and must be fulfilled only to literal Israel. And in light of this I receive many inquiries about Paul's statement in Galatians 3:27-29 which does not jive with this dispensational thinking. I hope and pray that what you are reading right now will help you get past that deception. In Romans 9:6 Paul says, "*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.*" Paul's meaning is that not all who are descended from national Israel really belong to Israel in the New Testament

sense. What Paul is saying to the Gentile Christians in Galatia is this—“We are no longer thinking in terms of Jews or Gentiles—in terms of male or female—in terms of slaves or free. If you’ve given yourself to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed (Spiritual Israel) and heirs to all the promises that were given to him.” Paul drives this home in Galatians 6:16, “*And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*” It’s important that you remember that Paul is writing to Gentile Christians in Galatia here. What he is saying is that “Israel” is no longer a title given to the literal descendants of Abraham, but has taken on a broad spiritual meaning and applies to any true child of God who is completely committed to Jesus Christ.

Where did the name come from?

The first time the name “Israel” appears in the Bible is in Genesis 32:28, “*Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel...*” “Israel” was a name given to only one man, Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons who were called “The Children of Israel” which was later shortened to just “Israel”—so that the nation is now called “Israel.” So “Israel” first applied to one man, and then to a whole nation. Around 800 BC the Lord made a profound statement through the prophet Hosea, “*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*” (Hosea 11:1). Hosea is talking about the whole nation of Israel here, yet by the time this text was written the nation of Israel was in apostasy, and they had failed to live up to the spiritual meaning of their name. God repeatedly predicted their rejection, and Israel’s rejection was complete when they rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Note what Matthew writes in the New Testament. Matthew 2:14-15 says, “*When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt I called My Son.*” Here Matthew is directly quoting Hosea 11:1, which, in its historical context was referring to the nation of Israel being called out of Egypt. Yet here

Matthew picks up that text and declares it “fulfilled” in Jesus Christ—so we’re back to one man again. Here Matthew begins to reveal a principle that continues to develop throughout the whole New Testament.

Remember, the first time “Israel” is used in the Bible it was a name given to one man, which in time expanded to a whole nation. Here in the beginning of the New Testament that name is applied again to one Man, Jesus Christ. And you may be surprised at the parallels in Scripture between Israel and Jesus—

In the Old Testament a young man named Joseph had dreams and went to Egypt

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When God called Israel out of Egypt, He called that nation “My son”

When Jesus came out of Egypt, God said, “Out of Egypt I called My Son”

After His baptism Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, and after those 40 days Jesus resisted the devil’s temptations by quoting the book of Deuteronomy—the very book that God gave to Israel following their 40 years in the wilderness.

What does all this mean? It means that in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus repeated the history of Israel, point by point, overcoming where they failed, and Jesus became the “New Israel.” You ask, “Is there anywhere else in Scripture where this can be supported?” Yes! Galatians 3:16 reads, “*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.*” Paul says that Abraham’s seed does not refer to “many”—but to “One,” therefore, Jesus Christ became the new “Israel.” But there’s more!

As you saw “Israel” go from “one man” to a “nation” in

the Old Testament, you also see “Israel” go from “one Man” to a “nation” in the New Testament. Remember Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:27-29? “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” So when Christ turned to the Gentiles He was “Israel” carrying out her original mission, and all those who unite with Him by faith are as branches grafted into Jesus the true Vine, who become heirs of the promises given to Abraham.

So—why did Jesus choose 12?

Notice what John MacArthur says, “The choosing of the twelve apostles was a judgment against institutionalized Judaism. It was a renunciation of those men and their organizations, which had become totally corrupt. That is why the Lord didn’t choose one recognized religious leader. He chose instead men who were not theologically trained, fishermen, a tax collector, and other common men.” (*Twelve Ordinary Men*, page 7). And it gets better! “Why twelve? Why not eight? The number twelve was filled with symbolic importance. There were twelve tribes in Israel. But Israel was apostate... In choosing twelve apostles, Christ was in effect appointing new leadership for the new covenant. And the apostles represented the new leaders of the true Israel of God. The twelve apostles symbolized judgment against the twelve tribes of Old Testament Israel. The significance of the number twelve would have been immediately obvious to almost every Israelite.” (Ibid, page 19).

George Ladd writes, “When the nation as a whole rejected the offer, those who accepted it were constituted the new people of God, the sons of the Kingdom, the true Israel.” (*A Theology of the New Testament*, page 113).

F. F. Bruce wrote, “Jesus’ calling of disciples around Himself to form the ‘little flock’ who were to receive the kingdom marks Him out as the founder of the New Israel.” (*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1979, page 558).

The 12 apostles symbolized judgment against the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus made this connection very clear in Luke 22:29-30, “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The apostles represented a whole new Israel, and their appointment, bypassing the religious establishment of official Judaism, signified a message of judgment against national Israel.

Who were the 12?

I have always been fascinated with the lives of the 12 apostles. Their personality types were similar to our own, and in most ways they were just like us. So what can we learn from studying their lives? John MacArthur says, “They were 12 perfectly ordinary, common men, and Christ’s strategy for advancing His kingdom hinged on the faithfulness of those 12. From a human perspective it seemed impossible, and there was no plan B if they failed, other than sending angels or causing the rocks to cry out.” The strategy Jesus chose depended on a dozen common men under the power of the Holy Spirit, and it worked!—the same way it will work today when we allow the Holy Spirit to take complete control of our lives.

At first the 12 were called *mathaytes* in the Greek, which means “student, pupil, disciple,” because that is what they did during their three years with Jesus—they learned. Towards the end of their time with Jesus they were known as *apostolos*, meaning “sent ones, commissioned ones,” which would characterize their mission after Christ returned to heaven.

There are four lists of the 12 apostles in the New Testament—

Matthew 10:2-4

Mark 3:16-19

Luke 6:13-16

Acts 1:12-18

The names in the lists are always the same, even though the order sometimes differs. Peter is always first; Judas Iscariot is always

last, and is omitted from the list in Acts, because he was already dead by the time Luke wrote Acts. Matthew 10:2-4 reads, “*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.*”

Who was Peter?

All four lists name Peter first, so let’s start with him. Peter was a fisherman by trade. He and Andrew his brother were heirs to a family fishing business centered in Capernaum, where they fished on the Sea of Galilee. Peter ran his fishing business from the village of Bethsaida before relocating to the larger town of Capernaum just a stones throw away.

In Jesus’ day, Capernaum was the major town on the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus made Capernaum the home-base of His ministry for a number of months. But He pronounced woe (or grief) on both Capernaum and Bethsaida in Matthew 11, because the people of these towns did not accept Him, even though He taught and healed there for many months. I have visited Capernaum, and stood on the ruins of the synagogue which is still visible today. Archaeologists have found the ruins of an early Christian church dating to just after the time of Peter, which is believed to have been built on the site of Peter’s home, near the shore-line of the Sea of Galilee.

We know that Peter was the leader of the apostles, not only because his name is always listed first, but because of the explicit statement in Matthew 10:2, “*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; the first, Simon, who is called Peter...*” The word translated “first” is a Greek word which does not refer to the first in a list, but means the “chief” or “leader” of a group. He is always listed first—always speaks first—always takes the lead. He seems to have had a naturally dominant personality, and the Lord acknowledged this and put it to good use among the 12.

Peter's name is mentioned in the Gospels more than any other name except Jesus. God took an ordinary rough man and shaped him into one of the greatest leaders this world has ever known, and that should give each of us hope today, because if He could do that with a rough character like Peter, He can do the same thing with people like you and me.

Simon was a very common name. Among the 12 there were two named Simon—Simon Peter, and Simon called the Zealot. In Matthew 13 Jesus' brothers are listed, and one of them is named Simon (or Simeon). Judas Iscariot's father was named Simon, and Matthew 26 tells of Jesus having a meal at the home of a man in Bethany named Simon the leper, whom I believe was one and the same Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus to a meal in Luke 7. There was also a man named Simon from Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross to the spot of execution. Our Simon's full name at birth was Simon Bar-Jonah, which means Simon the son of Jonah, and that's all we know about his parents. He was married, though the Bible says nothing about his wife. We know he was married because Jesus healed his mother-in-law in Luke 4, and later Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9 that Peter took his wife with him on his missionary journeys, and those are the only two clues we have about his domestic life.

The disciple we know as Peter was only known by his given name of "Simon" until Jesus gave him another name in Luke 6:14. Notice Luke's words, "*Simon, whom He also named Peter...*" And Luke's choice of words here is important. Jesus didn't give him a new name to replace the old name. Luke says He "*also*" named him Peter. John tells of Andrew first bringing his brother Simon to meet Jesus in John 1:41-42, "*He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas.'*" Those were the first words Jesus ever spoke to Simon, and from that day on he was known sometimes as Simon—sometimes as Peter—and sometimes by both names together, Simon Peter. "*Cephas*" is Aramaic for "stone," and when translated into Greek,

petros means “rock,” and because the New Testament was written in Greek, we see “*Cephas*” translated as “*Peter*.” So “*Peter*” was a sort of nick-name given to him by the One who can read the hearts and minds of men, and you will see this more clearly as we continue to study.

The nick-name is significant, and Dennis Smith tells us that Jesus had a specific reason for choosing it. It appears that Jesus changed his name because He wanted the nick-name to be a continual reminder to Peter of what He wanted him to be. John MacArthur says, “When Jesus called him Simon, He was saying, You are acting like your old self, and when He called him Peter, He was commending him for acting the way He wanted him to act. And from that day on Jesus could gently chide or commend him just by using one name or the other.”

In Luke 22:31 we read, “*And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”* Later in the Garden, when Peter should have been watching and praying, Jesus said to him, “*Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?*” It must have reached a point where, whenever the Lord called him “*Simon,*” he would cringe.

After the resurrection Jesus instructed the disciples to return to Galilee where He had breakfast prepared on the shore. The main purpose of this breakfast meeting was the restoration of Peter. Three times Jesus addressed him as Simon and asked, “*Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?*” Three times Peter affirmed his love, and that was the last time Jesus ever called him Simon. A short time later at Pentecost, being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter began to boldly preach Christ to a dying world.

So what happened to Peter? The Bible ends without any additional information, but there are a few accounts such as Eusebius, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria which are considered reliable. It is widely believed that the book of Mark is actually Peter’s gospel, recorded by the scribe John Mark around AD 55. Peter also wrote two epistles—1st Peter in AD 62, and 2nd Peter

in AD 64. Peter was crucified during the persecution of Nero in AD 67, and feeling himself unworthy to die like Christ, asked to be crucified up-side-down. Eusebius states that Peter was buried in Rome in a cemetery with the Gladiators near Nero's Circus Maximus, most likely in a mass-grave. The Vatican claims to have Peter's remains to this day. Is this true? I seriously doubt it since the Catholic Church was still in the early stages of its development during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Starting in the late 2nd century, the collection of relics reached a fever pitch. Constantine's mother, Helena Augusta, sent agents with large amounts of money to buy the bones and relics of the apostles, and this money fueled the trade in holy relics. Are some of today's relics real? Possibly, but money can make unscrupulous people do unscrupulous things. Do we know for sure that Peter's bones are in the Vatican? Not in my thinking. The trade in relics began more than a hundred years after Peter's death, and if it's true that he was buried in a mass grave, how would you know whose bones are whose?

So, "where" Peter's bones are today is not important. What is important is that his "life" is secure in his friend Jesus Christ, and I'm content to let Peter fill in the blanks for me when I meet him in heaven. Peter's life can be summed up in the closing words of his second epistle, "*Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*" That is exactly what Simon Peter did, and that's why he became a Rock.

Who was Andrew?

The Greek name means "manly," and from John 1:29-42 we learn that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and that he introduced his brother, Peter, to Jesus. He was one of the first two disciples to be called by Jesus, and he is the first to bring another person to Jesus, and from this the Andrew Principle was born. When we do evangelism we encourage church members with the Andrew Principle, which quite simply means to go and find someone to bring to Christ. This is perhaps the thing that Andrew is known for the most. Can you imagine what could happen if

everyone of us would follow the Andrew Principle, and bring someone to Jesus? The Church would explode over night. And isn't that what we were put on this earth to do?

Andrew returned to Capernaum with his companions, and continued his fishing career after that initial meeting with Jesus, and it was at Capernaum where Jesus encountered the brothers again. Matthew 4:18-20 reads, *“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him.”* A parallel account of this event is recorded in Luke 5, but Luke does not mention Andrew by name. We know he was there, because Matthew's record is clear. John MacArthur says, “Andrew was so much in the background that Luke doesn't even mention him.”

I was a second child. I grew up in the shadow of my older brother, and there were times when that was a big problem. When we were small he didn't allow me to do anything. He would jump in and do it before I had a chance to do it, and this is often the struggle second children have. Now does this mean that Andrew was younger than Peter? No, we don't know which one was older, but we do know that Peter was the dominant one. So what would indicate that sibling rivalry was not an issue? Because when Andrew met Jesus, he immediately went to find his brother. He didn't try to gain an advantage by keeping this “one thing” to himself. And he had to know full well that as soon as Peter entered the picture, he would take charge. Somewhere Andrew had learned to die to self, and deal with Peter's dominance without jealousy. That fact alone says much about his character.

So what happened to Andrew? After Christ's ascension Andrew is credited with being a very productive foreign missionary. Hippolytus tells us that he preached in Asia Minor, Greece, Thrace, and Scythia (north of the Black Sea), and for that reason the Orthodox Church calls him their Patron Saint of Constantinople. I have stood on the site where he was martyred in Patras, Greece. He was crucified in the same manner as his brother

Peter but on an X shaped cross in AD 70, three years after Peter was crucified.

Andrew's legacy is the example he left to show us that in effective ministry it's often the little things that count. Too many Christians today think that because they can't speak in front of a group, they are not responsible to evangelize, and there are few who understand the value of befriending just one person and bringing him or her to Christ. May the grace of God impress this on our minds, and may the Lord bless us as we endeavor to live our lives like the Apostle Andrew.

Who were James and John?

I'm going to deal with these two brothers together, and you will see why in a moment. James is English for the Hebrew name Jacob, which means "supplanter." The meaning of John's name is "Jehovah has been gracious." Of the three disciples in Jesus' closest inner circle, James is the least familiar to us. He never appears as a stand-alone character in the Gospel accounts, but is always paired with his younger brother John. The only time he is mentioned by himself is in Acts 12:2 when he was martyred.

Most of what we know about James younger brother John we extract from his writings. With the aid of the Holy Spirit he wrote a Gospel, three Epistles that bear his name, and the book of Revelation. Scripture is therefore full of insights into his personality and character. We see through his Gospel how he viewed Christ—through his Epistles how he viewed the Church—and through Revelation how he viewed the prophetic future of the Church and Christ's return. Both Scripture and history record that John played a major role in establishing the early church.

James and John are often referred to simply as the "sons of Zebedee." We see this in such places as Matthew 20, 26, 27—Mark 10—Luke 5—and John 21. These tell us that Zebedee was a man of importance, and this importance might have stemmed from his financial success or from his family lineage, and probably both. Mark 1 indicates that his fishing business was large enough to employ

hired servants, and according to John 18 the Zebedee family name had enough status that the apostle John was known to the High Priest in Jerusalem. It was John who was able to get Peter admitted to the High Priest's courtyard on the night Jesus was arrested. There is evidence from the early church record that Zebedee was a Levite, and closely related to the High Priest's family. On one of my visits to Capernaum I saw a sign pointing to the name Zebedee chiseled into a stone, marking the way to the place where the family home had been. Whatever the reason for Zebedee's prominence, it reached from Galilee all the way down to Jerusalem.

We first meet John when both he and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist. John 1:35-37 says, *"Again, the next day, John (the Baptist) stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."* Without hesitation John and Andrew begin to follow Jesus as soon as John the Baptist singled Him out as the Messiah. Earlier we read Matthew 4:18-20 where Jesus called Peter and Andrew as His first two disciples. Now let us read on where He calls the next two in verses 21-22, *"Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him."*

Mark 3:17 reads, *"James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder.'" John MacArthur has an interesting take on this. He believes Jesus nick-named the two brothers "Sons of Thunder" the same way He nick-named Simon as "Peter." If you remember, Jesus would use Peter's old name when He wanted to remind him of his old unreliable self. Did Jesus call James and John "Sons of Thunder" when He wanted to remind them of their old thunderous selves? MacArthur may have a point here. "Sons of Thunder" seems to have been a way of chiding them when they allowed their natural loud temperaments to get out of hand.*

So what happened to James and John? Thirteen years after Jesus ascended back to heaven, James would become the first of

the 12 to lose his life for his faith. The end of James' life on this earth is recorded in Acts 12:1-2, "*Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*" Few details of his martyrdom are given, but we know that he was beheaded in AD 44 by a command of Herod Agrippa. And we don't know why this Herod was so hostile to the new church, except that he was trying to win points by pleasing the Jews.

There are some facts about the life of John that we are certain about. He lived in Jerusalem with Jesus' mother until AD 65 when they moved to Ephesus. Paul's disciple Timothy was the first Bishop of Ephesus until his martyrdom. He confronted a superstitious crowd on the main street of the city, and was clubbed to death. After his death around AD 83, John became the Bishop of the Ephesus Church. Eusebius says the Emperor Domitian arrested John for his practice of Christianity, and tried to kill him by lowering him into a cauldron of boiling oil. This he miraculously survived unharmed, and was then banished to the Island of Patmos 60 miles off shore from his church in Ephesus. He was later released by the Emperor Nerva, and returned to Ephesus in AD 98. John wrote his three Epistles between AD 83-90. He wrote Revelation in AD 96 while on Patmos, and he wrote the Gospel of John in AD 98 after returning to Ephesus. He had three disciples, Polycarp, Papias, and Ignatius—all of whom wrote about their time with John in Ephesus. They say he died at the age of 104, before the death of the Emperor Trajan in AD 117.

Somewhere along the way James and John lost their thunderous egos and found balance in Christ-like humility, and these fisherman of Galilee became fishers of men on a monumental scale. And from their contribution to Scripture they are still casting their net into the sea today.

Before we leave James and John, I can't resist thinking out-loud and trying to clear up some lingering questions that have haunted me for more than 30 years. Matthew 20:20-24 reads, "*Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do*

you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’ So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’ And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.” This seems like the perfect place for a short interlude in our study of the 12 Apostles.

Who was Salome?

I can hear someone saying, “What! The 12 Apostles did not include women! And my answer back is “hold your horses.” You will see why I’m including Salome in just a few moments. Matthew and Mark name three woman standing close to the Cross—

Matthew 27:56, “And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.”

Mark 15:40, “There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome.”

Strong’s Concordance, Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, and The Englishman’s Concordance all tell us that Salome was the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John. Mark 15:40 gives us her name (Salome), and her son John tells us that she was Mary’s sister—

John 19:25, “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

So, what have we learned from these three Bible verses? We learned that Salome was Zebedee's wife, James and John's mother, and Mary's sister. What we need to deal with now is why John seems to name another woman he calls "*Mary the wife of Clopas.*" This is a bigger deal than you might think. The following is an explanation accepted by many scholars. "Levirate Marriage is a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obliged to marry her dead husband's brother. Levirate Marriage (Hebrew: *yibbum*) is mandated in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, and obliges the oldest surviving brother of a man who dies to marry his widow (see also Genesis 38:8). Levirate Marriage can, at its most positive, serve as protection for the widow and her children, ensuring that they have a male provider and protector. It can, but does not always mean marriage in the traditional sense. This can be a safe-guard in a society where women cannot have self-sufficiency and must rely on men to ensure the survival of the clan. The practice of Levirate Marriage is strongly associated with patriarchal societies. The practice was extremely important in the ancient Near East, and remains so today in some parts of the world." (Nancy E. Levine, *Sources of Instability in Polyandrous Marriages*).

After their return from Egypt, Joseph and Mary resettled in Nazareth (Matthew 2:19-23), and the last time Joseph appears in Scripture is the Passover visit when Jesus was twelve years old (Luke 2:41-51). We do not know when Joseph died, and Eusebius quotes Hegesippus as saying, "Clopas was the brother of Joseph." (Eusebius, *Church History*, book 3, chap 11). There is one additional point about Clopas that supports this interpretation. His name comes from the Hebrew meaning "the replacer." So Clopas would not have been his real name, but a nick-name. Elsewhere Clopas is mentioned by his Greek name, Alphaeus. Other sources propose that *Alphaeus*, *Clopas*, and *Cleophas* are variant attempts to render the Aramaic *H* in *Hilfai* into the Greek. *Easton's Bible Dictionary* says, "The Hebrew form of Alphaeus is Clopas," and Chrysostom says they were the same person. James Tabor says that Clopas, whom he accepts as a brother of Joseph, became the

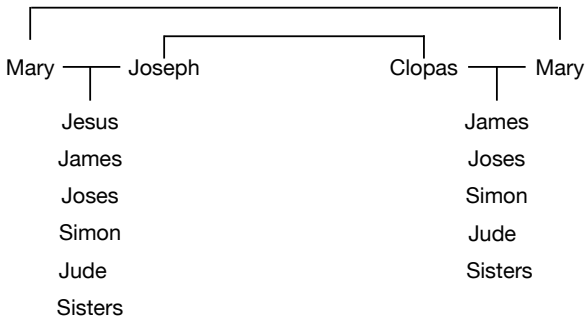
second husband, or care-taker of Jesus' mother. He argues that Clopas took Mary under his care according to levirate law. (Simon & Schuster, *A Historical Investigation of Jesus*). Let's look at John's text again—

John 19:25, "*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*"

The difference between Matthew, Mark, and John has caused untold problems over the years. If you are one who accepts the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, you will argue that Mary of Clopas is the sister of Jesus' mother Mary—this is done in an attempt to turn Jesus' brothers into cousins, and thus reinforce the belief in the life-long virginity of Mary. I hold to the Helvidian View of Mary which states that Mary and Joseph had a normal married life after the Virgin Birth of Jesus, and other children were born before Joseph died.

Matthew and Mark name three women, one being Mary's sister Salome, while John *seems* to exclude his mother Salome and has three different Mary's in his text. Do I believe there are three different Mary's in John 19:25? No I do not, and I will endeavor to explain. If you look at an early Greek manuscript you will see that there was no punctuation, and ancient Greek has no specific word order (meaning the words can be arranged in any order). My Greek professor Dr. Charles Dorthy taught us that Greek does not use word order to determine meaning as we do in English. The words can appear in any order, and if you translate correctly, the English sentence will always come out the same. Ancient Greek is among the languages that are said to have a free word order, but this freedom must be understood in relation to the fixed word-order patterns found in languages such as English. Wilfred Major and Michael Laughy say, "It is essential to parse all verbs and nouns, and determine how they function in the sentence, BEFORE you can successfully translate a Greek sentence into English."

Understanding Levirate Marriage, and that Clopas became Mary’s caretaker after Joseph died, the family tree would look something like this—



So, what about John 19:25? Since it is possible that the free order of words in the ancient Greek can be responsible for this slight mixup, I believe the text should have been rendered like this—

John 19:25, “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and His mother’s sister (Salome), and Mary Magdalene.”

Now Matthew, Mark, and John all agree. Mary’s sons were named James the Less (Mark 15:40), Joses (short for Joseph), Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). Alphaeus is named as father of James (called the less). Papias wrote, “Clopas and Alphaeus are the same person. Mary wife of Clopas or Alphaeus would be the mother of James, the brother of Jesus, and of Simon and Judas Thaddeus, and of one Joseph.” (Papias of Hierapolis, *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*).

Alphaeus appears as the father of James (called the less) and Matthew in the lists of the disciples (Matthew 10:3; Mark 2:14; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Jesus’ brother James became the head of the Christian Church in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended to heaven. Some would think that Peter should have

been selected to lead the Church, but Jesus' brother James was chosen, apparently because of his family tie to Jesus. James died in AD 62, and Eusebius quotes Hegesippus, "All with one consent pronounced Simon (or Simeon), the son of Clopas, of whom the Gospel also makes mention, to be worthy of the episcopal throne of that parish." (Eusebius, *Church History*, book 3, chap 11). The evidence is difficult to overlook. And it doesn't stop there. Jude 1 reads, "*Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James...*" This would make Jude the brother of Jesus. Eusebius preserved an extract from Hegesippus recording how the Emperor Domitian sought to exterminate the descendants of Jesus, and went after two grandsons of Jude. "There still survived of the kindred of the Lord the grandsons of Jude, who according to the flesh was called his brother. These were informed against, and Evocatus brought them before Domitian Caesar, for the emperor dreaded the advent of Christ, just as Herod had. When they were released they became leaders of the church, as was natural in the case of those who were martyrs and of the kindred of the Lord... After the establishment of peace for the church, their lives were prolonged to the reign of Trajan." (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiae*). So it would seem to appear that the office of Bishop in Jerusalem remained in the family of Jesus until some time after the turn of the first century.

So is it possible?

Salome was Mary's sister, mother to James and John, and the aunt of Jesus. This might explain why Zebedee didn't throw a fit when his sons left him to do the heavy work in his fishing business. This may also explain why Jesus left the care of His mother to His cousin John who was a family member. Remember that Jesus' mother Mary, His cousin John, and His aunt Salome were the only direct family members who did not flee from the crucifixion. Mary Magdalene also remained by the Cross though she was not a family member.

Someone will ask, "Where was Clopas? Why would Mary not remain in his care? The obvious answer to that is that he also

had died by the time Jesus reached the age of thirty. John cared for his aunt Mary in Jerusalem until AD 65 when they relocated to Ephesus shortly before Jerusalem was sacked by Rome in AD 70.

Another question I hear often is, “Why does John not mention his own name, or his mother’s name, or Jesus’ mother’s name in his Gospel?” That is a good question, and one that would have cleared a lot of things up if he had. Some say it was because of his humility in later life, but it may have been more than that. Martin Turner makes a point that must be considered, “We can only speculate as to why John, who was asked by Jesus to look after His mother, didn’t name her. It may be for the same reason that he doesn’t name himself. Christianity was by that point a persecuted religion. More than one hundred thousand Christians and Jews were put to death by Rome during the first century, and naming people explicitly might well have put them, or their family at risk. Mary would almost certainly have died earlier than she did.”

Who was Philip?

“Philip” is a Greek name meaning “lover of horses.” He must have also had a Jewish name, because all 12 disciples were Jewish, but that name is never mentioned in the Bible. The Hellenistic Period began when Alexander the Great conquered the known world in the 4th century BC. This was a time when Greek language and culture was forced on a captive world. It’s possible that Philip came from a family of Hellenistic Jews which would give a reason for his Greek name, but be sure that Philip was pure Jewish from the tribe of Zebulun.

Often times the apostle Philip is confused with Philip the deacon who led the Ethiopian to Christ in Acts 8. But these are two different people. Philip the deacon lived in Caesarea, while Philip the apostle was from Bethsaida, the same city Peter and Andrew were from. Philip grew up right next door to Peter, Andrew, James and John, and probably Thomas and Nathanael as well. They all knew each other, and probably worked together fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

John 1:43-44 reads, *“The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.”* Verse 45 says, *“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.’”* Remember the first thing Andrew did after meeting Jesus? He went and found his brother and brought him to Jesus. And from the text the first thing Philip did was go and find his friend Nathanael. This is evangelism at its best, and we as a church today would do well to learn from this and put it into practice.

So what do we know about Philip? Matthew, Mark and Luke give no details about him at all. Every detail we have about Philip appears only in the Gospel of John. When we piece together all that John records about him, it seems that Philip was a detail, by-the-book individual, and John MacArthur believes there was a fair amount of pessimism mixed in with it. He tended to be narrowly focused—identifying reasons why things won’t work, rather than finding ways to do them. Does this mean he was someone God could not use? Not at all. He along with the other eleven were men that Jesus would train, equip and empower to take the Gospel to a dying world.

John 6:1-6 reads, *“After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’”* Judas kept the money, but Philip was apparently the bean-counter who did not see a way to feed this large crowd. He was there when Jesus turned water to wine—he was there when Jesus healed the lame—he was there when Jesus raised the dead, yet he saw this crowd and began to feel overwhelmed by the impossible task of

feeding them. And this was a test because verse 6 says, “Jesus said this to test him.”

John 6:8-14 reads, “One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?’ Then Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.’ Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, ‘This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.’” It’s okay to be analytical as long as it doesn’t get in the way of faith. Jesus was teaching Philip that “*all things are possible with God.*”

Our final glimpse of Philip comes in the Upper Room the night before Jesus is crucified, and again his analytical nature comes through, “*Lord show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.*” For three years Philip had walked with the very person of God, and he still couldn’t see the big picture. His earthbound thinking shut him off from comprehending what was really happening. But Jesus didn’t give up on him, and that should give each one of us hope today.

So what happened to Philip? Philip traveled to Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece with his sister Mariam, and his fellow apostle and friend Nathanael. In Asia Minor they preached to Hellenistic Jews in such cities as Sardes, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, and Hierapolis. Many accepted Christ, and others did not. Four of the early Church Fathers say they converted Nicanora, the wife of the Proconsul in Hierapolis, to the Christian faith. It is said that Hierapolis was the most wickedly idolatrous city in all of Asia Minor. Hierapolis was a city devoted to the worship of Jupiter in the shape of a snake, and Philip rebuked them for their veneration of such a lowly creature as a snake. The city magistrate seized him

and his sister, and beat them severely, and later that night they were put to death on, or next to, a pillar of the city in AD 52. Some say they were crucified on the pillar, others say they were hanged on a pillar of the main street. Nathanael later took their bodies with the help of the Christians of the city, and buried them outside of the city of Hierapolis. And today Philip stands with the other apostles as proof that “*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty.*” Thankfully the Lord uses people like Philip.

Who was Bartholomew?

Bartholomew is Greek for bar-tolmai (son of Tolmai) which simply means that his father’s name was “Tolmai.” Nathanael is Hebrew meaning “God has given.” So he is Nathanael bar-tolmai (son of Tolmai), or Nathanael Bartholomew. Bartholomew is really his last name. Whether he liked to be called Bartholomew or Nathanael, we don’t know, but John always called him by his first name Nathanael, so we will do the same. Jerome believed that Nathanael came from the royal lineage of King David, and that he was named after the prophet Nathan from the story of David.

John 1:43-49 reads, *“The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and 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.’ And 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 is no deceit!’ 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 and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’”*

According to John 21:2 Nathanael came from the small town of Cana in Galilee, which you will immediately recognize

as the place where Jesus performed His first miracle. And Cana was only nine miles from Jesus' home town of Nazareth, and as we just read from John 1, Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip immediately after Jesus called Philip to be a disciple. Nathanael grew up five miles from Bethsaida where Philip lived, and the two were apparently close friends, because in each of the synoptic Gospel's they are listed together. They were close friends during their years with Jesus, and they later traveled and preached together throughout Asia Minor. Early church history and legend also links them together.

John MacArthur brings out an interesting point about John 1:46 where Nathanael says, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Nathanael was a student of Scripture and he had strong spiritual interests, but he was also human. His bigoted thoughts about Nazareth came out loud and clear. Cana was called "a dead end to nowhere" by the residents of Nazareth. Nazareth was called "a place to urinate" by the residents of Cana. So you can see that there was a tremendous civic rivalry between the two towns. All Judaeans looked down on all Galileans, but all Galileans looked down on all Nazarenes. The pecking order was clear, and Nazareth was at the bottom of the heap. Nathanael, though he came from the lowliest of Galilean towns, was simply echoing a general contempt for Nazareth. I pastored in Tacoma, Washington, and I often heard the same words of contempt from those living in Seattle.

Bigotry is ugly, and it's based on feelings of superiority. Israel rejected their Messiah because of bigotry. They were prejudice because He came from Galilee, and as far as they knew He was uneducated. They were prejudice because they didn't like what He had to say, and our ears can be closed to the gospel today for the same reasons. The apostle Paul used the metaphor of blindness when he said, "*If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this world has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Fortunately for Nathanael his prejudice was not strong enough to keep him

from recognizing Christ as the Saviour of the world. Nathanael came to a full understanding and commitment to Christ within minutes of first meeting Him.

So what happened to Nathanael? We know that he initially set out preaching with his friend Philip. During the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, they traveled and preached through Asia Minor where Philip and his sister were martyred at Hierapolis. Nathanael lovingly buried them outside of the city, and then continued preaching by himself. Early church fathers say he ministered from India to Armenia. Church fathers believe he was martyred in AD 70 because he was unwilling to recant his belief that Jesus rose from the dead. He was flayed alive before being martyred in Albanopolis in Armenia.

Everything Nathanael experienced with Christ, and everything he experienced during the birth of the early church only strengthened his faith, and we are told that he sang Christian hymns while they tortured him. Nathanael stands as a testimony that God can take the most common of people and turn them into great workers for Him.

Who was Thomas?

In John 11:16 John calls him “Didymus” which means “the twin,” so apparently Thomas had a twin, but his twin is never identified in Scripture. Thomas was a Jew, and according to Acts 1:11 he was from Galilee. From Scripture we know absolutely nothing about his family, but early church historians tell us that he was born to poor parents who taught him how to fish.

When we hear the name Thomas we always think “Doubting Thomas,” but this may not be the most fitting label for him. Pessimism, rather than doubt, would seem to describe him better. John 11:16 reads, “*Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’*” This is a verse that speaks volumes about Thomas. Jesus had taken the disciples down to the Jordan River where John the Baptist had been baptizing, and large crowds came out to hear Him preach. This

was a fruitful time in Jesus' ministry, and the disciples were there to witness the whole thing. Then Jesus hears of Lazarus' illness and He decides to return to Jerusalem where His enemies were waiting to arrest Him, and that is when Thomas says, "*Let us also go, that we may die with Him.*" This is a natural human response, but one that also reveals his pessimistic attitude. He could see nothing but disaster ahead, and in that way he is a lot like some of us. Thomas had not yet learned to trust Jesus completely, but that trust would grow in proportion to his faith as he continued to learn from his Master.

Following Jesus' resurrection, John records this event. John 20:24-29 says, "*Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'*" This is why Thomas has been nick-named "Doubting Thomas." But don't be too hard on him. Remember, the other disciples didn't fully believe until they saw Jesus after the resurrection. In Mark 16 when Mary Magdalene saw Jesus in the Garden, and went and told the others, they did not believe her. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not believe until Jesus prayed with them. It wasn't until they saw Jesus in the Upper Room that the other disciples fully believed.

Don't you love the way Jesus always dealt with the weakness and short-comings in His disciples? I am so thankful in my own life that He dealt with me gently and lovingly. He didn't scold. He didn't rebuke. He lovingly led me to a stronger faith in Him, and because of that I will serve Him forever.

So what happened to Thomas? There is considerable evidence that Thomas carried the gospel as far as India. Early historians have him preaching in Parthia, Persia, and then east to India. One source said that Thomas was afraid to travel too far from home, but that Jesus appeared to him in a night vision and said, "Fear not Thomas, preach the word to the east, and My Spirit will be with you." And Thomas carried that testimony with him until the day he died. Eusebius says that the philosopher Pantaenus visited India in the second century and found a copy of the Gospel of Matthew, and there is a small hill near the airport in Madras, where Thomas is said to have been buried. He was martyred by being run through with a spear in AD 70 while kneeling in prayer. There are Christian churches in south India who trace their roots to the preaching of Thomas near the middle of the first century.

Is there such a thing as honest doubt? Augustine wrote, "Thomas doubted that we may never doubt." Coleridge said, "All honest doubters end where Thomas did, on their knees before the Master in praise and adoration." From the story of Thomas we should learn that God can use any one of us, and wouldn't it be easier to surrender to Him now, rather than force Him to take us through a lot of heartache first? He loves each one of us enough that He is not willing to just let any one of us go.

Who was Matthew?

In Mark 2 and Luke 5 Matthew is called by his Jewish name "Levi" which means "gift of YHWH." Everywhere else he is listed by his Greek name "Matthew," and he is the author of the Gospel that bears his name. Mark 2:14 calls him the son of Alphaeus, and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* lists Matthew and James the Less as probable brothers. And without going through that whole Levirate Marriage thing again, Matthew and James would have been first cousins since Alphaeus and Joseph were brothers.

Matthew was a tax-collector, or a publican when Jesus called him to be a disciple. Matthew 9:9 reads, "As Jesus passed on from

there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he arose and followed Him." This is Matthew's own account of being called to follow Jesus. In the next chapter he openly calls himself a tax-collector. Matthew 10:2-4 reads, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him." This is Matthew who is writing here. In both texts he underscores that fact that he was a tax-collector. He wants you to know what he did before he came to Christ. In his entire Gospel he mentions himself only these two times, proving he was not seeking to elevate himself.

Tax-collectors were the most despised people in all of Israel. They were hated by all Jews, hated by the Herodians (Jews who were loyal to King Herod), and hated more than the Romans who occupied their country. Publicans were men who had bought a tax franchise from Rome to collect taxes from their own people that fed the Roman treasury, enabling Rome to continue to occupy their country. They often used thugs to strong-arm money out of the people, and most Publicans were despicable scoundrels.

Luke tells of a banquet that Matthew held in Jesus' honor at his home in Capernaum. Luke 5:29-32 reads, "*Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And the scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, 'Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'* Jesus answered and said to them, *'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'*" Matthew, like Andrew, invited his friends to come and meet Jesus. He was excited about being called to follow Jesus, and he wanted to share that excitement with everyone he knew—an example we would all do well to follow.

Someone asked me once why Matthew would invite these low-lives to his party? When you think about it, they were the only

friends he had. They were the only ones who would associate with him. He was a tax-collector, and tax-collectors were on the same level as harlots. His occupation made him a traitor to his country, and a religious outcast, forbidden to enter any synagogue. John the Baptist baptized many publicans, and Jesus commended him for it in Luke 7. Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 21:31, *“Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots will enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed...”* And of course the religious establishment was outraged, and they wasted no time voicing their criticism. Jesus’ answer is priceless—“I can do nothing for the person who does not feel their need, but sinners like Matthew, who confess their sins and put Me first in their lives can be forgiven and redeemed.”

Jesus said, *“Follow Me,”* and Matthew immediately left his tax booth, and his only source of income, and without hesitation followed Jesus. What was it in Matthew that caused him to drop everything like a hot potato? Scripture does not say. The best answer I can give is that Matthew was a troubled soul. Deep down inside he loved God and had a deep spiritual hunger, and those needs were not being met in his guilt-ridden, materialistic profession. When Jesus said, *“Follow Me,”* Matthew knew there would be forgiveness and a chance to start over again.

Matthew must have been raised in a good home where the Scriptures were studied often. We know that because when he wrote his Gospel in AD 60, he quoted the Old Testament ninety-nine times. That is more than Mark, Luke, and John combined. The masterly way in which he sets forth his material proves that he had been carefully educated, and while we learn practically nothing about him from his Gospel, his knowledge of the history and traditions of the Jews appears on every page. John MacArthur quotes the French sceptic Renan as saying that Matthew’s Gospel was “the most important book that has ever been written.”

So what happened to Matthew? It is believed that he preached in and around Jerusalem for eight years following Christ’s ascension. Hippolytus says he traveled and preached with Andrew

through Asia Minor and up along the southern shore of the Black Sea. While in Asia Minor he spent a good deal of time preaching at Hierapolis where Philip and his sister were martyred. Some historians say he later labored in the Syrian colony of Palmyra, between Damacus and the Euphrates, before going to Ethiopia where he was beheaded for his faith in AD 70 at Nad-Davar. The historian Dorotheus records that Matthew's friends took his remains back to Asia Minor and buried him at Hierapolis where the apostle Philip is buried.

Matthew was faithful to the end and never forgot his Saviour's words, "*I am with you always, even to the end of the world,*" and though he was despised by his own countrymen, he was loved by Jesus. And what else really matters?

Who was James the son of Alphaeus?

If you read the section on Levirate Marriage (page 18), and if you read the many statements by early church historians, you know that Alphaeus was the brother of Joseph, and that he became the care-taker of Mary after Joseph died. It may seem strange to us today that Joseph's children would take Alphaeus' name (or Clopas' name) after Joseph died, but it appears that was the custom in early Bible times. The advantage to the brother who agreed to marry his sister-in-law was that he would be the sole benefactor of his brother's estate. The children of the dead brother, out of respect for their care-taker uncle, and to show that they were under male protection, would accept him as their father and assume his name under levirate law. At the Cross Jesus entrusted His mother's care to the Apostle John, who was the son of Salome, the sister of Mary. But some will not be convinced, so let's look at some more evidence.

According to Josephus, in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 20, he refers to the stoning of "James the brother of Jesus" by order of Ananus the High Priest. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 1:18-19 that James the Apostle was "the Lord's brother." Hegesippus in the 2nd century, in the fifth book of his *Commentaries*,

writes, “James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem.” Jerome in the 4th century wrote that “James, the Lord’s brother, was also an apostle and ruled the church of Jerusalem for thirty years.” Fragment X of Papias in the 2nd century says that “James the Bishop was also an apostle.” So to me the evidence is overwhelming. The apostle James (called the Less) was the brother of our Lord who was chosen to lead the early church after Jesus returned to His Father.

One person asked me how I would answer the problem that arises in John 7:5, “*For even His brothers did not believe in Him.*” And the only answer I can give is that Jesus had four brothers. Does John 7:5 mean that all four did not believe in Him, or did it mean that two or three of the brothers doubted that He was who Mary and Joseph said He was. We know that Mary and Joseph had to have talked about the angel visit with the other children at some point in their growing years. And the other children must have known that there was something different about Jesus, but to accept Him as the coming Messiah may have been a stretch for some of them. It’s possible that James, when called to follow Jesus, chose to follow his brother even though there may have been some lingering doubt. That doubt was erased when he met with Jesus after the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:7 reads, “*After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles.*” But none of what you have read will convince the person who is bent on establishing the perpetual virginity of Mary. The Catholic Church also teaches the life-long virginity of Joseph, as well as Mary’s mother Anna.

There were two apostles named James. James the son of Zebedee, and James the Less (Mark 15:40), also known as James the son of Alphaeus, and then in later years as James the Just. The Greek word for “Less” is “μικρος” (micros) which literally means “little,” causing many to ask, “Was he little in stature?” But the word can also mean someone who is “young in age.” In fact some early historians actually called him “James the younger.” And the next question usually is, “Younger than who?” And to me the obvious answer would be “Younger than his brother Jesus.” But some have argued—and they may well be right—that it would

mean that he was younger than the other James (the brother of John). Nevertheless, James was one of the 12, chosen by Christ, and eternity will reveal the testimony of James, whom this world barely remembers, and knows little about.

So what happened to James the Less? James was Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, and was martyred in the year AD 62. Although he had the respect of most people, some of the scribes and Pharisees were jealous of his hold over the people. He was thrown from the walls of the Temple for refusing to renounce his faith in Christ, and then stoned and clubbed to death after he fell, still praying for those who were killing him. He is usually shown in art holding a book and a club.

Who was Thaddaeus?

Jerome referred to this disciple as “Trinomial,” the man with three names. Matthew calls him Lebbaeus—Mark calls him Thaddeus—Luke calls him Judas in both Luke and Acts. So we believe Judas was his birth name. Lebbaeus was a nickname which means “heart child,” evoking the idea of a nursing baby kept close to the heart. Thaddaeus was also a nickname meaning “breast child,” or “nursing child.” Both names suggest he was a momma’s boy, someone who was specially cherished by his mother.

The name Judas was a popular name, meaning “Jehovah leads,” but because of the treachery of Judas Iscariot, it will forever have a negative meaning. That’s why John refers to him in John 14:22 as “*Judas (not Iscariot).*” And that’s why Matthew calls him Lebbaeus, and Mark calls him Thaddaeus, and he is generally known as Thaddaeus today.

John 14:19-24 reads, “*A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, Lord, how is it that You will manifest 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 home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.*" This is the only place in the Gospels where Thaddaeus is recorded as saying anything. He couldn't believe that Jesus would reveal Himself to the 12, and not to the rest of the world. After all, He was the Saviour of the whole world, not just the 12. The disciples had always assumed that Christ had come to set up His kingdom here on earth. On another occasion Jesus had to tell them, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* But Thaddaeus, like the others, was still thinking in worldly terms. After the resurrection, all of their questions were answered.

Now, are you ready for this? J. B. Lightfoot, in his book, *The Brethren of the Lord* quotes Papias of Hierapolis (disciple of the Apostle John), "Mary the wife of Clopas or Alphaeus would be the mother of James the Just, Simon, Jude the Apostle, and Joseph." So does this mean that the Apostle Jude was the blood brother of Jesus? The Greek *adelphos* is translated "brother" and means "of the same womb." M. Miller in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, page 46 says, "The term *adelphos* (brother) is distinct from *anepsios* (cousin), and Hegesippus differentiated between those who were the *anepsios* or *adelphos* of Jesus." (Shanks, Hershel, Witherington, *The Brothers of Jesus*, page 94). Then why does Luke say, "Jude son of James" in Luke 6 and Acts 1, while Matthew and Mark both say "brother of James?" But the truth is Luke does not say "son of James" but rather "Jude of James." The word "son" is supplied and was not there originally.

Here again is the statement you read on page 21 of this book. Read it slowly and carefully. Jude 1 reads, "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James..." This would make Jude the brother of Jesus. Eusebius preserved an extract from Hegesippus recording how the emperor Domitian sought to exterminate the descendants of Jesus, and went after two grandsons of Jude. "There still survived of the kindred of the Lord the grandsons of Jude, who according to the flesh was called his brother (meaning

Jesus' brother). These were informed against, and Evocatus brought them before Domitian Caesar, for the emperor dreaded the advent (return) of Christ, just as Herod had. When they were released they became leaders of the church, as was natural in the case of those who were martyrs and of the kindred of the Lord... After the establishment of peace for the church, their lives were prolonged to the reign of Trajan." (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiae*). So it would seem to appear that the office of Bishop in Jerusalem remained in the family of Jesus until some time after the turn of the first century.

Papias was a disciple of the Apostle John in Ephesus. If one can get past trying to protect the false teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary, then what he says is interesting. He wrote, "Clopas and Alphaeus are the same person. Mary wife of Clopas or Alphaeus would be the mother of James, the brother of Jesus, and of Simon and Judas Thaddaeus, and of one Joseph." (Papias of Hierapolis, *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord*). *Fast Facts* (for what it is worth) tells us that "Thaddaeus' father was Alphaeus, and his brother was James the Less."

So what happened to Thaddaeus? Most of the early traditions suggest that he took the gospel to Turkey, Syria, Armenia, and Mesopotamia. Judas Thaddaeus was clubbed to death at the hands of pagan priests in AD 72. If we accept that Jude the apostle is the same as 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. But regardless of who he was and where he went, what we do know is this—Jesus called him, he followed, and he played a role in the beginning of a movement which changed the whole world. I would love to tell you more about him, but we will have to wait until we are in heaven to hear the rest of the story.

Who was Simon the Cananite?

Luke refers to this apostle as Simon the Zealot. Matthew and Mark call him Simon the Cananite, from the Greek *Cananaean*, which could mean "from the area of Galilee known as Cana." If

you remember Cana was the same town where Jesus performed His first miracle, and the same town that Nathanael came from, so I assume that Simon and Nathanael would have known one another. Why Luke calls him a Zealot I am not sure, though “zealot” in Aramaic can also mean “enthusiastic” or “zealous,” and there are a lot of things a person can be zealous about. But Luke forces us to ask, “Could Simon actually have been a Jewish Zealot?” Yes, it is possible. It is interesting that when Matthew and Mark list the 12, they list Simon just before Judas Iscariot.

Josephus tells of four political groups that existed in Jesus’ day. The Pharisees were the fundamentalists—the Sadducees were the liberals—the Essenes were the ascetics—and the Zealots were out to overthrow Rome. They were patriots who were ready to die for what they believed, and many historians believe the Zealots were largely responsible for the sacking of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70. And during the siege by Rome, the Zealots actually began killing Jews who wanted to negotiate with Rome to end the siege.

The Zealots had formed a secret society among themselves called the “sicarii” which means “dagger-men,” because of the daggers they carried in the folds of their robes. They believed that only God had a right to rule over Israel, therefore they believed they were doing God’s will by assassinating Roman soldiers. So we need to ask ourselves, had Simon truly gone that far? Maybe Luke means that he was merely a sympathizer and not one of the truly militant ones.

If not for the influence of Jesus, Matthew and Simon would never have been in the same room with one another. Matthew had sold out to Rome and was collecting tax money to support their occupation. If it’s true that Simon was a Zealot, he would have dedicated himself to overthrowing Rome, not supporting them. A lot of this is conjecture, because we really know nothing about Simon from the Gospels, other than the fact that Jesus called him to be a disciple. And it’s amazing that Jesus would select a man like Simon. But it’s even more amazing that Jesus would select a man like me.

So what happened to Simon? Since we know nothing from

the Gospels except that Jesus called him to be a disciple, what can we learn from the early church? The man who was willing to overthrow Rome found a more fruitful cause for which to give his life. The early church says he preached in Africa, Lybia, Persia, and the British Isles before being crucified by the governor of Syria in AD 74. We will have to wait until heaven to learn more about Simon the Zealot.

Who was Judas Iscariot?

Now we look at Judas Iscariot who is notorious and universally scorned for his betrayal of Jesus. And this should concern each one of us, because what he did, some of us will do. His name appears last in every list of the apostles except in Acts 1 where it doesn't appear at all because he was dead when Luke wrote Acts. Every time his name is mentioned in Scripture, it also says he was a traitor because he betrayed the Holy Son of God. His story is a dramatic example of the depths to which the human heart is capable of sinking, and to which we all will sink if not in a daily connection with Jesus.

Judas' parents had great hopes for him when he was born. His name is a form of the name Judah which means "Jehovah leads." His surname "Iscariot" is a combination of two names, and it signifies the region he came from. It is derived from the Hebrew "ish" meaning man, and the name of a town "Kerioth" meaning "man from Kerioth." It is believed that he came from Kerioth-Hezron in Judges 15, a quiet little town in the south of Judea. He was the only disciple who did not come from Galilee. John tells us that his father's name was Simon, and some Bible students believe he was the son of Simon the Pharisee, though there is no Gospel evidence for believing that. Nothing else is known of Judas' family or social background.

This was a time of heightened Messianic hope, and like most of Israel, he was eager for the Messiah to come. Just when and where Jesus called him to be a disciple is not recorded in Scripture, but he was obviously willing to follow, and was selected to be one

of the 12. I believe that all of the disciples initially followed Jesus for the wrong reasons (to set up an earthly kingdom), only later to see the big picture and be changed by the Holy Spirit. This change could have been experienced by Judas.

How do we reconcile the fact that Judas' treachery was prophesied hundreds of years before it happened? Psalm 41 predicted that Jesus would be betrayed by a friend. Zechariah 11 predicted that He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. John 13 and Matthew 27 identify that traitor by name, but Judas was in no way coerced into doing what he did. It only shows us that God knew in advance what he was going to do. Some will say that he was predestined to betray Christ, but I do not believe that for a moment. If Judas had no choice, then the whole issue of free will is out the window. Then how do we deal with that thought? We reconcile it by accepting that God knows the end from the beginning. He knew that Judas would betray Him, and prophesied it hundreds of years before it happened? We reconcile it by saying "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But we also know that not all will come to repentance. God gave Judas every opportunity to make the right choices, but He in no way manipulated his ability to make the right choice.

John 6:70 says, "*Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.*" And Judas listened to these very words and still went out and betrayed Him. Some believe Judas, like the others, was looking for an earthly, political kingdom, and because Jesus was not meeting his expectations, he betrayed Him in an effort to force Him into revealing Himself as the Jewish Messiah. And I have to admit, that is an interesting thought.

John 13 begins the apostle John's account of the Last Supper, and Judas, having already taken the money returns and blends into the group and pretends that nothing unusual has happened. Jesus dips bread and gives it to him, and verse 30 says, "*Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.*" Judas went straight from the Upper Room to the Sanhedrin, and

told them that the final break had been made, and that he would lead them to the place where Jesus could be taken. Matthew tells us that Judas had a prearranged signal, "*Whomever I kiss, He is the One.*" And Luke says Jesus responded, "*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*" When Judas realized what he had done, Matthew says, "*Then he threw the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.*" A tragic ending to what could have been a beautiful testimony.

In Acts 1:20 Luke wrote, "*For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it; and, let another take his office.'*" Judas' place in the 12 was filled by Matthias. There is no mention of Matthias among the lists of disciples or followers of Jesus in the three gospels, but according to Luke (Acts 1:15-26) he had been part of a larger group who followed Jesus from his baptism by John until He ascended back to heaven. Matthias means "Gift of God," and beyond this we know nothing about him from the Bible. According to tradition he ministered in Judaea and then carried the story of the risen Christ to Cappadocia, a mountainous district in central Turkey. Later it is believed that he journeyed to the region around the Caspian Sea, where he was martyred by crucifixion in AD 80.

So where does that leave us (me)?

My search began more than thirty years ago, and as hard as I tried to dismiss it or deny it—I couldn't. I have decided that I cannot go the rest of my life without at least considering that two of Jesus' brothers, and three of His cousins were part of the 12 whom He chose to form the New Israel. I am also aware that some will scoff at what I've written. But I've been scoffed at many times in the past so that will be nothing new. As you read about the 12 Apostles in the Gospels and Acts, you will notice that Jesus did not choose one worldly educated person. These were 12 common ordinary men. Why didn't Jesus choose the PhDs of His day? Could it be that maybe we become too set in our ways, and think too highly of our own opinions? Could it be that we become

unteachable? Could it be that the more highly we are educated by the world, the more skeptical we become? Could it also be that Jesus was sending the message that we do not need a PhD to follow Him and to do the work He has given us to do? Maybe it's time for a wakeup call. Put aside your preconceived opinions, accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you. I guarantee He is the best teacher you will ever need. Some of the best workers I've had the opportunity to know in my life were ordinary people who dedicated themselves to demonstrating the love and grace of God. God is waiting for the right response from you and me. It doesn't matter who you are, how educated you are, or what's in your past. Those things only matter to other people, not to God. Keep your hand in His, and let Him lead you in taking the Good News of the Gospel to a dying world.

I will follow Thee, my Savior,
Wheresoe'er my lot may be.
Where thou goest I will follow;
Yes, my Lord, I'll follow Thee.

Though the road be rough and thorny,
Trackless as the foaming sea,
Thou hast trod this way before me,
And I'll gladly follow Thee.

Though I meet with tribulations,
Sorely tempted though I be;
I remember Thou wast tempted,
And rejoice to follow Thee.

Though Thou leadest me through affliction,
Poor, forsaken though I be;
Thou wast destitute, afflicted,
And I only follow Thee.

Though to Jordan's rolling billows,
Cold and deep, Thou ledest me,
Thou hast crossed the waves before me,
And I still will follow Thee.

Refrain

I will follow Thee, my Saviour,
Thou didst shed Thy blood for me;
And though all men should forsake Thee;
By Thy grace I'll follow Thee.

James L. Elginburg

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