

THE ELEVEN APOSTLES NOT NAMED ISCARIOT

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”¹

(Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus of Nazareth walked this earth for less than 40 years; His public ministry lasted less than one-quarter of that time, and possibly as little as three years.² He wrote no books, and held no position of earthly power. He never led an army or fought a battle. So far as we know, He did not travel extensively. He gave the world no great invention or scientific discovery. He died alone, executed as a criminal, and deserted by His closest friends and followers. Yet today He is known and worshiped all over the world. This occurred because Jesus’ followers spread the message about His life, His teachings, and His resurrection. And the leaders of this movement were the eleven apostles who remained alive after Jesus’ death and resurrection.³ This is their story.

James “the Greater,” son of Zebedee

James had a brother named John, who was also one of Jesus’ disciples, and their father was Zebedee.⁴ Their mother’s name was probably Salome.⁵ James and John were fishermen, and were partners with Simon (Peter).⁶ When Jesus performed

¹ All Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard* translation.

² Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great (see Matthew 2:1-16), who died in 4 B.C. The generally accepted dates for Jesus’ birth are between 4 and 7 B.C., and His crucifixion was in about 30-33 A.D. According to Luke 3:23, Jesus was “about 30” when He began His ministry.

³ The 12th apostle, Judas Iscariot, committed suicide not long after he betrayed Jesus. See Matthew 27:3-5.

⁴ Matthew 4:21, 10:2; Mark 1:19-20, 3:17, 10:35; Luke 5:10

⁵ Compare Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40. Matthew mentions three women watching Jesus’ crucifixion from a distance: Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and “the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” Mark also lists three such women: Mary Magdalene, the second Mary, and “Salome.” If Matthew and Mark are referring to the same three women, as appears likely, then the “mother of the sons of Zebedee” was Salome.

⁶ Luke 5:5-7, 10

a miracle by giving them a huge catch of fish, James, John, and Peter all left everything to follow Him.⁷

James, John, and Peter were among Jesus' earliest followers and were probably His most trusted disciples. They seem to have formed a kind of inner circle within the group of 12 apostles. When Jesus brought Jairus' daughter back from the dead, He took only James, John, and Peter inside the house with Him.⁸ Those same three disciples went with Jesus to a mountain where they witnessed His transfiguration.⁹ In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night of Jesus' betrayal, Jesus led James, John, and Peter away from the other apostles and confided in them that He was "deeply grieved to the point of death."¹⁰

Jesus called James and his brother John the "Sons of Thunder."¹¹ Perhaps this name resulted from James and John asking Jesus if they should call fire down from heaven to consume a Samaritan village.¹² In any event, both the name and the incident reveal their fiery tempers. They were also a bit arrogant, as illustrated by their request to sit on Jesus' right and left in heaven, and by their confident assertion that they could bear any suffering which might be required.¹³

Aside from Judas Iscariot, James was probably the first of the 12 apostles to die. The account of his martyrdom is in Acts 12:1-2: "Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword." This fulfilled Jesus' prophecy in Mark 10:39: "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized." Since Herod Agrippa reigned from 41 to 44 A.D., James' martyrdom probably occurred in about 43-44 A.D., roughly 10 years after Jesus' death. Eusebius relates a tradition¹⁴ from Clement of

⁷ Luke 5:1-11

⁸ Luke 8:51; Mark 5:37

⁹ Luke 9:28-29; Mark 9:2-3; Matthew 17:1-2

¹⁰ Mark 14:32-34; Matthew 26:36-38

¹¹ Mark 3:17

¹² Luke 9:52-54

¹³ Mark 10:35-40; Matthew 20:20-23

¹⁴ The word "tradition" is used to refer to information that comes from sources which were written more than a lifetime after the people and events described, such that the author could not have witnessed the events himself nor had access to the actual witnesses of the events described. Many times this refers to apocryphal writings, which were written in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., describing the lives, deaths, and miracles of the various apostles. Examples include the *Acts of St. Thomas* and *The Acts of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew*. Tradition also refers to information provided by the early church "Fathers," such as:

Justin Martyr (lived about 100 - 166 A.D.)

Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons; lived about 130 - 202 A.D.)

Alexandria, which says that James' testimony on behalf of Christ at his trial moved his accuser to repent and to confess that he too was a Christian, so that they were both beheaded together.

There are several unreliable traditions, from the 4th century A.D. and later, about the location of James' missionary work during the years between Christ's death and his own. The most likely says that James traveled to Sardinia and Spain, where he preached to Jewish communities and established churches. We know from both the Roman historian Tacitus¹⁵ and the Jewish historian Josephus¹⁶ that 4,000 Jews were forcibly sent to Sardinia in about 19 A.D., and Jewish communities were well-established in Spain at this time, so James had plenty of motivation to go to both places.

However, a competing story says that James went to India with Peter. And it is also possible that James stayed in and near Judea, preaching the Gospel to Jews there. We cannot now prove or disprove any of these stories, but the absence of so prominent an apostle as James from *Acts* during these 10-plus years probably indicates that James traveled somewhere away from Jerusalem.¹⁷

John, son of Zebedee

Of course, much of what we know about James can also be said of John: both were fishermen, both were partners of Simon Peter, and both became part of Jesus' inner circle. John is believed to have been the youngest of the twelve apostles. John's Gospel refers several times to a disciple "whom Jesus loved,"¹⁸ which is probably a subtle reference to John himself. If so, then John was the person who occupied the privileged place of intimacy next to Jesus and then asked who would

Clement of Alexandria (lived about 150 - 220 A.D.)

Origen (lived about 185 - 255 A.D.)

Tertullian (lived about 160 - 230 A.D.)

Eusebius (church historian, lived about 260 - 340 A.D.)

Jerome (scholar, monk, and Bible translator, who lived 342 - 420 A.D.)

Augustine (Bishop of Hippo, lived 354 - 430 A.D.); and many others.

While these individuals had no personal knowledge of the lives and deaths of the apostles, they lived much closer in time to those events and had access to sources, both written and verbal, which are now lost to us. Thus, while a "tradition" is not always reliable, it is **not** the same as legend or fantasy.

¹⁵ Tacitus lived about 55 - 120 A.D.

¹⁶ Josephus lived about 37 - 95 A.D.

¹⁷ See, for example, Acts 3:1, where Peter and John are going to the Temple for prayer, but James, the 3rd member of Jesus' inner circle, is not mentioned.

¹⁸ See John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, and 21:20.

betray Him; ¹⁹ Jesus commanded John to look after His mother, Mary; ²⁰ John ran to Jesus' tomb with Peter on the morning of Jesus' Resurrection to see if it was truly empty; ²¹ John was fishing with Peter in Galilee when Jesus appeared; ²² and John wrote the Gospel of John. ²³ John may also have been the companion of Andrew mentioned in John 1:35-40. ²⁴ If so, then John, like Andrew, was a disciple of John the Baptist. This would help to explain why Peter, Andrew, James and John so quickly and readily left everything to follow Jesus. ²⁵ Unfortunately, the New Testament tells us little else about John. ²⁶

John probably wrote the Gospel which bears his name, as well as the First Letter of John. Eusebius tells us that John wrote the Gospel at the urging of fellow disciples and bishops in Ephesus (a city in western Asia Minor). Eusebius also tells us that John was convinced to write the Gospel when Andrew the Apostle had a revelation about it; however, this part of the story is dubious, because John's Gospel is believed to have been written near the end of the 1st century A.D., whereas Andrew is believed to have been martyred in about 69 A.D. Jerome tells us that John wrote his Gospel to counter the heresies of Cerinthus and the Ebionites, who claimed that Christ had not existed prior to His birth. Many believe John is also the author of II John, III John, and Revelation, although at least as early as the 4th century A.D. some Christians doubted this.

¹⁹ John 13:21-25

²⁰ John 19:26-27

²¹ John 20:2-8

²² John 21:1-7

²³ John 21:20-24

²⁴ John 1:35-40 says:

Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two, who heard John speak, and followed, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

²⁵ See Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11.

²⁶ We do know that John was one of two disciples (Peter was the other) who were sent to prepare the final Passover supper for Jesus and the twelve. (Luke 22:7-8) Then Luke and Mark tell a story about John, in which he tells Jesus about a man the disciples tried to stop from casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus responds by telling John to leave such men alone, for "he who is not against us is for us." (Luke 9:49-50 and Mark 9:38-41)

Paul called John one of the “pillars” of the Church in Jerusalem, along with Peter and James “the Just.”²⁷ (James “the Just” was the Lord’s brother, not to be confused with James “the Greater,” who was John’s brother, or James “the Less,” another apostle of Jesus). John eventually settled in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), where he became the pastor of the church at Ephesus, and was probably a spiritual leader for all of the churches in that area.

Augustine says that John also preached to the Parthians, who lived in the area which is now eastern Turkey, western Iran, and southern Russia. Tertullian says that John was for a time with Peter in Rome, and almost lost his life. Both are of course possible, but there is no further evidence to confirm either story.

Clement of Alexandria tells us the following story about John when he was very old. John entrusted a youth to a local bishop’s care. The bishop brought the youth up in the Church, but later became neglectful of his duty and allowed the youth, now a young man, to associate with bad people. This young man eventually renounced the church and became the leader of a group of violent robbers. When John returned and inquired about the young man, he was informed of the young man’s evil ways. John immediately obtained a horse and a guide and set off in search of the young man. John was captured by the young man’s gang and taken to him, whereupon John began to entreat him to repent. The young man, overcome with guilt, soon repented and returned with John to his village church.

Jerome tells us another story from John’s old age, when he was too feeble to even walk to the Christian gatherings and had to be carried by other disciples. At each meeting John would say only: “Little children, love one another.” After quite some time, when the disciples tired of this, they asked him why he always said this. John responded: “It is the Lord’s command. And if this alone be done, it is enough!”

During the Roman persecution of Christians under the Emperor Domitian (reigned 81 - 96 A.D.), John was exiled to the island of Patmos, a penal colony off the coast of Asia Minor. It was here that he received the vision which inspired the book of Revelation.²⁸ Jerome and Clement of Alexandria tell us that John was released from Patmos when Domitian died in 96 A.D., and that he returned to Asia Minor, where he continued to live until the time of the Roman Emperor Trajan (98 - 117 A.D.). Irenaeus confirms that John lived until the reign of Trajan. Unanimous Christian tradition says that John died of old age in about 100 A.D., and that he was buried in Ephesus.

Simon Peter

²⁷ Galatians 2:9

²⁸ See Revelation 1:9.

Peter, the most famous of Jesus' apostles, is also the one with the most obvious human frailties. Each of the apostles—except Judas Iscariot—were radically transformed by Jesus' resurrection and by the events of Pentecost, but perhaps none were changed as much as Peter. This man who denied three times that he even knew Jesus on the night of His arrest (after confidently asserting his willingness to die for Jesus),²⁹ would become the acknowledged leader of the Christian movement in the years following Jesus' death and resurrection.

Simon's Jewish name was Simon Barjona—meaning Simon, son of John.³⁰ But Jesus called him Cephas, which is Aramaic for "rock."³¹ The Greek word for "rock" is *petros*, and thus we call him Peter.³² Like James and John, Simon Peter was a fisherman. He had no special religious training or education.³³ His brother was Andrew, another of Jesus' twelve apostles.³⁴ Their family was originally from Bethsaida,³⁵ a town close to the northernmost point of the Sea of Galilee. However, Peter was living in Capernaum when he met Jesus.³⁶ Peter's mother-in-law lived with Peter and Andrew, so Peter's wife probably also lived there.³⁷ As discussed earlier, Peter was the third member of Jesus' inner circle, along with James and John.

In the Gospel accounts, we find many examples of Peter's confusion about Jesus' power, teachings, and mission. For example, Peter could not understand how Jesus was able to discern the touch of a single woman amid a large crowd of people.

²⁹ Luke 22:31-34, 54-62; Mark 14:26-31, 66-72; Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75; John 13:36-38, 18:15-17, 25-27

³⁰ Matthew 16:17; John 1:42, 21:15-17

³¹ William Steuart McBirnie, in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 45, says the following:

Dr. Schofield's footnotes are correct when he comments as follows: "There is in the Greek, a play upon the words Thou are Peter (Petros—literally, 'a little rock' or 'pebble') and upon this Rock (Petra) I will build my church. He does not promise to build His church upon Peter, but upon Himself, as Peter himself is careful to tell us." (I Peter 2:4-9)

³² For other references to Peter as "Cephas," see John 1:42; I Corinthians 1:12, 3:22, 9:5, 15:5; Galatians 1:18, 2:9-11.

³³ Acts 4:13

³⁴ John 1:40

³⁵ John 1:44

³⁶ See Matthew 8:5 and 14; Mark 1:21 and 29. See also Matthew 17:24, which indicates that Peter was well known in Capernaum.

³⁷ See Matthew 8:5, 14, and Mark 1:21, 29-30. Mark and Matthew do not explicitly say that Peter's wife was alive or that she lived with him. They do say that Peter's mother-in-law lived with him, so the presence of Peter's wife seems likely. Of course, his wife could have been deceased. However, if that is so, then Peter later remarried (which seems unlikely), because Paul mentions that Peter had a wife. (See I Corinthians 9:5.)

³⁸ Peter did not understand the meaning of the parable about what defiles a man. ³⁹ When Jesus spoke of His impending suffering and death, Peter was horrified and tried to rebuke Him for such talk. ⁴⁰ At the transfiguration, Peter foolishly suggests that they build three tents—for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—as if spirits had need of earthly shelters. ⁴¹ Peter’s confusion is also evident in his objection to Jesus washing the apostles’ feet, as well as in his overreaction to Jesus’ persistence. ⁴² But no story better illustrates Peter’s failure to comprehend Jesus’ purpose and importance than this: mere days or weeks after his Master had been triumphantly resurrected from death, we find Peter contentedly fishing in Galilee with his friends. ⁴³ Even then, Peter did not understand that his life would never be the same again.

Nevertheless, Peter was a sincere seeker after Truth, and was one of the most inquisitive of the apostles. Although confused by the parable about what defiles a man, Peter asked for (and received) an explanation of it. ⁴⁴ Peter questioned Jesus about whether he must forgive his brother as many as seven times, to which Jesus responded, “seventy times seven.” ⁴⁵ When Jesus spoke of the need to remain vigilant until His return, Peter wanted to know to whom this comment was directed. ⁴⁶

John asked Jesus who would betray Him, but Peter persuaded John to do it. ⁴⁷

Peter also had his moments of glory, even before Pentecost. When we first meet him, Peter is obedient and humble: he allows Jesus to use his boat to preach from, then complies with Jesus’ command to go fishing again, and finally falls at Jesus’ feet after a miraculous catch of fish. ⁴⁸ When Jesus says, “follow me,” Peter immediately leaves everything and does so. ⁴⁹ Peter was brave and trusting enough to

³⁸ Luke 8:43-45; see also Mark 5:25-31

³⁹ Matthew 15:10-15; see also Mark 7:14-17

⁴⁰ Mark 8:31-33; Matthew 16:21-23

⁴¹ Luke 9:33; Mark 9:5; Matthew 17:4

⁴² John 13:6-9:

So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, “Lord, do You wash my feet?” Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.” Peter said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.”

⁴³ John 21:2-4

⁴⁴ Matthew 15:15

⁴⁵ Matthew 18:21-22

⁴⁶ Luke 12:35-41

⁴⁷ John 13:21-25

⁴⁸ Luke 5:4-10

⁴⁹ Mark 1:16-18; Matthew 4:18-20; Luke 5:11

try to walk on water, even though he ultimately failed.⁵⁰ Peter, speaking for the other apostles at a time when many of Jesus' disciples had left, calmly stated, "You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."⁵¹ Peter uttered the famous confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God."⁵² For this confession, Jesus said that He would give Peter "the keys of heaven," and that whatever Peter bound or loosed on earth would be similarly bound or loosened in heaven.⁵³ After Jesus' resurrection, Peter and John ran to Jesus' tomb to check on the women's report that His body was missing; while John ran faster (John was probably younger) and reached the tomb more quickly, Peter bravely entered the tomb first.⁵⁴

Peter is certainly the leading apostle in the Gospels,⁵⁵ and he remains so in the other New Testament books, eclipsed only by Paul among Jesus' disciples. After the Lord's ascension, Peter seems to have become the leader of the apostles. Peter suggested that they elect a 12th apostle to replace Judas Iscariot.⁵⁶ On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God first fell upon the Christian church, Peter spoke to the crowds on behalf of all of the apostles.⁵⁷ Peter became the first apostle through whom God performed a post-resurrection miracle in Jesus' name, when a middle-aged beggar who had been lame from birth was enabled to walk.⁵⁸ Peter followed up this miracle with another speech to the curious on-lookers, calling upon them to repent.⁵⁹

Peter became as steadfast in the faith as he had been unsteady before. When the Jewish leaders arrested him and John and ordered them to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter and John boldly replied: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give

⁵⁰ Matthew 14:28-31

⁵¹ John 6:66-69

⁵² Matthew 16:15-16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20

⁵³ Matthew 16:19

⁵⁴ John 20:3-8; Luke 24:12

⁵⁵ Other Gospel stories about Peter prior to Pentecost include the following. When Jesus criticized the rich young ruler for refusing to give up his wealth, Peter pointed out that "we have left everything and followed you." (Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28) Peter noticed the fig tree which had shriveled after Jesus had cursed it. (Mark 11:13-14. 20-21; Matthew 21:19-20) And in Capernaum, Peter promised the local Jewish authorities that Jesus would pay the customary two-drachma tax; Jesus then instructed him to catch a fish, in the mouth of which he found the money to pay the tax. (Matthew 17:24-27) Then, in Galilee, the risen Christ confronted Peter by three times asking him, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" and three times telling Peter to watch over His "sheep." (John 21:15-17)

⁵⁶ Acts 1:15-22

⁵⁷ Acts 2:14-40

⁵⁸ Acts 3:1-11, 4:22

⁵⁹ Acts 3:12-26

heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.”⁶⁰ He and the other apostles later prayed for boldness to speak God’s words.⁶¹ When Peter and the apostles were again arrested for preaching in Jesus’ name, in violation of the leaders’ order to stop, Peter and his companions bravely responded: “We must obey God rather than men.”⁶² Peter’s leadership in the Church is evident in the story of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, in which Peter took the lead role on behalf of the Church.⁶³ His boldness is similarly evident in his rebuke of Simon the Magician, who sought to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁴

From Paul, we know that Peter was still in Jerusalem about three years after Paul’s miraculous conversion.⁶⁵ But Peter made several trips beyond Jerusalem. For example, Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that Peter, along with John, helped spread the Gospel in Samaria.⁶⁶ Later, Peter went to the towns of Lydda and Joppa,⁶⁷ where God used Peter to heal a paralyzed man and to bring a dead woman back to life.⁶⁸ But perhaps Peter’s most celebrated convert was the Roman centurion, Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea, a seacoast town and the center of Roman government in the region.⁶⁹ To help accomplish this, God gave Peter a vision to instruct him that the Gospel was to extend to Gentiles as well as Jews.⁷⁰

Paul also tells us that Peter went to Antioch, in northern Syria.⁷¹ Peter may have preached in Corinth, a city in Greece, since a portion of the Corinthian church claimed allegiance to Peter rather than Christ.⁷² Peter’s trips to Antioch and Corinth are further supported by early Church writings, such as the *Epistles of Ignatius*, the writings of Gregory the Great, and Eusebius’ history of the Church. The last two state that Peter was the head of the church at Antioch for seven years.

Peter was imprisoned at about the same time that King Herod executed James (John’s brother), but was delivered by an angel of God, who miraculously freed him

⁶⁰ Acts 4:19-20

⁶¹ Acts 4:23-30

⁶² Acts 5:29

⁶³ Acts 5:1-10

⁶⁴ Acts 8:18-23

⁶⁵ Galatians 1:18-19

⁶⁶ Acts 8:14-15

⁶⁷ Joppa was located on the Mediterranean coast northwest of Jerusalem. Lydda was along the road between Joppa and Jerusalem.

⁶⁸ Acts 9:32-43

⁶⁹ Acts 10:1-48

⁷⁰ Acts 10:9-20, 28-29

⁷¹ Galatians 2:11

⁷² I Corinthians 1:12, 3:22

from his confinement.⁷³ Later, we find Peter siding with Paul and Barnabas at the Jerusalem Conference, as they argued successfully that Gentile converts should not be required to observe the Jewish law.⁷⁴ However, we also read in Paul's letter to the Galatians that Peter suddenly stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch when a party of Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem, and that Paul publicly criticized him for such hypocrisy.⁷⁵

The Book of Acts suddenly drops the history of Peter's ministry after the Jerusalem Conference, but there are strong traditions that he made one or more trips to Rome. The First Letter of Peter, which was almost certainly written by Peter, states that it was written from "Babylon."⁷⁶ Peter may indeed have journeyed to this city in what is now Iraq, because Babylon had a sizeable Jewish community in Peter's day. This is corroborated by the unanimous tradition in the eastern churches that Peter went to Babylon and established the Church there. However, some have argued that Peter wrote this letter from Rome, and that "Babylon" is a veiled reference to Rome, as it may also be in Revelation.⁷⁷ Later traditions say that Peter journeyed to France and/or Britain, but these cannot be corroborated and the sources are dubious.

According to the early church fathers, the Gospel of Mark is based upon the recollections of Peter. Mark, the author of the Gospel, was Peter's interpreter in Rome. Thus, while Mark may not have been an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, he repeatedly heard and translated Peter's preaching and his stories about Jesus. Mark wrote down these stories and recollections, though probably not in chronological order.

The early Church fathers, including Origen and Eusebius, have passed down a unanimous tradition that Peter was martyred in Rome in about 64-68 A.D. This tradition states that he was executed on the Vatican Hill in Rome—crucified upside-down at his own request, feeling himself unworthy to suffer the same manner of death as Jesus. Peter's crucifixion thus fulfilled Jesus' prophecy in John 21:18:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go."

⁷³ Acts 12:1-11

⁷⁴ Acts 15:1-29, especially 15:7-11

⁷⁵ Galatians 2:1-14

⁷⁶ I Peter 5:13

⁷⁷ See Revelation 14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 18:10, and 18:21.

There is no contrary tradition regarding Peter's death, and it is corroborated by this passage from the Muratorian Fragment,⁷⁸ which mentions his martyrdom, though not the manner of his death:

The Acts of all the apostles, however, are compiled in only one Book. Luke collected them for the excellent Theophilus because these different events took place in his own presence. These are all he wants to report, as is clearly borne out by his omission of the martyrdom of Peter and by the fact that he does not report anything about the journey of Paul from the City to Spain.

Similarly, Clement, a disciple of Paul (see Philippians 4:3) and a 1st century A.D. bishop of Rome, mentions Peter's martyrdom in his letter to the Church in Corinth (about 97 A.D.):

Let us place before our eyes the good Apostle, Peter, through unjust odium, underwent not one or two, but many sufferings; and having undergone his martyrdom, he went to the place of glory to which he was entitled.

Andrew

Andrew was probably the first of the twelve apostles to become interested in Jesus. Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist, until he heard John call Jesus "the Lamb of God"; at that point, Andrew left John to follow Jesus.⁷⁹ Andrew then brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus.⁸⁰ However, neither Andrew nor Peter immediately became disciples, for we also read that they were fishing when Jesus later called them to follow Him.⁸¹ Luke adds some details about Jesus preaching in Peter's boat and then performing a miracle to give Peter, James, and John a huge catch of fish.⁸² But curiously, Luke does not mention Andrew.

Like Simon Peter, Andrew was a fisherman, and was probably also a partner of James and John, although Luke does not tell us that.⁸³ Perhaps Andrew left the partnership when he went to follow John the Baptist. Like his brother, Andrew was from Bethsaida,⁸⁴ and presumably had the same father as Peter (i.e., John). When Jesus came to Capernaum, Peter and Andrew were living there, along with Peter's

⁷⁸ A Latin fragment, written in about 180 A.D., was found by a man named Muratori in 1740 A.D. and named after him. The fragment discusses the then-accepted books of New Testament scriptures, describing who wrote them and, in some cases, how they came to be written.

⁷⁹ John 1:35-40

⁸⁰ John 1:41-42

⁸¹ Matthew 4:18-20, Mark 1:16-18

⁸² Luke 5:1-11

⁸³ Luke 5:5-7, 10

⁸⁴ John 1:44

mother-in-law.⁸⁵ Andrew told Jesus about the boy with five loaves and two fish, which Jesus then used to feed 5,000 men (plus women and children).⁸⁶ Andrew naturally associated with Peter, James, and John, as illustrated by the story of the four of them privately questioning Jesus about His prophecy that the Jerusalem Temple would be torn down.⁸⁷ These same four witnessed one of Jesus' earliest miracles, when he healed Peter's mother-in-law.⁸⁸ However, unlike the other three, Andrew was not part of Jesus' inner circle. Andrew may also have been a close friend of Philip; when some Greeks came to him, asking to see Jesus, Philip in turn went to Andrew, and together they approached Jesus.⁸⁹ The Book of Acts mentions Andrew only as being one of the 11 remaining apostles,⁹⁰ and does not discuss any of his activities after Jesus' resurrection. Paul's epistles and the other New Testament letters do not mention Andrew at all.

Various traditions state that Andrew's ministry extended to Parthia, Scythia (the part of Russia around the Black Sea), Ephesus, and Greece. Any or all of these are possible. Ephesus was of course the adopted home of Andrew's friend, John, and a dubious tradition (related above) says that Andrew, while with John in Ephesus, had a vision that John should write an account of Jesus' life, resulting in the Gospel of John. Andrew's ministry in Scythia is well attested, being mentioned by Eusebius and two apocryphal writings: *The Acts of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew* and the *Martyrdom of St. Andrew*. The Greek ministry comes from the *Acts of Andrew*, another apocryphal writing, which was written in about 260 A.D.

There are two traditions regarding Andrew's death. The *Martyrdom of St. Andrew* says that Andrew was stoned and crucified in Scythia. However, the *Acts of Andrew* says Andrew died in Greece, and this version seems to be both more credible and more widely accepted. According to this latter source, Andrew preached in Greece and incurred the wrath of Aegeates, the proconsul and/or governor of Patros, possibly for converting his wife, Maximilla, to Christianity. Andrew was put on trial and, when he refused to renounce his Christian faith, was crucified on an X-shaped cross. However, rather than being nailed to the cross, Andrew was bound to it with ropes, in order to prolong his agony. He died after about three days in this condition. The generally accepted date of his death is November 30, 69 A.D., although this cannot be corroborated or confirmed.

⁸⁵ Matthew 8:5, 14, and Mark 1:21, 29-30. See also I Corinthians 9:5.

⁸⁶ John 6:8-13

⁸⁷ Mark 13:3-4

⁸⁸ Mark 1:29-31; see also Matthew 8:14-15 and Luke 4:38-39

⁸⁹ John 12:20-22

⁹⁰ Acts 1:13

The X-shaped cross on which Andrew died is known as “St. Andrew’s cross,” and is the official symbol of Scotland. Andrew is claimed as patron saint by Christians in Scotland, Russia, and Greece.

Thomas

Thomas is famous for his refusal to believe in Jesus’ resurrection until he had seen it for himself:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”⁹¹

On the other hand, when Thomas was confronted by the risen Christ in the flesh, Thomas responded in faith: “My Lord and my God!”⁹² Since Thomas was also called “Didymus” (see the above quote), which means “twin,” he was probably a twin. However, his sibling is never identified.

Thomas seems to have been the type of person who always spoke his mind. When Jesus announced that He was returning to Judea (to raise Lazarus from the dead), after almost being stoned there a short time before, Thomas told the other disciples: “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”⁹³ When Jesus told His disciples that He must go away and that “you know the way where I am going,” Thomas protested: “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”⁹⁴

Thomas was one of several disciples present at the Sea of Galilee (along with Peter, Nathanael, James, John, and two others) when Jesus appeared to them there.⁹⁵ However, as with Andrew, the Book of Acts tells us nothing about Thomas’ ministry after Jesus’ resurrection.

Tradition says that Thomas initially went to Babylon, accompanied by Bartholomew and Judas (Thaddaeus), and may have later gone to Parthia. Whether or not this tradition is true, there is a unanimous tradition that Thomas’ mission field included India, and that he was martyred there. This tradition comes from many sources, including the *Acts of Thomas*, an apocryphal writing from the late 2nd or

⁹¹ John 20:24-25

⁹² John 20:28

⁹³ John 11:16; see also John 10:22-39

⁹⁴ John 14:2-5

⁹⁵ John 21:1-2

early 3rd century A.D.,⁹⁶ and the writings of various early Church fathers. The tradition is further corroborated by many oriental sources, including: (1) the Indian church, which unanimously claims derivation from Thomas; (2) a stone inscription that says Thomas converted three of the leading kings of India (Xoren Porumal, king of Bisnaga; Pandi Perumal, king of Pandi; and Xaran Perumal, king of Malabar); (3) a Chaldean book which states that Thomas converted three emperors (corresponding to the three kings in (2), above) and six kings in India, and was murdered by being stoned into unconsciousness and then stabbed with a lance; and (4) the tomb of Mylapore, India, which is the only place, inside or outside of India, which has ever claimed to be the burial place of Thomas. In addition, the presence of a strong Christian community in southern India before the end of the 2nd century, with a remnant present even today, adds further weight to the tradition. More evidence may have existed at one time, but the Portuguese destroyed all church records when they arrived in southern India in the 16th century, thinking that it would help to destroy what they regarded as heretical Christianity.

In any event, this unanimous tradition states that Thomas came to India in about 49 - 52 A.D. It appears likely—though by no means certain—that he began in northern India in about 49 A.D., as related by the *Acts of Thomas*, and went south in 52 A.D. due to war in the north. In southern India, Thomas converted many and established several churches. After a time, he went to the east coast of India, where he was martyred.

India was by no means an unlikely mission field for early Christianity. In Thomas' day, trade routes existed between the Roman Empire and the east, and civilization extended well beyond the borders of the Empire. Northern India lay on the land trade route, and Malabar and other parts of southern India lay on the sea trade route. Roman coins from this general time period have been found in south India, along the Malabar Coast.

Thomas' death is recorded in two similar, but slightly different, traditions. One relates that he was stoned while preaching, and then stabbed with a lance as he lay unconscious. The other tradition is that he was stabbed with a lance while praying on a mountain. Both traditions claim that his murder was instigated by the Brahmans due to the perceived threat that Thomas' preaching carried for the Hindu religion. A stone inscription indicates that Thomas died on December 21st, "in the 30th year of the promulgation of the Gospel."

As noted above, unanimous tradition says that Thomas was buried at Mylapore, along the east coast of India, and now a suburb of Madras. The tomb is of

⁹⁶ According to one source, the *Acts of Thomas* is believed to have been written by Bardesanes, an Edessene writer who lived from 154 to 222 A.D.

similar construction as that of a Roman trading station which operated nearby from about 50 A.D. to about 100 A.D. The tomb was probably built during that same time period.

Matthew

Matthew (also known as Levi) was the son of Alphaeus.⁹⁷ James “the Less” (the other James, not the son of Zebedee) was also the son of Alphaeus.⁹⁸ If we are talking about the same Alphaeus in both cases, then Matthew and James “the Less” were brothers.

Matthew’s alternative name of Levi⁹⁹ probably indicates that he was from the priestly tribe of Israel, the Levites. But Matthew was no priest. He was a tax collector, which was a despised profession in that day. The Romans did not generally collect their own taxes. Instead, they delegated the job to a member of the local population, who was given a specific quota of money to pay to the Roman officials. A tax collector made his living by keeping any taxes he collected in excess of the quota—the more taxes he collected, the wealthier he became. For obvious reasons, tax collectors were often greedy, dishonest, and oppressive. And regardless of their personal character, they were viewed by the Jews as collaborators with Rome. Tax collectors were therefore vehemently hated by their fellow Jews. Performing the task of a tax collector required at least a modest education, including familiarity with several languages (the local language of the area, plus Greek and Latin), so Matthew may have been the best educated of the apostles.

Matthew’s tax office was in Capernaum, probably near the seashore where Jesus was preaching.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps Jesus noticed Matthew listening intently to the preaching. In any event, when Jesus passed by Matthew’s tax office, He told Matthew to “follow Me”; Matthew left everything and did so.¹⁰¹ Matthew then gave a party for Jesus, attended by many sinners and tax-collectors.¹⁰² Unfortunately, the New Testament tells us nothing else about Matthew.

Matthew is traditionally believed to have been the author of the Gospel of Matthew, although some scholars believe the Gospel was written in his name by one of his disciples. Unlike the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Matthew’s Gospel was almost certainly written for a Jewish audience, since he repeatedly shows how Jesus fulfilled

⁹⁷ Mark 2:14

⁹⁸ Luke 6:15; Mark 3:18; Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13

⁹⁹ See Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27, 29.

¹⁰⁰ See Mark 2:1, 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Luke 5:27-28; Mark 2:13-14; Matthew 9:9

¹⁰² Luke 5:29; Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15

Old Testament prophecies.¹⁰³ Irenaeus¹⁰⁴ and Augustine¹⁰⁵ say Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Aramaic. Eusebius¹⁰⁶ says the same, quoting Papias.¹⁰⁷

We have several testimonies from the church fathers about Matthew's missionary fields. Irenaeus says that Matthew preached the Gospel to the Hebrews (i.e., the Jews), but does not tell us where. Since there were Jews all over the Roman Empire, this does not limit Matthew to Palestine. Clement of Alexandria¹⁰⁸ says Matthew went to Ethiopia, northern Greece, Syria, and Persia. Each of these areas is confirmed by later Christian writers. However, in Matthew's time, "Ethiopia" referred not only to the area of northeast Africa south of Egypt, but also to an area of Persia south of the Caspian Sea. Either could have been part of Matthew's mission field, and we cannot know with certainty which is correct, but the Asiatic Ethiopia seems more likely since it is geographically close to Syria and Persia, two other areas visited by Matthew.

The circumstances of Matthew's death are uncertain. Clement of Alexandria and another early Christian writer named Heracleon state that Matthew died a natural death. The Jewish Talmud states that Matthew was condemned to death by the Jewish Sanhedrin. There is a western tradition that Matthew was martyred, but even the manner of death is uncertain—both sword and spear are mentioned. The Roman Catholic tradition is that he was beheaded. Matthew's body is believed to be buried in Salerno, Italy.

Philip

Philip is a Greek name, which may mean that Philip was a Greek Jew, or had some Greek heritage. Another indication of Philip's Greek connections is that when some Greeks asked to see Jesus, they approached Philip.¹⁰⁹ Like Peter and Andrew,

¹⁰³ For example, see Matthew 1:18-23 (Jesus' birth from a virgin fulfills prophecy); Matthew 2:1-6 (Jesus' birth in Bethlehem fulfills prophecy); Matthew 2:13-15 (flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Egypt fulfills prophecy); Matthew 2:16-18 (Herod's slaughter of children fulfills prophecy); Matthew 3:1-3 and 11:7-11 (ministry of John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus as Messiah, as prophesied); Matthew 4:12-16 (Jesus' preaching in Galilee fulfills prophecy); Matthew 8:14-17 (Jesus' healing fulfills prophecy); Matthew 12:15-21 (Jesus' ministry fulfills prophecy); Matthew 13:11-15 and 13:34-35 (Jesus' teaching in parables fulfills prophecy); Matthew 21:1-5 (Jesus' entry into Jerusalem fulfills prophecy); Matthew 26:31 (disciples' abandonment of Jesus fulfills prophecy); and Matthew 27:3-10 (circumstances surrounding Judas' death fulfill prophecy).

¹⁰⁴ Bishop of Lyons, France; lived ca. 130 - ca. 202

¹⁰⁵ Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa; lived 354 - 430

¹⁰⁶ Church historian, lived about 260 - 340 A.D.

¹⁰⁷ Bishop of Hierapolis, circa 100 A.D., whom Irenaeus says was a disciple of John the apostle

¹⁰⁸ Lived about 150 - 220 A.D.

¹⁰⁹ John 12:20-22

Philip was from Bethsaida.¹¹⁰ We are told nothing of Philip's background, but only that Jesus found Philip and told him to "follow Me."¹¹¹ However, John implies that this occurred outside Galilee,¹¹² so Philip may have been living or travelling away from home at the time. Perhaps he had come to hear Jesus, or he could have been there on business or a religious pilgrimage.

Philip seems to have been a close friend of Nathanael (who may be the apostle, Bartholomew), because Philip sought him out and convinced him to come see Jesus, whom Philip described as "Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote."¹¹³ However, while Philip quickly recognized that Jesus was a prophet, or maybe even the Messiah, Philip was slow to understand that Jesus also claimed to be God. When Jesus tried to explain this to the apostles, Philip showed his spiritual blindness by stating: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." This prompted Jesus to respond: "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. . . ." ¹¹⁴

Before Jesus fed the 5,000, he tested Philip by asking: "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat."¹¹⁵ Philip replied, in apparent disbelief, that even 200 denarii ¹¹⁶ would not be enough to feed so many people. ¹¹⁷ This occurred at or near Bethsaida, Philip's home town. ¹¹⁸

The book of Acts lists Philip as one of the remaining eleven apostles. ¹¹⁹ Acts later speaks of a Philip who was a Greek Jew, and who became one of the seven deacons of the early church. ¹²⁰ This was almost certainly a different Philip, since none of the apostles were to serve as deacons. ¹²¹ The deacon Philip, who is also

¹¹⁰ John 1:44 and 12:21

¹¹¹ John 1:43

¹¹² John 1:43 says: "The next day He [Jesus] purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip, and Jesus said to him, 'Follow me.' "

¹¹³ John 1:45-46

¹¹⁴ John 14:8-9

¹¹⁵ John 6:5

¹¹⁶ A denarius was a unit of money, equivalent to a day's wages for a common laborer. See, for example, Matthew 20:1-2.

¹¹⁷ John 6:7

¹¹⁸ John 6:2-14 and Luke 9:10-17 both describe the feeding of the 5,000. Luke 9:10 tells us that this occurred near Bethsaida.

¹¹⁹ Acts 1:13

¹²⁰ Acts 6:1-5

¹²¹ See Acts 6:2-4:

And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may

called “Philip the evangelist,” settled in Caesarea, and had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.¹²²

This second Philip introduces confusion, because Chapter 8 of Acts says “Philip” proclaimed Christ in Samaria and performed many miracles there, but does not tell us whether this is Philip the apostle or Philip the evangelist.¹²³ Acts 8 also tells another story involving a Philip—almost certainly the same Philip as in the earlier verses of Chapter 8—who received instruction from an angel of the Lord to go from Jerusalem to Gaza.¹²⁴ There Philip met, converted, and baptized an Ethiopian eunuch, who was a high-ranking court official of the Ethiopian queen. Again, Acts does not make clear which Philip is intended here. However, most scholars seem to agree—probably on the basis of Acts 21:8-9¹²⁵—that the Philip of Acts 8 is Philip the evangelist, rather than Philip the apostle. Like most of the other apostles, Philip is not mentioned in Paul’s letters or the other books of the New Testament after Acts.

Papias,¹²⁶ in his *Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord*, and Polycrates,¹²⁷ each tell us that Philip the apostle lived in Hierapolis, a city in Asia Minor. Papias says he received this information from Philip’s own daughters, whom Papias heard speaking there. Hierapolis is about 16 miles from Colossae and about 6 miles from Laodicea—all three cities were centers of Christian activity. Paul wrote a letter to the church in Colossae, and John wrote to the church of Laodicea in the Book of Revelation, but there is no New Testament letter to the church at Hierapolis. This could be because Philip was known to be in charge of the church there.

In Philip’s day, the warm spring waters at Hierapolis were believed to have healing powers, so sick visitors flocked there from all over the Roman Empire. These visitors would have formed a promising mission field. Philip’s Greek background may have ideally suited him for preaching the Gospel in Hierapolis, which was heavily Greek in culture.

put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

The Greeks’ apparent distrust of the Hebrew Christians undoubtedly influenced the apostles’ decision to delegate this task to the Greek Christians. See Acts 6:1.

¹²² Acts 21:8-9

¹²³ Acts 8:5-8, 12-13

¹²⁴ Acts 8:26-40

¹²⁵ Acts 21:8-9 says:

On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

¹²⁶ Bishop of Hierapolis, ca. 100-135 A.D.

¹²⁷ ca. 194 A.D.

Church tradition says that Philip also preached in Scythia before returning to Hierapolis where he was martyred by crucifixion. The fact that Philip's tomb is in Hierapolis—which is confirmed by Polycrates—lends credence to this tradition. However, the *Acts of Philip* says he was martyred by being pierced through the thighs and hung upside down. Pope John III ¹²⁸ is said to have acquired the body of Philip from Hierapolis and interred it in Rome in the Church of the Holy Apostles (which, until about the 10th century A.D., was known as the Church of the Holy Apostles Philip and James).

Finally, there is a very late tradition that Philip preached in France. However, this tradition is very dubious and unreliable, since the earliest sources for this tradition date from about the 7th century A.D. The tradition probably arose from confusion of Gaul (France) with Galatia (a region of Asia Minor); indeed the Gauls originally came from Galatia. Nevertheless, the tradition cannot be conclusively refuted.

Bartholomew

Bartholomew literally means, “son of Tolmai.” The synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as the Book of Acts, tell us nothing about Bartholomew except that he was one of Jesus' 12 apostles. ¹²⁹ But in each of the synoptic Gospels, Bartholomew's name is juxtaposed to that of Philip. And in the Gospel of John, a friend of Philip, who is called Nathanael, is given some prominence. This has led many to conclude that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person (although this connection was apparently not made until about the 9th century A.D., by Elias of Damascus). So let's see what John tells us about Nathanael.

Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee. ¹³⁰ Not long after Philip became a disciple of Jesus, he found Nathanael and told him that Jesus of Nazareth was the one “of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote.” ¹³¹ Nathanael was skeptical at first, especially when he heard that Jesus was from Nazareth. ¹³² But at Philip's urging, Nathanael came to see Jesus for himself. ¹³³ As Nathanael approached, Jesus said of him: “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” ¹³⁴ (“Guile” means treachery or deceit.) When Nathanael asked Jesus, “How do you know me,” Jesus responded that He had seen Nathanael under a fig tree before Philip had come to him. ¹³⁵ Jesus' response clearly impressed Nathanael, because he

¹²⁸ Pope, 560 - 572

¹²⁹ Luke 6:14; Mark 3:18; Matthew 10:3, Acts 1:13

¹³⁰ John 21:2

¹³¹ John 1:45

¹³² John 1:46

¹³³ John 1:45-46

¹³⁴ John 1:47

¹³⁵ John 1:48

immediately confessed that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel.¹³⁶ Jesus replied that Nathanael would see greater things than that, and that he would see “the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”¹³⁷ John also tells us that Nathanael was with Peter, Thomas, James, John, and two other disciples at the Sea of Galilee when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection.¹³⁸ Neither Nathanael nor Bartholomew is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.

Eusebius tells us that St. Pantaenus, in the early 3rd century A.D., travelled to India, where some Christians showed him a Hebrew copy of the Gospel of Matthew and told him that Bartholomew had brought it when he planted the faith there. Eusebius may have gotten this from the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, which tells this same story. From this, it is believed that Bartholomew preached for a time in India. However, “India” was often used to refer to numerous regions east and south of the Roman Empire, including Arabia, Ethiopia, Libya, Parthia, and Persia, so any of these could be intended. Also, if true, the Gospel of Matthew must have been written at a much earlier date than is generally accorded it today.

The Preaching of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew says that Bartholomew preached in Parthia, which is modern Iran. The *Acts of Philip* says that Philip and Bartholomew preached together in Hierapolis (in Asia Minor) for a time, and that Bartholomew escaped the martyrdom suffered by Philip there. John Chrysostom¹³⁹ places Bartholomew for a time in Lycaonia, which is also in Asia Minor.

The Armenian church claims Bartholomew as one of its founders, along with the apostle Judas Thaddaeus. A unanimous, though not early, Armenian tradition says that Judas Thaddaeus arrived first, and stayed from about 43 A.D. until about 66 A.D., and that Bartholomew was present from about 60 A.D. until his martyrdom in about 68 A.D. (Armenia is an area of south Russia and northern Iran, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.)

There are several traditions about Bartholomew’s death, all involving martyrdom. *The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* states that he was placed in a sack and cast into the sea. Other traditions state that he was crucified (head downward), flayed alive, or beheaded. The Armenians place his martyrdom in the city of

¹³⁶ See John 1:49. John does not tell us why Jesus’ answer so impressed Nathanael, but the most likely explanation is Nathanael’s conversation with Philip occurred at a considerable distance from Jesus, so that He could not have observed it except through supernatural means.

¹³⁷ John 1:50-51

¹³⁸ See John 21:1-4. The fact that Nathanael, like the apostles Peter, Thomas, James, and John—and unlike the “two disciples”—is specifically identified by John may imply that Nathanael was also an apostle. If so, then Nathanael and Bartholomew must be the same person.

¹³⁹ Chrysostom lived about 345-407 A.D., and became the Bishop of Constantinople.

Albanopolis, also known as Albana (modern Derbend, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea).

Simon the Zealot

There are many Simons in the New Testament:

- (1) Simon Peter, the apostle;
- (2) Simon the Zealot, also an apostle;¹⁴⁰
- (3) Simon, a brother of Jesus;¹⁴¹
- (4) Simon the Pharisee, whom Mark and Matthew call Simon the leper;¹⁴²
- (5) Simon Iscariot, the father of Judas Iscariot;¹⁴³
- (6) Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to carry Jesus' cross;¹⁴⁴
- (7) Simon, one of the two men who encountered Jesus along the road to Emmaus;¹⁴⁵
- (8) Simon the Magician;¹⁴⁶ and
- (9) Simon the tanner.¹⁴⁷

Unfortunately, all we know of Simon the Zealot from the New Testament was that he was an apostle and a Zealot. The Zealots opposed Roman rule of the Jews—often violently. Simon surely could not have remained a Zealot for long after becoming one of Jesus' followers, in light of Jesus' teachings about non-violence. Simon the Zealot was probably called by this name to distinguish him from that other apostle named Simon—Simon Peter.

Dorotheus¹⁴⁸ tells us: “Simon Zelotes traversed all Mauritania [a region of North Africa, which included parts of modern Morocco and Algeria], and the regions of the Africans, preaching Christ. He was at last crucified, slain, and buried in Britain.” If this account is accurate, Simon must have been killed in southern Britain—which had been conquered and occupied by the Romans in 43 A.D.—because crucifixion was not a British method of execution. Roman Catholic traditions say that he arrived in Britain in 60 A.D., during a vicious war between the Romans and the British, and was crucified on May 10, 61 A.D.

However, a competing tradition says that Simon preached in Egypt, and then later went to Persia with the apostle Judas Thaddaeus, where both were martyred.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13

¹⁴¹ Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3

¹⁴² Luke 7:36-50; Mark 14:3-9; Matthew 26:6-13

¹⁴³ John 6:71

¹⁴⁴ Luke 23:26; Mark 15:21; Matthew 27:32

¹⁴⁵ Luke 24:13-35, and especially Luke 13:34

¹⁴⁶ Acts 8:9-13, 18-24

¹⁴⁷ Acts 9:43, 10:6

¹⁴⁸ Bishop of Tyre, about 300 A.D.

This tradition states that Simon was sawed apart, while Judas was killed with a halberd (a weapon that is like a combination of a spear and an ax). These conflicting stories may be the result of confusion between Simon the Zealot and one of the other Simons mentioned in the New Testament, such as Simon the brother of Jesus.

Judas son of James (a/k/a Thaddaeus)

Judas is the Greek form of Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel (and the one from which we get the word, “Jew”). The Latin form of the name is “Jude.” Mark and Matthew call him “Thaddaeus,”¹⁴⁹ which probably means “dear” or “beloved.” Luke refers to him as “Judas, son of James,”¹⁵⁰ while John simply calls him “Judas (not Iscariot).”¹⁵¹ (Note that each of the Gospel writers refers to Judas Thaddaeus in a way that distinguishes him from Judas Iscariot.)

Like “Simon,” the name, “Judas” (or “Jude”), was a popular one:

- (1) Judas the apostle, son of James;
- (2) Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus;¹⁵²
- (3) Judas, a brother of Jesus;¹⁵³
- (4) Judas of Galilee, a false prophet;¹⁵⁴
- (5) Judas, a resident of Damascus;¹⁵⁵ and
- (6) Judas Barsabbas.¹⁵⁶

The confusion this common name generated is illustrated by the title of an apocryphal book, which confused Judas Thaddaeus and Judas the brother of Jesus: *The Belief of the Blessed Judas the Brother of Our Lord Who Was Surnamed Thaddaeus*. The possibility that Judas Thaddaeus actually was the above-mentioned brother of Jesus seems very unlikely, since Jesus’ relatives thought He was out of His mind,¹⁵⁷ at least until after His resurrection. Therefore, the likelihood that His early followers, such as the eleven apostles, included one of His brothers appears to be remote.

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) only tell us that Judas Thaddaeus was one of the 12 apostles. John’s Gospel contains another reference to Judas Thaddaeus, which reveals that he was as slow as the rest of the apostles to comprehend Jesus’ message. As Jesus was speaking about many spiritual matters—including His own death, His relationship with the Father, and the role of the Holy

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18

¹⁵⁰ Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13

¹⁵¹ John 14:22

¹⁵² See Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:19, and Luke 6:16.

¹⁵³ Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55

¹⁵⁴ Acts 5:37

¹⁵⁵ Acts 9:11

¹⁵⁶ Acts 15:22

¹⁵⁷ See Mark 3:21.

Spirit—Judas heard Jesus say, “After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you will live also.”¹⁵⁸ As Jesus tried to go on,¹⁵⁹ Judas interrupted Him to ask: “Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world.”¹⁶⁰ Jesus simply goes on talking, apparently ignoring Judas’ question.¹⁶¹ We learn no more about Judas Thaddaeus in the New Testament. He probably did not write the Letter of Jude, which many scholars believe was written by Judas, the brother of Jesus.¹⁶²

Nicephorus Callistus, an early historian of the Christian church, says that Judas Thaddaeus preached in Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia, before suffering martyrdom in Syria. However, Armenian tradition claims that Judas preached there for many years, from about 43 to 66 A.D., being joined in about 60 A.D. by the apostle Bartholomew, and that Judas eventually suffered martyrdom there. (Armenia is in present-day southern Russia and northern Iran.) The method of his martyrdom is similarly cloudy, with several competing claims: (1) stabbed with a javelin, (2) shot with arrows, (3) tied to a cross; and (4) crucified.

In Eusebius’ history of the church, he tells a story which he obtained from correspondence he saw in Edessa and translated himself. (Edessa is a city in Armenia, in southern Russia.) The story goes that Abgar, King of Edessa, wrote to Jesus, saying he had heard of Jesus’ miraculous healings, and inviting Jesus to come to Edessa to escape mistreatment by the Jews and to heal a dreadful, incurable illness Abgar had contracted. Jesus wrote back to the king, explaining that He must remain in Palestine to fulfill all things there, but promising to send one of his disciples to heal the king after Jesus had gone to heaven. Eusebius’ story goes on to say that Judas was picked to go to Abgar after Jesus’ ascension. In Edessa, Judas preached the Gospel, while healing the king and many others. The apocryphal book, *The Acts of*

¹⁵⁸ John 14:19

¹⁵⁹ John 14:20-21

¹⁶⁰ John 14:22

¹⁶¹ See John 14:23-26:

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 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. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.
But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

¹⁶² See Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55. The author of Jude calls himself the “brother of James.” (See Jude 1.) As discussed below, James was another brother of Jesus, and was known as “James the Just.” The author of Jude mentions that he is the brother of this well known James, since humility did not permit him to claim a blood relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

St. Peter, similarly places Judas in Edessa, as well as Syria, and so does a tradition of the church in India.

James “the Less,” son of Alphaeus

This James is known as James “the Less,” to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee. The father of James “the Less” was Alphaeus.¹⁶³ Since Matthew’s father was also named Alphaeus,¹⁶⁴ James and Matthew may have been brothers (although the New Testament does not say so). James’ mother was named Mary, and he had a brother named Joses (or Joseph).¹⁶⁵ Mary, the mother of James, was almost certainly a follower of Jesus herself, for she appears at His crucifixion,¹⁶⁶ His burial,¹⁶⁷ and His tomb on Resurrection Sunday.¹⁶⁸

At one time the Roman Catholic Church believed that James “the Less” was the same person as James “the Just.” (James “the Just” was a brother of Jesus who later became a leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem,¹⁶⁹ and was probably the author of the letter of James in the New Testament.) However, this is very unlikely. While both had a mother named Mary, the father of James “the Less” is Alphaeus, not Joseph, and there is no evidence—by tradition or otherwise—that Mary remarried after Joseph’s death. Also, as with Judas Thaddaeus, the possibility that one of Jesus’ brothers would have been among His early followers seems remote, in view of His relatives’ initial skepticism toward His ministry.¹⁷⁰ Thus, most scholars now accept that James “the Less” and James “the Just” were two different persons.

Tradition tells us that the Jewish leaders hurled James “the Just” down from the roof of the Temple in Jerusalem when he refused to speak against Jesus in front of the crowds below, but instead confessed his belief in the Lord. When the fall did not kill James, he was stoned and then beaten with a club until he died. He was buried on the Mount of Olives.

On the other hand, James “the Less” probably undertook missionary journeys to spread the Gospel. Unfortunately, what we know about James “the Less” stops there, because of the frequent confusion of this James with both (1) James “the Greater,” son of Zebedee, and (2) James “the Just,” the brother of Jesus. Most of the traditions regarding James “the Less” seem more consistent with James “the Just,” and therefore cannot be trusted. The only tradition for James “the Less” that avoids

¹⁶³ Luke 6:15, Mark 3:18, Matthew 10:3, Acts 1:13

¹⁶⁴ Mark 2:14

¹⁶⁵ Mark 15:40, Luke 24:10; Matthew 27:56

¹⁶⁶ Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56; and by implication from Luke 24:1-10, Luke 23:49

¹⁶⁷ Mark 15:47; Matthew 27:61; and by implication from Luke 24:1-10, Luke 23:55

¹⁶⁸ Luke 24:10

¹⁶⁹ See Galatians 1:19, 2:9, 2:12; I Corinthians 15:7; and Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18.

¹⁷⁰ See Mark 3:21.

this problem says that James became the first bishop of the Syrian Christian church. We do not know how James “the Less” died.

- Sources:
- (1) *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, by William Steuart McBirnie, Ph.D. (Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1973)
 - (2) *The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation*, with annotations, etc. by Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Th.D., Ph.D. (Moody Press, Chicago, 1978).
 - (3) *A History of Christianity, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette (Harpers and Row, New York, 1953, 1975).
 - (4) *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea, in Palestine*, translated from the original by Isaac Boyle (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970, 1972, 1979).
 - (5) *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1962).
 - (6) *The Story of Civilization, Volume III: Caesar and Christ*, by Will Durant (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1944).
 - (7) *Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary* (in Bible Explorer 3.0 software, 2005).