

The Twelve Apostles

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(See [History](#).)
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1. General Information

The [large chart below](#) shows all of the lists of the twelve apostles given in the New Testament, arranged for comparison, plus additional information. These lists are interesting in a number of ways.

First, no list exactly matches the order of any other list; they each have some unique orderings. (It is interesting that two of the lists are compiled by Luke, the writer of Luke and Acts, but do not follow exactly the same order!)

Second, the way the lists are arranged into groups or pairs is important, and provides us with a lot of information. See 3. [The Three Groups of Four](#) and 4. [Other Groupings in the Lists](#) below.

John provides no complete list as such, though all but 3 of the 12 are mentioned somewhere in the book, as shown in the chart. Actually, John is the only one who mentions many of the apostles in situations other than these lists or the accounts of when Jesus calls them. In fact, other than the core group (Peter, James, and John) and Judas Iscariot none of the other apostles are even mentioned in the synoptic gospels except in these lists or in the accounts of when Jesus calls them.

We know the fathers of 8 of the 12, as shown in the chart, though the word “son” (υἰός) is almost never used in these cases (except in John 1:42), being implied by the genitive (e.g. “James of Zebedee”).

Another list of the Twelve is mentioned in Revelation 21:14, which says, “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”. However, it does not provide us with the actual list, which leaves us wondering who exactly was on it. Obviously Judas was not, since he betrayed the Lord, as Peter makes clear in Acts 1:15-22. Was Matthias on it? Or was the apostle Paul the real replacement for Judas? (See comments in endnote [6](#) below.)

2. The Chart

Luke list	Mark list	Matthew list	mentioned in John	Other Information	Acts list
Official choosing of the 12, early in Jesus’ second year of ministry, (mid 28 A.D.), with the complete list (reordered to match the Matthew list)	A complete list of the 12 (probably late in 28 A.D.) which clearly divides the	A list from an informal meeting of 7 disciples (reordered to match the Matthew list)	Others mentioned in John (if never mentioned marked with —)		Another complete list of the 11 after Jesus’ ascension (mid 30

		list into distinct groups												A.D.) which divides the text into slightly different groups (not reordered)
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Luke 6:14-16 Mark 3:16-19 Matthew 10:2-4 John 21:2 Initial Call "Official" Call Hometown Occupation Father Other Info Acts 1:13

Group	Category	Luke 6:14-16	Mark 3:16-19	Matthew 10:2-4	John 21:2	Initial Call	"Official" Call	Hometown	Occupation	Father	Other Info	Acts 1:13	Group
Group 1 (Jesus' intimate group)	brothers	1. Simon (Peter)	1. Simon (Peter)	1. Simon (Peter)	Simon Peter	(often)	Simon Peter (Cephas) (Jn. 1:40-42)	Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44)	fisherman (see "Official" Call)	John (Jn. 21, 1:42)	Wrote 1 and 2 Peter	1. Peter	Group 1 (Jesus' intimate group)
		2. his brother Andrew	4. Andrew	2. his brother Andrew		Jn. 6:8, 12:22	Andrew (Jn. 1:35-42)		↑ (north shore of Sea of Galilee, mid 28 A.D.)	fisherman (see "Official" Call)	John		
	brothers	3. James	2. James [son] of Zebedee	3. James [son] of Zebedee	the [son]s of Zebedee	(never by name)		Bethsaida? (because business partners with the above)	fisherman (see "Official" Call)	Zebedee	Died 44 A.D. ¹ (Acts 12:2)	3. James	
		4. John	3. his brother John (Boanerges = Sons of Thunder)	4. his brother John		(never by name) ²	(John?) ² (Jn. 1:35-40)		fisherman (see "Official" Call)	Zebedee	Wrote 5 New Testament books	4. Andrew	
Group 2	usually grouped together	5. Philip	5. Philip	5. Philip		Jn. 6:5-7, 12:21-22, 14:8-9	Philip (Jn. 1:43-46)	Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44, 12:21)				5. Philip	Group 2
		6. Bartholomew	6. Bartholomew	6. Bartholomew	←?=Nathanael ³		Nathanael (Jn. 1:45-51)	Cana in Galilee (Jn. 21:2)				6. Thomas	
	usually grouped together	8. Thomas	8. Thomas	7. Thomas	Thomas (Didymus) ⁴	Jn. 11:16, 14:5, 20:24-29						7. Bartholomew	
		7. Matthew	7. Matthew	8. Matthew the tax collector		—		Mt. 9:9-17 Mk. 2:14-17 Lk. 5:27-31 ↑ (Capernaum, early 28 A.D.)	Capernaum?	tax collector (Mt. 10:3) (also see "Official" Call)	Alphaeus ⁵	Wrote Matthew, a.k.a. Levi [son] of Alphaeus (Mk. 2:14-17, Lk. 5:27-31)	
Group 3		9. James [son] of Alphaeus	9. James [son] of Alphaeus	9. James [son] of Alphaeus		—				Alphaeus ⁵		9. James [son] of Alphaeus	Group 3
		11. Judas [son] of James	10. Thaddaeus	10. Thaddaeus		Judas (not Iscariot) Jn. 14:22				James		10. Simon the Zealot	
		10. Simon	11. Simon	11. Simon		—						11. Judas	

the Zealot	the Zealot	<u>the Zealot</u>									[son] of James
12. Judas Iscariot , who became a traitor	12. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him	12. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him		Jn. 6:71, 12:4, 13:2,26-30, 18:2-5			probably Kerioth south of Hebron	treasurer of the disciples	Simon Iscariot (Jn. 6:71)	Committed suicide 30 A.D. (Mt. 27:5, Acts 1:18-19)	(12. Judas replaced by Matthias , Acts 1:26) ⁶

two other disciples, unidentified

↑
(all in Bethany beyond Jordan, 26 or early 27 A.D.)

Red: Distinct names given to a particular individual or pair

Green: Out of the order given by Matthew, which is as close to a standard order as any

A double line between cells indicates a break in the list, suggesting the start of a new group.

Explicitly called brothers in the list

3. The Three Groups of Four

All four of the complete lists of the apostles given in the chart above group the 12 into the same 3 groups of 4, and each group always begins with the same person. So Peter is always number 1, Philip is always 5, and James son of Alphaeus is always 9. Also, Judas Iscariot is always listed last, as number 12. Other than this, the order within each group varies.

The meaning of the first group is clear: these are the 4 fishermen, and are also Jesus' intimate group among the disciples, especially Peter, James, and John, whom Jesus often takes along with him separately, as in the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-13, Mk. 9:2-13, Lk. 9:28-36), the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:37), and many other cases. (They are usually listed as "Peter, James and John", though occasionally they are listed in other ways, like "Peter and the two sons of Zebedee" in Mt. 26:37, and in Luke as "Peter, John and James" in Lk. 8:51, 9:28.) Occasionally Andrew is mentioned as well, as in Mk. 1:29, 13:3.

What about the other two groups? They must mean something; otherwise they would not be consistent among the four lists in spite of other variation. And it seems that they do: the second group is the second most important group in terms of (positive) involvement in Jesus' ministry, as we can see from how many times they are all mentioned in the gospels, as shown in the chart. The third group includes those who have the least (positive) involvement in Jesus' ministry. James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot are never mentioned at all outside the lists, and Judas son of James is only mentioned once, in Jn. 14:22, as "Judas (not Iscariot)".

As for Judas Iscariot, he had lots of involvement in Jesus' ministry, but all of it was negative, before, during, and after the betrayal of Jesus.

Thus the three groups apparently serve to rank the apostles according to how useful they were to Jesus. For more information about this question, a few helpful links I found are edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2011/01/30/introducing-and-ranking-the-twelve-apostles and various comments at biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/10-2.htm.⁷

4. Other Groupings in the Lists

In English when we enumerate a list of more than 2 items, we only use the word "and" before the last one, as in "Peter, Andrew, James, and John". However, in Greek this is not the usual practice; instead, "and" (καί) is inserted between all of the items in the list: "Peter and Andrew and James and John". What is unusual is when a break is made in such a list by leaving out the "and" between two people in the list. This actually indicates the beginning of a new list, and Matthew uses this to break the second and third groups into 4 pairs of individuals, which is what the double lines ===== between cells indicate

in his list in the chart. The Acts list has different groupings, as shown in the chart. We could surmise that these groupings mean something, but in most cases it is unclear what the association would be, except for the cases I have already discussed above or in the footnotes.

¹ James was the first to die (after Judas), and the only one (besides Judas) whose death is recorded in the New Testament. The only other apostles whose death years are known from tradition died much later, the earliest being Peter, who died under Nero, just as Paul did, perhaps in 66 or 67 A.D., several years after the last events recorded in Acts.

² John is never mentioned by name in the book of John, but is often mentioned indirectly. He may have been the other disciple who is not named in John 1:35-40. See footnotes 3 and 4 in [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#).

³ Nathanael is never explicitly equated with Bartholomew, the former only being mentioned in the Synoptics, and the latter only in John, but this very fact, plus the fact that both are associated closely with Philip (Nathanael in John 1 and [Bartholomew](#) in 3 of the lists), and that Nathanael appears at both the start and the end of Jesus' ministry, suggests that Nathanael was almost certainly one of the core group, and was probably the same as Bartholomew. Most commentators and traditions maintain this position.

⁴ The name Thomas is the Greek form of an Aramaic or Hebrew word meaning "twin", Hebrew [תאומים](#) /tā'ʔōm/, which only occurs in the plural in the Old Testament [תאומים](#) /təʔōm' mīm/. Three times in John the equivalent Greek name Δίδυμος Didymus, also meaning twin, is given in addition, to make it clear that they really called him "twin". However, this is probably a nickname, and the Bible never gives his real name. Neither does it say who his twin was, though one theory which assumes that he is listed after his twin Matthew is given in the next footnote.

⁵ Even though both Levi (Matthew) and James are called the son of Alphaeus, some commentators doubt that they are brothers but the sons of two different men named Alphaeus, since they are never grouped together in the text as are the other brothers. However, at least one commentator, [Ellicott](#), claims that Matthew, Thomas, and James are all brothers, and are grouped together in the list for that reason, and gives some interesting arguments for this. So who knows?

⁶ Matthias is chosen as the replacement for Judas in Acts 1:26, but is never mentioned again. Many have suggested that the real replacement for Judas was the Apostle Paul, whom Jesus clearly chose and called on the way to Damascus in Acts 9.

⁷ One comment that I found especially interesting at this link was this one in "[Bengel's Gnomens](#)", which has some interesting insights, but does not seem to actually be true: "The first [[Matthew](#)] and third [[Luke](#)] arrangements correspond generally to the time of their vocation [calling], and the conjunction of the apostles in twos; the second [[Mark](#)], to their dignity before our Lord's passion; the fourth [[Acts](#)], to their dignity after His ascension." The first part of this would suggest that the Matthew and Luke lists show the order in which they were called, which if we look at the chart, is not really true. The second part would suggest that the Mark list indicates their importance during Jesus' ministry (which confirms what I have said above about the three groups), and the third part would suggest that the list in Acts indicates their importance in the history of early church. Other than what I have already said about the three groups, I can sort of see that these [theories](#) are marginally true, but only in reference to group 1: in the gospels James may have been considered more important than John, since he is usually mentioned first, whereas in Acts John is clearly the most important in terms of his activity, and of course was the writer of 5 of the New Testament books. So, in short, I think the variation in ordering is probably more random than anything.