

14 Mark 3:13-19 Jesus Calls the Twelve Disciples

Discussion: Have you ever had a nickname? Did it stay with you, or did it only last for a certain period of your life?

Mark 3	Matthew 10	Luke 6
Jesus Appoints the Twelve 13 Jesus went up on a mountainside	Jesus Sends Out the Twelve	The Twelve Apostles 12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. 13 When morning came,
and called to him those he wanted,	1 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him	he called his disciples to him
and they came to him.		
14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach		
15 and to have authority to drive out demons.	and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.	
16 These are the twelve he appointed:	2 These are the names of the twelve apostles:	and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:
Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter),	first, Simon (who is called Peter)	14 Simon (whom he named Peter),
7 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"),	and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;	his brother Andrew, James, John,
18 Andrew,		
Philip, Bartholomew,	3 Philip and Bartholomew;	Philip, Bartholomew,
Matthew, Thomas,	Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector;	15 Matthew, Thomas,
James son of Alphaeus,	James son of Alphaeus, and	James son of Alphaeus,
Thaddaeus,	Thaddaeus;	
Simon the Zealot	4 Simon the Zealot	Simon who was called the Zealot,
		16 Judas son of James, and
19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.	and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.	Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Comparison

- Mark and Luke refer to a mountainside (or hillside) while Luke adds that Jesus spent the previous night in prayer.
- All three describe the *call* but a more accurate translation might be *summons*.²⁸ Mark adds how they responded, i.e. “they came to him”,
- Luke doesn't say anything about the purpose of calling them, but Mark explains
 - *so that they might be with him, and*
 - *that he would send them out to preach,*while both Mark and Matthew tell us
 - *that they will have authority over demons*and Matthew adds
 - *that they will be able to heal every disease and sickness.*

This is the same Divine Authority (*exousia*) conferred upon Jesus, that he now allows the disciples to use.²⁹ It establishes their credibility and that their preaching and healing ministries are accompanied by signs and wonders, and that they have God with them.³⁰

- Throughout Scripture, the sequence of names or events is often significant. This is true here for the list of disciples. Matthew emphasizes this by saying “first, Simon...” Mark then lists James and John, as those three represent Jesus' inner circle, while Matthew and Luke have listed Andrew next (as he is the brother of Simon Peter). Thereafter, the disciples' names are listed in almost the same sequence across all three Synoptics, except for Thaddeus whom most commentators believe is the same person as Judas, son of James.
- Many Bible versions have in Mark 3:14 the additional text “whom he made apostles”, as it does appear in early Mark manuscripts, in brackets.³¹ All three Synoptics, therefore, state that they are apostles. Apostle means *one who is sent*.

Context

- Rabbis were usually selected by their students, who determined who might be the best to teach them the Torah, in much the same way a student today chooses the college of their preference.³² In contrast, Jesus calls the disciples not to the Torah but to *himself*. No rabbi would place themselves above the Torah in this manner.³³

Key Points

- Why twelve disciples? Numbers (*Gematria*) played an important role in Jewish ritualistic practises and twelve represented *divine government* or *completeness*. Since the fall of the northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 BC when its people were taken into a foreign land as captives, it was believed that only 2½ tribes of the original 12 remained by the time of Jesus (Benjamin, Judah and part of Levi).³⁴ Many Jews hoped for a political restoration of Israel, implemented by a messianic figure like King David. The kingdom of God has come, as promised in the OT, but Jesus is reconstituting Israel in a new and unexpected manner, with twelve disciples.³⁵ This is the *new Israel*.³⁶
- Jesus *made* the Twelve; he *brought them into existence*.³⁷ The disciples have been selected, chosen by Jesus.³⁸ There is a sense here of Jesus willing it, that they did not *choose* to follow Jesus, but he *selected them* to follow him.³⁹

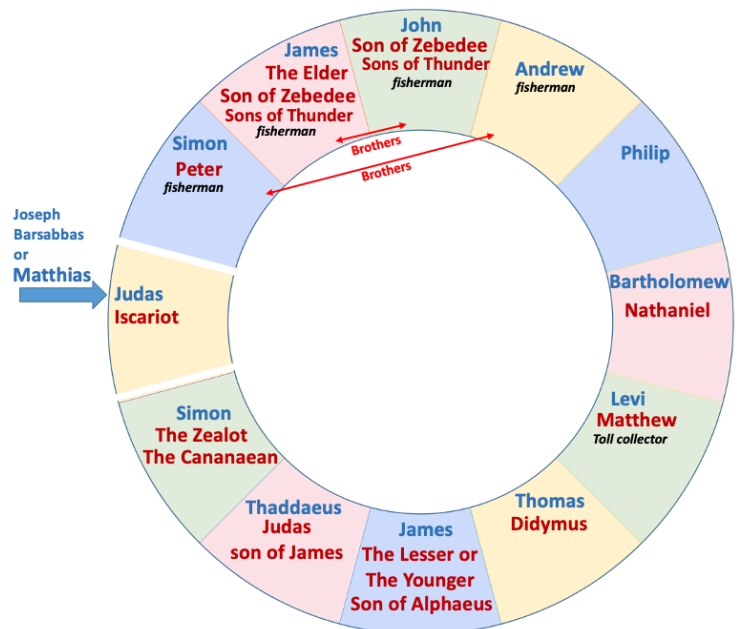


Figure 12: Naming of the twelve apostles

Going Deeper: Differing names for the twelve apostles

The Twelve were often called by a variety of names. Sometimes it was a nickname (i.e. Simon was renamed *Peter* by Jesus). A second Simon was referred to as *the Zealot* (in Greek), probably to differentiate him, but also as the *Cananaean* (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic name). *Thaddeus* is the Greek alternative to Judas, distinguishing him from Judas *Iscariot* (itself a possible reference to his home town of Kerioth). A family name was sometimes employed such as *sons of Alphaeus*, while Thomas is the Aramaic for *Twin* (which in Greek is *Didymus*). Finally, Matthew is referred to as the toll collector, possibly once Matthias had been selected to join the Twelve.⁴⁰

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- A disciple is a follower, one who devotes themselves to learning from their mentor or teacher. But an apostle is one who is *sent*, first to be *with him* (i.e. learn by seeing, hearing and doing, like apprentices), but then to carry on his mission of taking the *good news* to the world.⁴¹ Being an apostle is being commissioned for a specific purpose. It doesn't mean a special category of "super-followers".⁴² As Christians, we are all disciples and each have a unique calling, often commissioned to specific tasks.
- The Twelve were Jesus' inner circle, distinguished as Apostles from a wider group of disciples.⁴³ We also note that within the Twelve, Peter, James and John were Jesus' closest and most trusted companions.
- Later, when Judas Iscariot dies after betraying Jesus, the number needs to be made up to the numerically important twelve again, and we note from Acts 1:21-23 that Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias were proposed (with the lot falling to Matthias). The criteria for their selection included that they had been there from the beginning when Jesus was baptised, which implies both of them had been present and might therefore have been among the disciples of John the Baptist.⁴⁴

Discussion: As a follower of Jesus, do you have a sense of what Jesus might be laying on your heart, a direction in which he might be calling you? Do you feel he has given you gifts that might prove useful in serving him and serving others?