



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 6:12-16

To understand a little more about the twelve disciples.

Twelve

Twelve is a significant number in the Scripture for more than one reason. In the Old Testament, the twelve sons of Jacob formed families and then eventually tribes, and because of Jacob's name change to Israel, these tribes effectively became the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Those who were born as Israelites descended from one of the twelve tribes, and each of those tribes had different roles. For example, the tribe of Levi formed the priesthood (which we learn about in Leviticus). The tribe of Judah was the tribe of kings, and would eventually bear the Messiah (Gen. 49:10; Rev. 5:5). The tribe of Reuben was "uncontrolled as water" (Gen. 49:4), and even settled outside of the Promised Land. The number twelve is significant for the tribal reason alone.

However, the number twelve gains new significance in the New Testament when Jesus selects twelve disciples to follow Him: "And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (Lk. 6:13). The disciples become the main individuals in the book of Acts that will proclaim the Gospel to a post-resurrection world and see the church established. But who are they? The Bible gives sparing details for some of them, and for others we get a clear picture. This week we will consider each of them, what we know about them, and why it matters.

The Inner Three

Of the twelve disciples, Jesus had a so-called "inner-three" to whom He gave additional attention. Below is a brief breakdown of James, John, and Peter.

JAMES

“James” comes from the Hebrew name for Jacob. He, along with his brother John, was a fisherman, and the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21-22), and became the first of the apostles to be martyred when he was executed in A.D. 44 by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2). This is *not* the same James who was the half-brother of Jesus, leader in the New Testament church in Jerusalem (Acts 15), who also wrote the Epistle of James. Together, James and his brother John were known as “the sons of thunder” (Mk. 3:17), presumably because they were highly zealous individuals.

JOHN

The brother of James, John means, “the Lord is gracious.” John is historically credited for authoring the Gospel According to John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation (Rev. 1:1). He often refers to himself as “the beloved disciple,” reflecting his identity as a close and intimate disciple of the Lord. John was a close friend of Peter (and presumably Andrew) and a fishing partner as well (Lk. 5:10). Paul recognizes him as one of the pillars of the church (Gal. 2:9). John and Peter were very close friends as well (Jn. 21:7), and were often seen together doing ministry in the book of Acts (Acts 3:1; 4:13).

SIMON

Simon, from the Hebrew word meaning, “hearing.” He is later called Peter or Cephas, both meaning, “rock” in Greek and Aramaic respectively. The significance of his name is later identified in Matthew 16:16-19. The extra-biblical writing known as, “The Apocalypse of Peter,” narrates his death by crucifixion. History tell us Peter did not feel worthy to die in the same way as his Lord, so he requested to be crucified upside down.

The Other Nine

In addition to the inner-three, there were nine other disciples that followed Jesus throughout the course of His earthly ministry. While they were not privy to some of the more special and intimate moments that Peter, James and John experienced, they still were close with Jesus and walked with, learned under, and essentially lived with Him for the years leading up to His death, burial, and resurrection. Much is known about some of them, and very little information exists regarding others. Below is a brief breakdown of each of them.

ANDREW

Andrew’s name comes from the Hebrew word for, “manliness.” Andrew is listed after Peter and before James and John because he is Peter’s brother, and also a fisherman (Mk.1:16). He is one of the first of John the Baptist’s followers (John 1:40).

PHILIP

Philip was one of the three earliest followers of Jesus. His name means, “horse lover,” and he is not the same Philip who was a deacon in Acts 6:5.

BARTHOLOMEW

Bartholomew is Hebrew for, “the son of Talmi,” and is more than likely the same person as Nathaniel, the travel mate of Philip.

MATTHEW

He was also called Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Matthew was a converted tax collector and author of the Gospel According to Matthew. He was likely a wealthy man as demonstrated by the large feast he hosts for Jesus and his other tax collector friends (Lk. 5:29). He is identified as “Levi, son of Alphaeus” in Mark’s Gospel (Mk. 2:14), which indicates that he was the brother of James, the son of Alphaeus as well (not to be confused with James, son of Zebedee). One Greek apostolic father named Papias wrote that Matthew’s Gospel was

originally written in Hebrew, although no other additional historical records confirm this. There are also other legends surrounding Matthew, one of which finds him influential in church planting after the book of Acts before being martyred in Ethiopia.

THOMAS

Thomas is sometimes called, “Didymus,” which is the Hebrew word for, “twin.” (Jn. 11:16; 21:2). His Aramaic name means twin as well. He is notably the one who doubted the physical resurrection of Jesus (John 20:24-28). A somewhat reliable historical source tells us that he established the church in India.

JAMES, THE SON OF ALPHEUS

He is also sometimes called, “James the Lesser” or “James the Younger,” likely to set him apart from James, son of Zebedee. There is not much information about him recorded.

SIMON, THE ZEALOT

Simon the Zealot was likely linked historically to a revolutionary group that promoted violence against the Roman government. This is not to be mistaken for the formal group known as the, “Zealots,” who came later in history. Becoming a disciple of Jesus likely tamed his zealous disposition and re-oriented his focus towards the Gospel instead of law.

JUDAS, THE SON OF JAMES

Thaddaeus is sometimes known as Lebbaeus or Judas (Luke 6:16). Both are likely nicknames of sorts. Nothing else is known of him.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

The infamous Judas Iscariot, the one who betrays Jesus, was the treasurer of the group (John 12:6). His name means something like, “man of Kerioth,” the name of cities in both Judea and Moab. If that is the case, he is the only disciple of the twelve that is not from Galilee. Judas is mentioned more by Matthew than any other disciple with the exception of Peter, which poses a fascinating reality: Peter and Judas are the only two whose future’s are told by Jesus (one is the rock, the other is the betrayer).

What About Now?

One major takeaway is that Jesus calls a diverse group of people to Himself. When one considers how much these twelve men had in common, there are some things, but not many. Jesus, however, is not interested in only one kind of follower. On the contrary, Revelation envisions a worship service involving “a great multitude” of Christians “that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9). Another takeaway is not all relationships need to be the highest level. Jesus clearly positions Peter, James, and John in a more privileged place than the other nine, and yet the other nine are still His disciples. It means that, in the context of Christian community, it is ok to have friends and *close* friends. Neither are wrong, and both are important.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 6:12. What did Jesus “go out” to do? Where did He go to do this? For how long did He pray while He was on the mountain?

2. Read Luke 6:13. Who did He call together, and how many from that group did He choose to become “apostles?”

Day Two

1. Read Luke 6:14. Who are the disciples named in this verse, and what is their significance? Why is Andrew likely listed here in the front of the list though he is not one of the inner-three?

2. Read Mark 3:17. What additional name was given to James and John in Mark’s Gospel. Why do you think they were referred to this?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 6:15. Who are the disciples named in this verse?

2. What is the significance of Matthew? What other name does he go by? What is he best known for?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 6:16. Who are the remaining two disciples named here? How is Judas Iscariot described? Why?

2. Read Acts 1:13. Compare the list of the apostles here with the list in Luke 6. Who is missing? What is different?

Week 21 Discussion: Discipleship Matters

In Luke 6:12-16, Jesus gathers His many followers together to Himself and selects from them twelve men who will become His “apostles.” Over the course of His earthly ministry, He provides special insight into His mission and key interpretation to many of the parables He tells that were otherwise confusing, and then commissions them to go and do with others what He had done with them (Matt. 28:18-20). Talk as a group about the importance of not only being discipled but also discipling other people.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been discipled by someone? If so, who? If not, why not?
2. Why do you suppose discipleship is so important to the kingdom of God?

3. Talk about some different contexts where discipleship happens (i.e. sermons, Bible study, etc.).
4. Both large group and small group discipleship are important, but which did Jesus seem to emphasize? Why do you think that is?
5. Who in your life needs discipleship? What is preventing you from taking them on and discipling them?
6. How can the church better empower and equip members to make disciples?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus chose from His disciples twelve men that would become His apostles.
2. Of the twelve men, three of them (Peter, James, and John) were given special attention.