

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE

The disciples first called by the Lord Jesus are named in Matt 10:2-4. The word disciple means follower. Altho there were many others who became followers also, the first twelve were called Apostles. They were chosen for the special purpose of being heralds or messengers of Jesus' message, and were given miraculous powers to authenticate the divine message. For us today who trust Christ as Savior, the Word of God is given for our instruction that we may walk in Him - see Col. 2:6,7.

Apostles - the official name of those twelve disciples chosen (see Matt.10: 1-4) by our Lord to be with him during his ministry, and to whom he intrusted the organization of His Church. These He chose early in His ministry, and ordained "that they should be with Him." The number twelve doubtless was with reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and was fixed so that the apostles were often called simply "the twelve" (Matt. 26:14,17/ John 6: 67; John 20:24; 1Cor. 15:5). Their names were Simon Peter (Cephas Barjona) Andrew, John, Philip, James, Bartholomew (perhaps same as Nathanael), Thomas (Didymus), Matthew (Levi), Simon Zelotes, Jude (Lebbaeus Thaddaeus), James the Less, Judas Iscariot.

The original qualification of an apostle, as stated by Peter (Acts 1:21,22), was that he should have been personally acquainted with our Lord's ministry from his baptism by John to His ascension. Amongst other essential qualifications, an Apostle was to be an eye witness of His resurrection Ministry (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1), which is manifestly impossible today. By this close personal intercourse with Him they were peculiarly fitted to give testimony to the facts of redemption. Shortly after their ordination. "He gave to them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of diseases;" "and sent them forth two by two, to preach the kingdom of God" (Mark 3:14; Matt. 10:1-5; Mark 6:7; Luke 6:1,13; Luke 9:1). They accompanied our Lord on His journeys, saw His wonderful works, heard His discourses to the people (Matt. 5:1; Luke 6:13-49) and those addressed to the Jews (Matt. 19:13, ff; Luke 10:25, ff). They sometimes worked miracles (Mark 6:13; Luke 9:6), sometimes attempted to do so without success (Matt. 17:16). They recognized Jesus as the Christ of God (Matt. 16:16; Luke 9:20), and ascribed supernatural power to Him (Luke 9:54) but did not have a high understanding of His spiritual mission (Matt. 15:16; 16:22; 17:20,21; Luke 9:54; 24:25; John 16:12), and acknowledged the weakness of their faith (Luke 17:5). Jesus taught them to understand the spiritual meaning of His parables (Mark 4:10, sq.; Luke 8:9, ff), and yet when He was removed from the earth their knowledge of His kingdom was very limited (Luke 24:21; John 16:12). Apparently loyal at heart, when He was arrested they all forsook Him and fled (Matt. 26:56). Before His death our Lord promised to the Apostles the Holy Spirit, to fit them to be founders and rulers of the Christian Church (John 14:16,17,26; 15:26,27; 16:7-15), and after His resurrection He confirmed their call, and commissioned them to "preach the Gospel to every creature" (John 20:21-23; Matt. 28:18-20).

Shortly after Christ's ascension they, under divine guidance, chose Mathias to be the successor of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the Church (Acts 2), and the apostles became altogether different men, testifying with power of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 13:31). Their first work was to the building up of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 3-7), and then they carried the Gospel into Samaria (Acts 8:5-25). With this ends the first period of the apostles' ministry, with its center at Jerusalem, and Peter as its prominent figure. In this age Peter represents Jewish Christianity, Paul Gentile Christianity, and John the union of the two. The center of the second period of the apostolic agency is Antioch, where a Church was soon built up, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. Of this and the subsequent period St.Paul was the central figure, and labored with the other apostles (Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-5). In the third period the twelve almost entirely disappear from the sacred narrative, and we have only bits of personal history, which will be found under their respective names.