

The Messiah's Misfits

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Introduction

I often ask myself, “What would I do if I were that person?” If I were a politician, I would attempt to lower taxes and raise morality. If I had influence overseas, I would try to get everyone to drive on the right (that is, the correct) side of the road. And if I were going to start a religious movement that was radically different from anything people had known, I would make sure that I had the most influential, powerful people in society on my side (and I would make sure they had plenty in common so they could all get along).

Nearly 2,000 years ago there was a virgin birth. He was the prophesied Messiah, the Son of God who brought the message of salvation. As He grew older and began to fulfill not only prophecy, but His purpose, He took 12 men under his wing and prepared them for His departure. These men were given the great task to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

I don’t know about you, but I would have chosen the best that society had to offer for this task. So who did Jesus choose? Twelve misfits. Plus, they could not have been more different. He chose uneducated fishermen, a hated tax-collector, a political fanatic, and a couple of power-hungry brothers. Not exactly the best that society had to offer.

Yet, in the eyes of men a strange thing happened. This hodgepodge of men, this motley crew, fulfilled their mission. By the time of the writing of Colossians the gospel had spread throughout the whole world (Colossians 1:6). As we embark on this journey together of studying the 12 apostles, I hope you will see that God’s mission cannot be thwarted, His people can work together, and you can be of service.

Lesson 1: Apostles 101

The Definition of Apostle

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apóstolos* and means one sent forth.¹ An apostle is a messenger. Although we always associate the word with the 12, the word “apostle” is applied to other individuals. The word is applied to Jesus (Hebrews 3:1), Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Galatians 1:19), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), brethren in general (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), as well as Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6). In 2 Corinthians 11:13, some are referred to as false apostles. For the purposes of our study, however, when the word “apostle” is used, it will be a reference to the 12.

The Apostles’ Qualifications

When choosing someone to replace Judas, Peter made it clear that an apostle must be one who was with Jesus and one who witnessed the resurrection. “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21–22). Also, in arguing for his apostleship, Paul posed the question, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1) Some religious groups will claim that there are still apostles today, but clearly from these passages this cannot be the case. A person must have been with Christ and seen Him resurrected to be an apostle.

The Apostles’ Purpose

The apostles were witnesses. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We usually associate the word “witness” with a court setting and for good reason. A witness is one who reports

what he has seen, heard, or knows. The apostles had seen Jesus on a daily basis, they had heard His teaching, and they knew that He was the Son of God. John makes this clear in his first letter.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1–3).

They were to go out and tell what they knew to the lost world.

The Apostles' Calling

Hopefully you were not deprived as a child and you thus know the 12 apostles song. Do you remember the chorus? Yes, Jesus called them, Yes, Jesus called them, Yes, Jesus called them, and they all followed Him. Jesus called the 12 (Mark 3:13), but what does that mean? Simply put, the word “call” in Scripture means to invite.²

Jesus invited these 12 men to come along with Him and be His shadow. An apostle is a messenger. A disciple is a learner. We could accurately say that they were first disciples and then apostles. Once they had learned from Jesus they were then sent out to teach others. That is what all followers of Christ are to do. Learn from Him and then help others learn. “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

We usually think of the calling of the 12 as a one-time event. A bunch of fisherman out washing their nets and up walks Jesus. They left their nets and followed

Him, right? Well, this is true, but there is more to the story. The summoning of the 12 was not just a one-time event. Let's consider three sections of Scripture.

John, Andrew, and Simon

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came 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 Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter) (John 1:35-42).

Two men were following John the Baptist. We know that one of them was Andrew (John 1:40). The other one is unnamed. It is likely John the brother of James because he never mentions himself in his gospel. Andrew is convinced they have found the Messiah so he tells his brother Simon.

Philip and Nathanael

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. 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." 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 there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called

you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:43–51).

The next day, Jesus invites Philip to follow Him. Philip then finds Nathanael and passes on the good news.

Another Encounter with Andrew and Simon Plus James and John

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him (Mark 1:16–20).

These events must have transpired after those in John 1 because John the Baptist is now in prison (Mark 1:14). In John 1:35, John the Baptist was with Andrew and John. By now, we have been introduced to seven of the apostles.

Matthew

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them (Luke 5:27–29).

“And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him” (Mark 2:14).

We now know of eight of the apostles. It would fit chronologically that Matthew’s invitation was extended between the events of Mark 1 and the listing of the 12 in Mark 3, which we turn to now.

The Rest

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him (Mark 3:13–19).

It’s final. These are the twelve. We are not introduced to some of them prior to this listing, but these are the 12 apostles.

The Listing of the Apostles

The apostles are listed together in 4 passages: Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, Luke 6:14–16, and Acts 1:13. They appear in different orders, but there are two similarities within all the lists (refer to figure). First, the names Peter, Philip, and James, are always in the same place. They occupy positions one, five, and nine respectively. Second, they are listed in groups of four, just in differing order. Some order of Andrew, James, and John always follows Peter who is always listed first. Some order of Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew always follows Philip who is listed fifth. A varying order of Thaddeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot always follows James who is always listed ninth.

The apostles seem to be listed in order of their closeness to Christ. Although the order may change somewhat as just discussed, Peter is always first and Judas Iscariot is always last.

MATTHEW 10:1-4	MARK 3:16-19	LUKE 6:14-16	ACTS 1:13
Peter Andrew James John	Peter James John Andrew	Peter Andrew James John	Peter John James Andrew
Philip Bartholomew Thomas Matthew	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
James Lebbaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James Thaddeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James Simon Judas Judas Iscariot	James Simon Judas

Taken from John Macarthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 30.

Review Questions

1. What does the word “apostle” mean?
2. Is the word only applied to the 12?
3. What two qualifications must someone meet to be an apostle?
4. What purpose did apostles serve?
5. What does the word “call” mean?
6. Describe the calling of the apostles.
7. What do you find interesting about the listing of the apostles?

Lesson 2: *Peter, the Leader*

Every generation has popular names. In times past, it seems there was a George or a Mary on every street. Apparently Bryan was popular for those born in the eighties. Everyone at my high school called me by my last name, Nash, because there were so many guys named Bryan. In recent years the name Noah has made resurgence. Rewind a couple thousand years in our planet's history and the popular name for men was Simon. There are at least seven Simons in Scripture. There was one, however, who would become a pivotal person in the church. We know him better as Peter.

Family: The son of Jonah (Matthew 16:17). The brother of Andrew (John 1:40-42)
Married (Luke 4:38)

Hometown: Bethsaida (John 1:44)

Occupation: Fisherman (Mark 1:16)

Education: Very little (Acts 4:13)

Fast Fact: Spoke with a strong accent (Matthew 26:73)

Personality Profile: Outspoken, natural born leader

His Place Within the 12

Peter is portrayed as a leader. As we have already seen, he is always listed first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). Upon his confession that Jesus was the Son of God, Christ told Peter that he would be given the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:19). In Matthew 17:24, tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid the tax. Why ask Peter? Apparently he was the go-to guy. In Acts 1, Peter led the process to replace Judas. In Acts 2, Peter responded to accusations against the apostles and delivered the great Pentecost sermon. Throughout the book of Acts, and the New Testament for that matter, Peter is a leader. Peter was not without his faults, though. It has been said that Peter was the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. He just always seemed to say the wrong thing. I believe we can all see a little of Peter in ourselves. Let's look at six things we know about Peter.

A Man of Change

The great changes that took place within Peter are signified by the change of his name. Throughout Scripture a change of name signifies a life change. Abram was changed to Abraham. Sarai was changed to Sarah. Jacob was called Israel. The persecutor Saul was given the name Paul. The apostle had been given the name Simon, but Christ referred to him as Peter meaning rock.

As we have already mentioned, Peter stuck his foot in his mouth quite often, but when he realized he was wrong he embraced change. In John 13, when Jesus was washing the disciple's feet, Peter refused to be washed. However, when Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8), Peter responded by saying, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" (John 13:9)

Peter denied the Lord three times (Matthew 26), but that was not the end of the story. Peter had fallen, but he got up, brushed himself off and did great things for the Lord. He told Christ three times that he loved Him (John 21:15-17). Jesus told Peter to "feed my sheep." That is exactly what Peter went on to do.

As Christians, change is not optional. We are to be transformed (Romans 12:2). We are given a new name in Christ, and we must not bring reproach upon that name (Colossians 3:17).

A Man of Curiosity

Peter was like a little kid that always asks "Why?" Peter wanted to learn. That may be why he emerged as such a great leader. Leaders are learners. You cannot teach what you do not know.

After hearing a parable Peter spoke up and said, "Explain the parable to us" (Matthew 15:15). Again in Luke 12:41 Peter wanted to have a better understanding of a parable. "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" In Matthew 18:21, Peter wanted to learn about forgiveness. "Lord, how often will my brother sin

against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” We often come down on Peter for asking what we think is such a silly question, but I think this was just Peter’s curious nature. We would do well to ask more questions about forgiveness. In Matthew 19:27, Peter wanted to know about his reward. “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Peter was inquisitive about the one who would betray Christ in John 13:25. “Lord, who is it?”

The only way to learn is to ask. Too often we are content with what we know and yet we want everyone else to be learning. I’ve found that many sermon requests are not true requests from the individual but rather what they want someone else to hear. You can either be a person of contentment or a person of curiosity. Contentment is a great thing but not when it comes to knowledge.

A Man of Commitment

Peter made many mistakes, but he was ultimately committed to Christ. He asked questions, but he also provided wonderful answers to questions that Jesus asked. “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ ” (Matthew 16:16). After many of the disciples had left, Jesus asked the apostles, “ ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God’ ” (John 6:67-69). Peter was truly a man of commitment.

Iconic guitarist, Les Paul, was in a bad car wreck and his arm was severely damaged. The doctors told him they could rebuild it, but he wouldn’t be able to move it. So, he asked the doctors to place his arm at a ninety degree angle so he could still play the guitar. If only that much commitment was in the body of Christ!

A Man of Courage

Peter's commitment is displayed through his courage. He had actions to back up his words. In Matthew 14:27-29, Peter walked on the water to Jesus. He became afraid and fell, but he did get out of the boat. Most are content to just stay in the boat.

In John 18, Peter is ready to take on a gang of soldiers for Christ. "So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. . . . Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear (John 18:3, 10). Some scholars have suggested that from the wording of the chapter there could have been hundreds of soldiers there. What are you doing Peter? Do you think you are going to defeat all of Rome's soldiers with your little sword? Yet another example of Peter's courage (although at times misplaced) for Christ.

Have you ever wondered why it was Peter who denied Christ? What about the rest of the disciples. Where were they? John 18:15-16 gives us the answer. "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in." Peter denied Christ because he stayed close by until the pressure became too much. We should give him some credit for having the courage to stick around longer than the rest.

Peter's courage continues in the book of Acts. He defends the apostles in Acts 2:12-14. He refused to keep his mouth shut in Acts 4:18-20, making the bold declaration, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Also in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men."

Someone once wisely said, “A ship is safe in harbor, but that’s not what ships are for.” Some Christians want to stay in the harbor. The problem is, we have not been commanded to stay in the harbor. We have been commanded to take the word to the world. When we do, we will face adversity and criticism. Christians must be courageous.

A Man Who Required Correction

Peter was human just like you and me. Therefore, he made mistakes. Peter received his harshest rebuke in Matthew 16:23 when Christ said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” In Mark 14:37, Peter was found sleeping when he should have been praying. This time Christ asked him a question. “Could you not watch for one hour.” In Galatians, Paul recounts how he had to correct Peter.

The ability to handle correction shows maturity. The wise person accepts correction. “Reprove a wise man and he will love you” (Proverbs 9:8). “Whoever heeds reproof is prudent” (Proverbs 15:5). “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool” (Proverbs 17:10).

Peter was the leader and a good one at that. Who better to lead the 12 than a curious, committed man who was willing to change and always wanted to learn? We would all do well to be a little more like Peter.

Review Questions

1. How would you describe Peter?
2. What were some of his strengths/weaknesses?
3. What about Peter reminds you of yourself?
4. Why do you think Peter was chosen?