

# The Twelve Apostles of the Lamb

## Treasured Lessons from the Lives of the Apostles

### Chapter One

#### The Twelve Apostles of the Lamb

#### Their Calling and Purpose

The word Apostle means “one sent forth as a messenger,” one chosen and sent with a special mission as the fully authorized representative of the sender. In the beginning of his ministry, Jesus looked for twelve such messengers whom he would teach and prepare to bring forth his special message of the Gospel. These twelve were Simon Peter, Andrew, James the brother of John, John, Philip, Nathanael who was also called Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the Less, Jude Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas Iscariot who was later replaced by Paul. (Matthew 10:2-5)

Jesus said that his heavenly Father guided and directed him to choose these twelve, and so he gave much attention to his close companions. Through his example and guidance, he taught them the truth and its importance, how to preach it and how to live it in their lives. These twelve Apostles were to be special witnesses of the persecution, death and resurrection of their master, Jesus. Because of this, they are known as the founders and special teachers of the Gospel Church. “I have manifested Your name unto the men [the Apostles] which You gave me out of the world: Yours they were, and You gave them to me; and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever You have given me are from You; for I have given unto them the words [the doctrine] which You gave me, and they have received them... I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them who You have given me; for they are Yours... Neither pray I for these [Apostles] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word [the entire Gospel Church—to the end of the age]; that they all may be one [in heart and purpose and love]; as You, Father, are with me, and I with You, that they also may be one in us—that the world may believe that You have sent me”—[to redeem and restore them]. (John 17:6-9, 20 and 21)

When Jesus started looking for his twelve Apostles, he didn't look in the Jewish synagogues for the finely dressed, righteous acting scribes and Pharisees. Jesus didn't look for his twelve among the rich rulers and popular public speakers of his day. No, Jesus looked for twelve men who were living and working in the humbler walks of life. Five were fishermen, one was of the despised publicans, and the occupations of the others are not mentioned. All, but Judas, were from Galilee and none of the original twelve received higher education. (Acts 2:7) This should tell us something when looking at our brethren. The Lord often uses some of the most humble and meek brethren to carry out his grand eternal purposes. “...not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... that no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Cor. 1:26-29) These twelve men of humble means were chosen to live with the most magnificent of all God's creation, His only begotten Son! (1 John 4:9)

Jesus blessed his Apostles with special gifts of the spirit to heal the sick. The Apostles could have used this spiritual wealth to acquire worldly wealth as many so-called preachers of the Gospel do today. But, no, they never accepted wages for their Gospel work. They chose instead to live humbly within their income. Sometimes they worked at different jobs, so they would have enough temporal means to work more in the Lord's spiritual service. (Acts 18:2, 3)

The Apostles lived very closely with God's Son for the three and a half years of his ministry, and yet, they didn't understand his real mission until after his death on the cross. They thought that Jesus had come at that time to set up an earthly kingdom with Israel as the ruling nation. (Acts 1:6) But this was only part of Jesus' purpose

which would be fulfilled almost 2,000 years after his death. No, Jesus tried to tell them over and over again that he was not sent to set up an earthly or national kingdom, but a spiritual one in heaven. He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) It was not until 50 days after Jesus’ death, during an event that is called Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit of God came upon the Apostles, and they finally understood both Jesus’ and their own mission. That mission was to call out a people for God’s name by establishing a Church of believers in Jesus who would give up all to follow him. (Acts 15:14) They realized then that Israel was just one part of God’s plan, and that all of the previous experiences of Israel were designed to be a teacher to lead them to Christ. They also realized that Jesus had to die to pay the price for the sin of Adam—a perfect life for a perfect life. (1 Corinthians 15:22) And, by witnessing the resurrection of their Lord, they realized that there would be more than just the kingdom promise of restored perfect life and all that was lost in Adam, but that there would be a spiritual resurrection of all who would give up everything to be faithful followers of Jesus during this time. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost also taught them that their message would cause great persecution upon Jesus’ followers, just as it did their master. (2 Tim. 3:12)

It is this mission of spreading the Gospel truth which the Apostles were sent out to accomplish. Because of their love for God, Jesus and their brethren, they lived, worked and died to bring us this message. All should love and respect their zeal for truth. All should be very grateful for their Bible messages to the Church. And all should thank God that He provided the twelve Apostles of the Lamb who are a strong foundation for the Church. (Rev. 21:14)

*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:16, 17)*

## **Chapter Two** **The Apostle Andrew**

Andrew, the son of Jona and Joanna, was from Bethsaida in Galilee. (John 1: 40, 42, 44) He was a young man who had little interest in worldly pursuits. Though he was a fisherman by trade, his main interest in life was his God. He was a follower of John the Baptist when Israel was in expectation of the Messiah. John the Baptist showed Andrew and others who sincerely sought after righteousness the terrible wickedness of the religious rulers of Israel. John the Baptist was the last of the faithful prophets to proclaim the promised “King of kings.”

As a result of John the Baptist’s ministry, Andrew grew more and more to think about the matters of the heart rather than the matters of fishing. Andrew’s heart was being prepared for an event which would shortly change his life. It is quite possible that he witnessed the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. (Matt. 3:13-17)

After Jesus was baptized, he went up into the wilderness to pray and be alone with God. This was a time when Jesus would receive instruction from God as to all that he was to do. It is very likely that Jesus would learn about selecting the twelve Apostles sent by special providence of God. On his journey back to Nazareth, Jesus passed by John the Baptist who was still preaching to his followers of God’s kingdom. When John saw Jesus he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) This so thrilled Andrew’s heart that he left John the Baptist’s ministry the very next day and began to follow Jesus. Andrew was probably one of the first who would witness to others about Jesus, for right after he talked to Jesus, Andrew ran to find Simon Peter, his brother, to tell him of Jesus. He said, “Simon, come! We have found the Messiah!” (John 1:35 and 40-41)

Shortly after Andrew introduced his brother Peter to Jesus, they were invited with Jesus to a wedding in Cana where they would witness the first miracle ever performed by their new Master. (John 2:1-11) There, Jesus turned vessels of water into wine. This was truly a wonder for Andrew and Peter to observe, however, it was not until they witnessed a miracle performed especially for them that they sold their fishing business and gave up all else to follow Jesus. Andrew, Peter and their partners in the fishing business had been up all night fishing and they still had nothing caught in their nets. The next day, Jesus told them to cast their nets out and try again. To their amazement, they caught such a great haul of fish that their boats began to sink from the weight. This is what convinced Andrew and Peter that the man who was preaching in their midst was worthy of their very lives. This was a man sent of God! (Matt. 4:18-22 and Luke 5:1-11)

Andrew would witness many more of Jesus' miracles and teachings and would go on to perform miracles himself. He was present at the feeding of the five thousand by the Sea of Galilee, where he is mentioned as having introduced to Jesus the young boy who had the five loaves and two fishes. (John 6:1-14) He was also present at the Mount of Olives where Peter, James, John and he inquired diligently about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age. (Mark 13:1-4) Andrew was a privileged witness to Jesus' short but wonderful ministry and was faithful in sharing his love of Jesus to others.

Because of this faithful ministry in preaching the Gospel of Christ, Andrew is said to have died a painful death on the cross. It is also said of Andrew that he brought the Gospel message to Ephesus with the Apostle John, and to Greece, Russia, and Asia. Of course, this is not recorded in the Bible and is only a history of the Apostle Andrew passed down from tradition. But this one thing is clear, Andrew was provided every experience needed to be a most capable Apostle of the Lamb and a faithful foundation of the Church.

### **Chapter Three** **The Apostle Peter During Jesus' Ministry**

Simon Peter was the brother of the Apostle Andrew and shared a fishing business with him. There is more written about the Apostle Peter than any other Apostle. This is probably because Peter was an excellent picture of how powerful God's Holy Spirit is in changing rough, unstable characters into shining Christian examples as stable as a rock!

Peter often acted first and thought second. Even when Jesus came to Peter and Andrew and performed the miracle of the great haul of fish to convince them to leave all and follow him, Peter said, "Depart from me O Lord for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:1-11) This showed Peter's true humility, and yet, at the same time, it showed that Peter thought he knew what was best for him to do. But Jesus lovingly understood Peter and replied, "Do not fear, from now on you will be a fisher of men."

Shortly after Peter left his fishing business to follow Jesus, Peter experienced another miracle of Jesus. One day, the Lord and his Apostles all assembled in Peter's house. There, the mother of Peter's wife was very sick with a fever. "And he [Jesus] came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them." (Mark 1:29-31) Peter's wife would have been most grateful to the Lord for this miracle. It is quite possible that she supported Peter in his decision to follow Jesus, because throughout the Gospels, Peter's house was considered one of hospitality.

The many experiences of Peter with his Lord have provided beautiful lessons to all of Jesus' followers. Matthew 14:22-33 shows of Peter's love and trust in his master. When Jesus called Peter to walk to him on the water, Peter quickly did so. But when the waves became rough, Peter began to sink and he called to the Lord for help. This shows the Christian that when his experiences of life become like rough waves in the ocean, he is to keep focus-

ing straight ahead to Jesus for help and strength, and to trust that Jesus will provide all his needs. (Phil. 4:19)

Another experience of Peter's life is found in Matthew 16:13-16. One day when Jesus asked his Apostles "who do you say that I am," everyone except Peter were unsure. Peter answered that Jesus was "The Christ, [the long promised Messiah-the anointed one] the Son of the living God." Jesus used this as a lesson and always loved Peter especially because of this. He changed Peter's name from Simon to Peter. Peter means small stone or rock. He was the only one of the original twelve Apostles to have his name changed by Jesus. Jesus then told Peter that upon this rock of truth—that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God\*—would lay the foundation for the whole Church. Then Jesus said that Peter would receive the keys to preach the Gospel to the Jews and the Gentiles. Peter did not completely understand what this meant because he didn't have the Holy Spirit. But soon he would be the first to deliver the Gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles. (Matt. 16:13-19)

\*Note that Jesus here refers to himself as the "Son of God" and not as God. See also Matthew 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:54; and Mark 1:1. Also note that Peter's name was actually changed earlier when Jesus first met Peter. See John 1:42 for this lesson.

Peter's life brings another lesson to the Christian in Matthew 16:21-23. He was always quick to come to the Master's defense. But before he received the Holy Spirit, he didn't understand that the Lord had to suffer and die. He told Jesus that he would never allow anyone to hurt him. Jesus then taught him a hard lesson by stating clearly that Peter must not stop the providence of the heavenly Father from taking place. He said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

As another lesson to Peter and the Church, the Lord permitted Peter to see something very important—a vision of Jesus, Moses, and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter very quickly said, "This is wonderful! Let us build three tabernacles—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elias!" It was just like Peter to jump ahead of the Lord. Then a voice from Heaven spoke, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." God was saying to Peter, "Be quiet, and listen to Jesus to tell you what you should do." What an important lesson to the Christian. We should look to the Lord for answers before jumping ahead and doing things on our own. (Matt. 9:17:1-5 and Mark 9:2-8)

Further lessons are spoken through Peter's experience in John 13:4-10. Because people walked on dusty roads in open sandals, it was a custom to wash their feet often. Jesus wanted to show a lesson in humility to his Apostles by washing their feet, but Peter said "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Jesus then said, "If I don't do this, you will have no part with me." Peter responded, "...not my feet only, but also my hands and head!" (John 13:6). Christians learn from this that we should be willing to do the humblest of tasks for our brethren. The Apostles missed a great blessing in not washing one another's feet. So, Jesus, their Master, did it for them.

Jesus' understanding and sympathy for the fallen, weak flesh of his followers is displayed in another lesson to Peter. After the last supper with our Lord, the Apostles went up to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked James, Peter, and John to watch with him while he went alone to pray. But they were so tired that they fell asleep. Jesus said, "Could you not stay awake just one hour for me?" This happened three times, then Jesus whispered, "Sleep on now..." for he knew that the next day would be a very difficult hour of trial for them. (Matt. 26:36-45)

The Apostle Peter was certainly the best character to portray the lesson found in John 18:8-11. When Judas betrayed Jesus, and he brought the multitudes to capture his Lord, Peter took out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the chief priest's servants. This showed how bold Peter was, but also how wrong it was for a follower of Jesus to have a fighting spirit. Jesus always taught that Christians should be peaceful and should love even when it is difficult. Christians should love even their enemies. (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27) After Jesus healed the servant's ear, he said, "They that use the sword against others will die by the sword." (Matt. 26:52) Proverbs states that the

tongue is sharper than a two-edged sword. A Christian should never “cut” with his words, but should be graceful and peaceable with all. (Rom. 12:18)

Probably the most painful lesson to Peter, but a most valuable one to him and the Church is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. (Luke 22:31-34, 54-62 and Matt. 26:33-35, 57-58, 69-75) Even with all of Peter’s boldness, he failed by submitting to his fear during Jesus’ most trying hour. He denied the Lord three times. But Peter regretted his weakness of character in fearing persecution and grew from his experience.

The next chapter will show how dramatically Peter changed after receiving the Holy Spirit. Even though all of Peter’s experiences during Jesus’ ministry were difficult and sometimes very painful, he and other Christians are provided great comfort through them. All should thank the Apostle Peter for his example of faithfulness through every lesson of his life. It was by these special trials to Peter’s faith that he was made strong and became a firm foundation to the Church.

#### **Chapter Four** **The Apostle Peter After the** **Crucifixion of Jesus**

Even after Jesus died on the cross, he continued to use Peter as an example to the church. It is good to remember when reviewing Peter’s experiences that it was not until 50 days after Jesus died that the Apostles were begotten of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This means that they were not yet “New Creatures” with the Holy Spirit to help in their understanding of the “deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:9-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17)

This lack of spiritual wisdom from above is a good reason why Peter and the other Apostles became confused and disappointed over Jesus’ death. If Jesus was the Messiah, they thought, why didn’t he bring honor to the nation of Israel? Why didn’t he take charge like a General in an army and crush the enemies of Israel? Why didn’t Jesus insist on the respect of the Roman and Hebrew leaders? Why didn’t he exercise his great power against them and stop them from putting him to death? Was Jesus gone forever?! These were very logical questions for the Apostles to ask. So, by his many appearances after his resurrection, Jesus continued to instruct his faithful Apostles as to his true mission at his first advent.

One very important appearing to teach such a lesson and raise the hopes of the Apostles again was to Cleopas and his fellow traveler on the road to Emmaus. The two men saw a stranger on the road and invited him to walk with them on their journey. They discussed how disappointed they were in the death of Jesus. But the stranger, who was really their resurrected Lord, explained to them the scriptures in the Old Testament. At last, the prophecies were made clear to them! They were so thrilled at the wisdom of this stranger, that they asked him to share supper with them. When the stranger broke the bread and blessed it, they knew right away it was Jesus their Lord! (Luke 24:13-35)

This special witness of the resurrection of Jesus, was wonderful for Peter to see! Peter and the others needed still further encouragement to be persuaded to continue to leave all behind and serve only their master. Disappointment and confusion set into Peter’s heart again, and he decided to go back to his fishing business. Many other Apostles followed because they did not yet have the Holy Spirit to help them see their spiritual calling and responsibilities. This is when Jesus appeared to Peter again and asked three times, “...lovest thou me?” Peter answered yes all three times. It must have hurt Peter that the Lord would question his love three times. But Jesus was using this as a gentle correction for the three times Peter denied Jesus. It also brought forth other lessons to Peter about his responsibilities to the little flock of Christ. (John 21:3-17)

Other such appearances of Jesus to his Apostles continued to prepare them for accepting the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' death. The Apostles were all assembled in one place, and the Holy Spirit of God filled their hearts with spiritual wisdom and special gifts. One gift of the spirit was being able to speak in many foreign languages so that they could talk clearly and with understanding to anyone about the Gospel truth of Jesus. (Acts 2:1-8 and 11) When Peter received the Holy Spirit of God, he was no longer just Simon Peter the man with worldly ambitions, but he was now the Apostle Peter, a New Creature in Christ. Being begotten as a New Creature meant that he would begin to develop and grow just like a little baby begins to grow inside of its mother. Peter was growing more and more into the character-likeness of his Lord—thinking and acting more as a spiritual New Creature in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15)

This help from the Holy Spirit of God made it possible for Peter to bring the Gospel to the Jews; preaching the truth in wisdom, love, justice and power. (Acts 2:14, 37, 38 and 41) Not only could the Apostles speak in foreign languages, but the Holy Spirit made it possible for them to heal the sick. Peter healed a lame man and many others so that the Jews would become convinced of God's love and truth. (Acts 3:1-10)

Peter was so filled with this Holy Spirit that he was not afraid to preach to the religious rulers after being put into prison. He was so firm in his beliefs that they freed him. This was quite a different Peter than the one who denied the Lord three times. (Acts 4:1-21)

Jesus loved Peter especially because Peter said long ago, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said that upon this rock of truth, he would give Peter the keys to preach the Gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles. (Matthew 16:17-19) And so, Peter opened up the door to the high calling not only to his brethren, the Jews who knew God, but also to the Gentiles who did not know God. Acts the 10th Chapter gives the wonderful account of the first gentile convert, Cornelius.

Peter's faith continued to be an example to the flock. In Acts 12:1-11 we read that he was imprisoned and about to be put to death. But Peter's work was not yet finished, and an angel helped him escape to return to his grieving brethren. It is important to understand that sometimes a Christian escapes severe trials, but sometimes the Lord permits harsh experiences of pain and persecution. Christians learn through experience "...that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Even though Peter was changed by the Holy Spirit, and he developed more and more as a New Creature, there were times when his old nature interfered with his work for the Lord. Peter still had a stubborn streak and showed fear and self-will when he tried to uphold an error about the Jewish law. But the Apostle Paul firmly showed Peter the error of his ways, and Peter took it as a lesson from the Lord. Peter changed and grew again from his mistake. (Galatians 2:7-14) This is a good example of how a Christian should not be stubborn and too proud to change when shown the truth, but should be humble and teachable.

In all his life's experiences, both before and after the Holy Spirit, Peter was a very important Apostle. He had the kind of character that the Lord could use to make many lessons clear to Peter and his brethren. We can read what great things Peter learned from his many experiences through his writings in First and Second Peter. Also, it is presumed that Peter wrote the Gospel of Mark using Mark as his secretary.

What a firm foundation to the Church was the Apostle Peter! It is commonly believed that he died a very sacrificial death. It is thought that he was sent to die on the cross, but he asked to be crucified upside-down so that he would not die as did Jesus. He felt unworthy to die the same death. We should learn much from Peter's life. He was a man of many faults, and yet he loved the Lord so much that he was willing to grow into a wonderful Christian example. And now, since our Lord's return, Peter is in heaven with his heavenly Father, with Jesus, and with all the brethren who have proved faithful unto death! (Revelations 2:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! John 1:47*

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Apostles Philip and Nathanael**

Philip was from Bethsaida, the same city as his friend Andrew. They were both disciples of John the Baptist who preached to Israel of the coming deliverer. Like Andrew, Philip was ready in his heart to receive Jesus as his Master. Andrew and his brother Simon Peter sought to find Jesus, but in the case of Philip, Jesus found him. Philip knew at once that this must be the long prayed for Messiah, and he realized the blessed privilege it would be to become Jesus' disciple.

Filled with excitement, Philip looked for his friend Nathanael (Nathanael is sometimes called Bartholomew). Philip and Nathanael were of one mind and heart in wanting to serve God. In fact, before Philip came to him, Nathanael was praying in the hidden cover of the branches of a fig tree, seeking God's wisdom and guidance. Nathanael was also a disciple of John the Baptist, and Philip knew his friend of great faith would rejoice when he heard, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." But Nathanael was a very wise and cautious man and felt Philip had accepted Jesus too quickly without examining the facts. Nathanael said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael knew the Scriptures and most likely wondered to himself: "No prophecies, so far as we know, make any reference to the city of Nazareth. And that city isn't of great reputation. So, how could anything holy and good come from there?" But Philip insisted, "Come and see for yourself." (John 1:45, 46)

It was good for Nathanael to have this questioning attitude, because it showed that he would not easily be misled by a pretender. When Jesus saw Nathanael, he knew Nathanael's heart was not hypercritical and he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, who has no deceitfulness!" What a wonderful thing to say! But, Nathanael was still not convinced that this was the Messiah. He thought, We have never met before, so how do you know my deepest character? You could be just flattering me to win me over. Jesus was gentle and loving in his response, "Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael's heart probably thrilled thinking: "Only one with the spirit and power of God could know that! I prayed in secret, hidden in the branches of the fig tree!" Nathanael then said aloud, "Rabbi [Master], thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!" As soon as Nathanael confessed his faith in Jesus as King, Jesus said that Nathanael and all who see with the eyes of faith would behold greater miracles than this. (John 1:45-51)

One such miracle witnessed by Philip and Nathanael was the feeding of the multitudes by just a few loaves and fishes. There, Jesus directed a question right to Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" Jesus knew Philip to be more of a business mind and was hoping to show him that he should exercise faith in the Lord for his provisions and not depend on earthly means alone. Philip answered Jesus by saying that it would take two hundred pennyworth of bread (about a year's wage) to feed the multitudes. The Apostle Andrew then pointed out the basket of loaves and fishes, but quickly added that it was not nearly enough. Both could have said, "Lord, you can perform a miracle like you did at the wedding in Cana!" But they did not, so Jesus used this as an excellent opportunity to show that all our needs will be provided by His Father's riches in glory and through God's Son. (Phil. 4:19, John 6:5-12)

We are not sure of the lives of the Apostles Philip and Nathanael beyond what is written in the Scriptures. The last accounts of their activities are given in connection with the resurrection of Jesus and the receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.\* Bible historians state that Philip went on to preach in Asia Minor and was there put to death for preaching against a pagan religion. Nathanael was also said to have preached in Asia Minor and also in

India and the northwest parts of Africa. He may have died as a result of preaching the truth in Armenia which was then a country overrun with idolatry.

Even though there is not much written in the Scriptures on these two Apostles, both were faithful in their commissions to preach the truth of the Gospel. Their lives as Apostles of the Lamb were firm foundations for the Church!

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\*There is another Philip mentioned in the Bible who was also a faithful disciple of Jesus. Acts, chapters 6 and 21 speaks of Philip the deacon and evangelist who preached to the Ethiopian and throughout Samaria. Although Philip the Evangelist was not an apostle, he was a good example, as was the Apostle Philip, in his service to the Lord, the truth and the brethren.

## **Chapter Six** **The Apostle James** **(Brother of the Apostle John)**

There was a man named Zebedee who owned a successful fishing business in Galilee, and who had two sons named James\* and John. These two brothers were fellow fishermen with Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. All four probably worked for Zebedee. One day while they were all out fishing, Jesus came to Andrew and Peter and performed a miracle causing a great catch of fish in their nets. Jesus then said, "I will make you fishers of men. Come and follow me." When Peter and Andrew left their fishing business, Jesus walked with them a little further down the shore on the Sea of Galilee and called to James and John to leave their fishing business as well. It is quite possible that the boat on which they were fishing was not far from Peter and Andrew's boat when they caught the great haul of fish. Seeing this miracle and hearing Jesus call to them would have seemed a privilege to James and John. Of course, both left their fishing business and followed Jesus. (Matthew 4:18-22, Luke 5:2-11; and Mark 1:19-20)

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\*The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle John should not be confused with the other men named James in the Bible. One was James the brother of Jesus, and another was "James the Less" who was also an Apostle.

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The Apostle James was older than his brother John, yet they both shared very similar characters which were strong and devoted to Jesus. They received the nickname "Sons of Thunder" because of the zeal they had for their Master. One day when Jesus and the Apostles were about to enter the land of Samaria, Jesus sent James and John on ahead to purchase bread and supplies. The Samaritans asked them if the Great Teacher would recognize the Samaritans and heal their sicknesses, or if he would treat them as did the Jews—unkindly. James and John answered that Jesus was sent only to the Nation of Israel. The Samaritans were angry at this and said, "Very well, then buy bread and supplies from them!" James and John became angry in turn, and when Jesus arrived they said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down and consume them?" But Jesus rebuked James and John for this angry spirit. This is a good lesson to the Christian on the loving, peaceful spirit we should have toward all, even those who don't accept our message of truth. (Luke 9:51-56)

The mother of James and John believed in the Lord Jesus and looked forward to his coming kingdom to the point where she came to him and asked: "Jesus, would you grant that my two sons would sit on either side of you in your coming kingdom?" This might sound prideful to some, but to the Lord, it indicated that they loved him so much that they wanted to be very close to him throughout eternity. If the Lord would have seen pride in the



hearts of James and John, he would have reproved them as he did in the lesson of the Samaritans. But instead he said, “Ye know not what ye ask.” He wanted them to be very aware of the difficult life it would be and asked them if they would be willing and able to live such a life of sacrifice. They both said “We are able,” and they were willing to have faith and trust in the Lord’s providence that he would help them in this responsibility. (Matt. 20:20-23)

The Apostle James must have been a very special friend to Jesus as well as an Apostle. Jesus had three close companions among his chosen Apostles – Peter, James, and James’ brother John. The special favor shown to these three was not selfishness on Jesus’ part to show favorites. No, it was a lesson to Christians that the Lord loves those who show to him a warm, sincere and zealous spirit. Peter, James and John were especially warm and zealous and always expressed great interest in what their Master was teaching. This made them more advanced in spiritual things so that they would be ready to appreciate the special privileges Jesus would grant to them.

One such privilege for Peter, James and John was to witness the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead. Jesus allowed only these three, Jairus and his wife to be present to witness the miracle. What a thrilling experience to see before their very eyes the transformation of the young girl’s pale, dead body to healthy colorful life! The Apostle James could truly help the Church in understanding the resurrection of the dead after he witnessed this miracle. (Mark 5:21-24; 35-43)

This special favor to Peter, James and John was also shown as they witnessed the miracle on the Mount of Transfiguration. This was a most frightening experience to the three Apostles, but Jesus especially chose them to see the vision, because he knew they had a greater ability to understand the lesson. The Apostle Peter said that they were able to make known to the Church the power and glory of the coming kingdom because they witnessed this miraculous vision. (2 Peter 1:16-18, and Matthew 17:1-9)

Not only did the Apostle James witness Jesus’ power in the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead and the glory of the coming Christ in the vision, but he also witnessed the sacrifice and great suffering required to accomplish these wonderful blessings. Jesus asked his special three Apostles to be with him in his most sorrowful hour. The night before Jesus was crucified, the Apostles went with him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knew what was about to happen to him and asked his three dear brethren to go with him to watch and pray. Jesus knew of their great love for him and desired compassion from his friends. But even though Peter, James and John should have understood the needs of their Master, they fell asleep and didn’t watch or pray with him. This is one of the most important lesson to all of Jesus’ followers. Our Lord watched and prayed during this difficult time, and as a result, he found great comfort and strength to win the victory unto death. But Peter, James and John did not watch and pray, and as a result, when their difficult times came, they became confused and made many mistakes. Of course, the Lord provided for them that they would soon learn the importance of prayer when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But imagine how sorrowful they were when they realized they missed the privilege of comforting their Master in his hour of suffering. (Mark 14:32-42)

The Apostle James lived a faithful life unto his Lord and spread the Gospel message wherever he traveled. Because James was an effective witness, King Herod Agrippa the First killed James with a sword to please the angry Jews. This was only 12 years after Jesus died for the same reason—to please the angry Jews. James truly fulfilled his Lord’s prophecy that he would drink of the same cup as his Master. The Apostle James was a faithful example of loyalty and love for his Lord. He was and still is a firm foundation to the Church of Christ. (Acts 12:1-3)

*And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, What do you seek? They said to him, Rabbi, (which means, Master), where are you staying? He said to them, Come and see. John 1:36-39*

## **Chapter Seven The Apostle John**

The Apostle John was the younger brother of the Apostle James. In fact, John was said to be the youngest of the Apostles of Jesus. John was a very humble man, and whenever he speaks of himself in his Gospel, he refers to himself as “that disciple whom Jesus loved.” He didn’t want to be so bold as to say “I did this…” or “I did that, and Jesus loved me best!” So whenever John spoke of himself, it was always by pointing to Jesus’ special love, and thus drawing attention away from himself. (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7,20)

Much has already been mentioned about John in the previous chapter on his brother including that John and James were sons of a successful fisherman named Zebedee. Some traditions stated that their family was “well-to-do” and had “connections” and perhaps influence with the social and religious rulers of their day.

After the baptism of Jesus and his 40 days alone in the wilderness, Jesus walked past John the Baptist as he was preaching repentance to a crowd of Jews. John the Baptist exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God!” John, the son of Zebedee, and Andrew who were then disciples of John the Baptist, decided to quickly follow after Jesus. They quietly walked behind Jesus for quite a distance when Jesus turned to them saying, “What do you seek?” John and Andrew said, “Master, where are you staying.” (John 1:36-39) Jesus showed them, and they stayed with him that day, learning from him.

This faithful, teachable spirit of John was a special blessing to Jesus. Like the Apostle Peter and John’s brother James, John became a close, loving friend of Jesus. Although John was this loving servant of the Lord, he and his brother James were nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder” when they sought to rebuke the Samaritans. (Recall Mark 3:17, Luke 9: 54, 55)

In addition to this incident about the Samaritans, Mark 9:38-40 confirms John’s firm spirit. John spoke out boldly to the Lord against a person who had been casting out devils in Jesus’ name. Jesus corrected him again by saying, “Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, who can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.” In other words, we are to show love to those who claim to have the Lord’s spirit whether they associate with us or not. John learned this lesson quickly, because he loved his Lord very much and desired to please him.

This and many other incidents showed Jesus’ special love and trust in his Apostle John. Along with Peter and James, John witnessed the raising of Jairus’ daughter, the transfiguration, and the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As mentioned in previous chapters, these three Apostles alone witnessed these very important events.

Another evidence of this special friendship was when Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover for Jesus and the twelve Apostles. Through this they witnessed yet another miracle of Jesus in Luke 22:8-13. Jesus told them to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water on his head, and this man would lead them to the room where they would eat the Passover together. This was unusual, because women were normally the ones to carry pitchers of water on their heads, not men. The miracle was that Jesus knew in advance that a man, at just the right time, would walk by carrying a pitcher of water on his head.

Even though John was called the dearest friend loved of Jesus, he experienced the same fear and confusion as the other Apostles in Jesus' most trying hour. John didn't stay to assist Jesus when the religious rulers arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matt. 26:56) All of the Apostles "forsook him and fled." This was probably out of a feeling of helplessness, because, up to this time, Jesus was able to escape any harm. Jesus warned them of this hour, and yet, they were not prepared for the prophecies to be fulfilled that pointed to Jesus' death. (John 16:32, 33 and Matthew 26:37-41) It wasn't long after abandoning Jesus that John regained his courage. The Scriptures show how John used his "connections" with the religious rulers to gain entrance to the palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas. John and Peter were permitted to be in the courtyard of the High Priest where Peter denied the Lord three times. (John 18:13-15)

How John's heart must have ached for his Lord. He must have wanted desperately to free his master. It might have been that John viewed from a distance the proceedings of Jesus' journey bearing the heavy cross. And then, while John stood helplessly at the foot of his master's cross, he heard Jesus say to Mary his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" (John 19:25-27) Jesus was so thoroughly trusting of his faithful Apostle that he asked John to care for his mother.

After Jesus had been placed in the tomb, Peter and John were told by Mary Magdalene that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. As they raced to see for themselves, John outran Peter to the tomb. They both saw the burial clothes lying in the tomb, but Jesus' body was gone. They then knew that Jesus had been resurrected. (John 20:1-8) But they and the other Apostles still didn't know why Jesus had to suffer and die.

Because of their disappointment at the death of Jesus, John and the other Apostles went back to their various jobs. One morning, soon after Jesus' resurrection, the Apostles John, Peter, James, Thomas, Nathanael and two others were coming back from a long night of fishing with no catch of fish. Nearing the shore, they heard a man say, "Try throwing your nets out on the other side of the boat." They did as he said and caught a great haul of fish. Because John's heart was very near Jesus at all times, John recognized the stranger on the shore as being Jesus. He said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:2-7) This is a good example to the Christian, because if we are living close to the Lord, we will recognize when it is he calling to us and giving us instructions for our lives.

After these many opportunities of witnessing the resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles were ready to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. John was with the other Apostles when the miracle of Pentecost occurred. (Acts 2:5-7) One of the first recorded uses of the gifts of the spirit is shown in Acts 3:1-10 where Peter and John healed a lame man. This miracle provided two important lessons for John and Peter. First, they learned that the gift of healing provided an opportunity to witness to others about their Lord and his coming restitution of all things. (Acts 3:11-26) Second, they learned that this would bring an opportunity to suffer with their master for bearing witness to the truth. Because of healing the lame man, they were persecuted by the religious rulers and thrown into prison. But the lame man was so thrilled by the experience that he went to prison with them to show support for these servants of the Lord. They could have become discouraged by their imprisonment, but instead, they saw even this as an opportunity to preach the good tidings of the coming kingdom! When all three were brought before the religious rulers, Peter and John spoke boldly for the truth. (Acts 4:1-21) We should all look at our difficult experiences in this way—as an opportunity to share the goodness of God to others.

After being imprisoned for the sake of Christ, John lived and preached in Judea, continuing to care for Jesus' mother. John went on performing miracles to draw out a people for the name of Christ, even when the religious rulers told him not to do so. The Apostle Paul called John, James, and Peter "pillars" of the Church; and that these three would continue preaching to the Jews while he, Paul, would go the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:9)

John likely preached until he was banished to the Island of Patmos around 90 A.D. (Revelations 1:9) This was a time of great persecution to the early church, and Patmos was a desolate island prison where many were sent as a result of their faithfulness to God. But, as before, John turned his imprisonment into an opportunity to glorify

God. John could have said, “Oh, poor me! I’m on this lonely island with nothing to do.” But, no, he again rejoiced in the Lord for being able to experience the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. And because of this positive attitude, God granted a most remarkable blessing, the vision seen in the last book of the Bible known as the Revelation of John.

John’s loving, yet strong nature made him useful in the Lord’s work. He is responsible, by the Lord’s Holy Spirit, for writing five books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John; the three letters of John to the Church; and Revelation. These inspired writings illustrate John’s wonderful example of Christ-likeness. His humble spirit is displayed in Revelation 1:1 where John speaks of him-self as a servant of his master, Jesus. Because of John’s special vision, he could write with a deeper understanding of the Heavenly works of Jesus and their meaning to the Christian. All of John’s writings have this spiritual view of presenting the truth of Jesus’ life and teachings, whether it be the writings of deep symbolism in Revelation, the three letters of encouragement to the Church, or the Gospel of John which records the events of Jesus’ life. The other three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell of Jesus’ earthly work.

It is interesting to note that the Apostle John was the last Apostle to die, whereas his brother James was the first to die. Almost all of the Apostles met with violent deaths as a result of preaching the Gospel of Christ, but John died a natural death in Ephesus at the advanced age of around one hundred.

The Apostle John was certainly a wonderful example to all believers in Jesus. His life and writings prove to us that in all things, whether good or bad, we can rejoice if we look to the Lord for strength. The Apostle John was worthy to be called one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

The Jews answered him, saying, We are not stoning you for good works; but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, makes yourself God. Jesus answered them: Is it not written, You are Gods? ... Therefore they sought to take him: but he escaped out of their hand. John 10:33-39

*Then said Thomas, who is called Didymus, to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. John 11:16*

## **Chapter Eight** **The Apostle Thomas**

Thomas, like the other faithful Apostles, was a Galilean. It is thought that he must have been a fisherman at the time Jesus called him to be an Apostle. Thomas was also called Didymus which means “a twin.” It is quite possible, then, that Thomas had a twin brother or sister, but the Scriptures do not say who this was.

The most interesting thing about Thomas was his character. He was a man of great faith and courageous zeal for his beloved Lord. He was willing to oppose all others if he thought his ideas were right. The Scriptures provide two examples of this strong-mindedness which illustrate two very important points. One example shows how Thomas was strong-minded in a correct decision, and one example shows how he was strong-minded and wrong in his idea of the truth.

In the first example, the Apostle Thomas opposed the other Apostles when they warned Jesus to avoid danger. Jesus and the Apostles had just escaped from Jerusalem where angry Jews wanted to stone Jesus for saying he was “the Son of God.” (John 10:33, 36-39) They fled to a quiet place out of harm, but soon followed news of the death of Jesus’ dear friend, Lazarus. Jesus said, “Let us go to Judea again.” But all of the Apostles except Thomas said:

“Master, the Jews just tried to stone you, and yet you want to return there again?” Jesus explained the importance of returning, and Thomas, knowing well of the danger, spoke out, “Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus!” This was certainly an admirable character trait displayed in Thomas. He willingly and promptly obeyed his Master and encouraged his brethren to do the same, even though they were all shrinking from fear of persecution. In this instance of strong-mindedness, Thomas was sincere and his decision was the right one. It is also a good lesson to the Christian that just because most of our friends believe something, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it is right.

In the second example of the Apostle’s strong-mindedness, Thomas again opposed the popular ideas of his brethren, but this time he was wrong. One evening after the resurrection of Jesus, ten of the Apostles were meeting in “the upper room” sharing in their joy over the many appearances of their resurrected Lord. Thomas was not there with them that night. Perhaps he couldn’t believe all these reports of the resurrection appearances of his Master, and perhaps he didn’t want to be encouraged in what he thought was a deception. That night, Jesus appeared to the ten assembled in the upper room. The doors were locked and windows closed, yet he appeared before them with the nail wounds in his hands and feet and the spear wound in his side. Filled with excitement that surely Thomas would believe now, the Apostles went to him and told him of this wonderful appearing. But Thomas said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (John 20:25) He didn’t think he could trust his own eyes because this might have been a deception. He needed to touch the wounds of his Lord.

In this case, Thomas was wrong in his decision to oppose the other Apostles. Here were several of his respected companions who actually saw their resurrected Lord, yet Thomas distrusted their reports. We can only suppose that Thomas sought the Lord in prayer to seek his will in the matter, while he still held to his cautious opinion. This is good advice to every Christian, for the Scriptures assure us that the Lord will direct our path if we seek him in sincerity and truth. (James 1:5, 6) Thus, Thomas was being put to a test. Would he stubbornly defend his wrong course out of pride when he was proven wrong? Jesus lovingly and patiently gave Thomas the very evidence to make him that help believe. He knew Thomas had not as yet received the Holy Spirit, which he would at Pentecost, to help him understand this idea of the resurrection. Jesus also knew what a confusing time it was for his beloved followers, and so he had upon compassion Thomas in this time when additional proof was needed.

It was one week after the appearance in the upper room that the Apostles again assembled there. This time Thomas was with the other ten. Perhaps he had prayerfully considered the possibility of these appearances and was ready to be proven wrong if the Lord chose to do so. Suddenly, before them, stood their resurrected Lord. Jesus immediately went to Thomas and asked him to come forward and not only see, but touch his wounds. How humbled Thomas must have been when he cried, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus was not trying to reprove Thomas, but to show him and all Christians since then that he most certainly was alive forevermore! He said to Thomas, “Because you have seen me, you believe. Blessed are those who have not seen me, and yet they believe.” (John 20:29) Jesus was trying to show that there are two ways to believe in him. Some believe only when they see clear evidence, which is good. But Jesus says that a more excellent faith is one based upon true faith in the testimony of the scriptures and Jesus’ word.

So, in this lesson, Thomas was almost deceived by his own lack of faith in Jesus’ promise to return. This example was important to the entire Church throughout the ages, for if no one had ever doubted the resurrection, the Lord would not have had the opportunity to provide convincing proof to his followers of the fact. Doubts would have appeared sooner or later and they might have ended in disastrous results.

The lessons in Thomas’ experience are more than proof of the resurrection. They show how, if Jesus was not angry with one who was overly cautious, but was patient and provided proof of important truths; we should also be patient with others who are not easily convinced of the message of the Gospel. We should follow the Lord’s example and lovingly work with them to help them see the truth. There is a saying, “Be patient with me, God

isn't finished with me yet!" If we would want this patient love extended toward us, we should certainly extend it to others. Sometimes it is better if one requires extra proof to believe, for they are more thoroughly convinced of truth in the end. Some actually are too quick to believe and their faith becomes easily shaken later. Each of us has different abilities to learn, and we should be thankful that God provides sufficient evidence of truth for everyone who truly seeks Him. He is patient, but He does expect us to grow once He has clearly shown us the truth. Thomas did believe when he was given the proof needed.

There is only one more mention in the scriptures of the Apostle Thomas. It was on the shore of Galilee when, after Jesus' resurrection, he appeared to Thomas and six of the other Apostles and performed the miracle of the great haul of fish. (John 21:1-6) We can be sure that Thomas was given added strength of faith by this experience.

*And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto them, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. Luke 5:27, 28*

## **Chapter Nine** **The Apostle Matthew**

At the time Matthew was called to be an Apostle, he was a successful tax collector for the Roman government. Matthew called himself a "publican" in Matthew 10:3, which was what Jews called tax collectors. This was considered a dishonorable job and disloyal to the Nation of Israel. That is why the Jews considered tax collectors in the same class as sinners, murderers, thieves and harlots. They thought anyone of their brethren who would take money from their family and give it to a heavy handed government, would surely not be devoted to their God. Tax collectors were well educated in money matters and very shrewd businessmen who sometimes became dishonest and unfair when collecting taxes. Even though some publicans like Matthew, were not dishonest, the Jews looked upon all as hated sinners. So, for Matthew to admit in his Gospel that he was a publican showed that he was a humble man. He didn't want to give the wrong impression of his past and wanted instead to show the transforming influence of the Lord's spirit. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

When Matthew was a publican, he was known by the name of Levi. (Luke 5:27) But he went by the name of Matthew (meaning "the gift of God") when he answered the call to be an Apostle. Matthew's father was Alphaeus, also known as Cleopas. It is assumed that Cleopas was the same disciple who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus after Jesus was resurrected. Matthew's mother, Mary, was also a disciple of Jesus and must have been close to Jesus' mother for when Jesus died, both Marys were at the foot of the cross together. She was also at Jesus' tomb when it was discovered that Jesus was missing. One of Matthew's brothers, James the Less, was also an Apostle of Jesus. Matthew had a brother Joseph who may have been a disciple of Christ, for he is mentioned in connection with certain events as if he was commonly known among the brethren. (Mark 2:14, Matthew 10:3, Mark 15:40, and John 19:25)

There may have been a family tie between Matthew and Jesus. It is believed from the reference in John 19:25 that Jesus' mother, Mary, and Matthew's mother were sisters. This would make Jesus the cousin of Matthew and James the Less. If this family connection is true, then Matthew would have known Jesus personally before he was called to be an Apostle, and would not have been a stranger to the wonderful life, character, and preaching of Jesus.

Capernaum was a busy fishing port on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus often preached there to the many citizens and merchants. It was in Capernaum that Matthew lived and worked. By the time Matthew was called to be an Apostle, Peter, Andrew, James and John were already followers of Jesus. One day while Jesus was preaching in Caper-

naum and Matthew was busy collecting taxes from the Jews, Jesus came to Matthew and said, "Follow me." How thrilled and honored Matthew must have felt! The Pharisees always looked down upon Matthew as they walked by. Likely, Matthew thought about this snobbery of the Pharisees, "If this is what it is like to be a religious man, I will have no part of it!" But Jesus' loving character by contrast would have made Matthew see the true heart of a devout man. Matthew probably thought, "This man offers forgiveness and discipleship to publicans and sinners like me. Of course I will follow him!" (Mark 2:13, 14)

Now, Matthew was a man of influence and money, but as soon as Jesus called him, he was not ashamed and wanted to announce to his family, friends and business associates his decision to leave all and follow Jesus. He arranged a banquet at his home and invited them all so that they might share his Saviour and experience the joys and blessings he felt in his heart. Matthew was a kind and generous friend and a good Christian example, witnessing to them about Jesus. (Mark 2:15) Not only was Matthew willing to share, but also his wife must have supported him in his decision. For her to assist in putting on an elaborate banquet showed her desire to help Matthew in whatever way she could.

Since the people assembled at the banquet were all publicans and sinners, the Pharisees came along and used this as an opportunity to criticize Jesus. Their hearts were always finding fault. But Jesus turned this around to show them and others that they were not as holy as they thought. Jesus ate with the publicans and sinners because he wanted to build them up and give them the hope of God's forgiving grace. (Mark 2:16, 17) But the Pharisees still tried to get the people to think that Jesus was no better than a sinner. They accused him again by saying, "The disciples of John the Baptist and we Pharisees fast. Are we not more religious and devoted than you and your followers?" Jesus answered, "How can the bride fast and be sad when she is with her bridegroom? They will not always have him here, so now is the time to rejoice and celebrate with him." Mark 2:18-20 This was a parable which the Pharisees could not understand, for they were blinded by their pride and arrogance. Although they boasted of fasting, they had lost sight of the purpose for doing so. Fasting, or going without the normal portions of food, is a method of teaching discipline and clearing the mind so it can meditate on God. They had made fasting into a ritual and tradition to make themselves feel more holy than others. When someone is so pleased with himself that he can't see his own sinfulness and yet criticizes others, he is considered a hypocrite. (Matthew 7:3) And that is just what Jesus called the haughty scribes and Pharisees.

Not much is written about Matthew beyond these references in the Gospels. Some histories suggest that Matthew ministered to the Jews in Judaea and Galilee for about fifteen years after Pentecost or perhaps until the destruction of Jerusalem. It is certain that Matthew directed his ministry to the Jews, for his Gospel of the earthly ministry of Christ quotes the Old Testament prophets more than any of the other three Gospels. Matthew's skill at being a record keeper made him quite capable of drawing together the facts of Jesus' life and the Old Testament references to him. So that the Jews would become convinced of Jesus' authority as their King, he proves that Jesus was the Messiah by quoting their prophets. This would not have been as important to the heathen Gentiles who were unfamiliar with the law and the prophets.

Matthew's ministry for Jesus was one of self-denial and cross bearing. Anyone who would leave all and follow Jesus would surely live such a life. (2 Tim. 3:12) Matthew's writings show his humility, zeal and loving admiration for his Master. Matthew was indeed worthy to be called one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

## **Chapter Ten** **The Apostles James the Less, Jude** **Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot**

As shown in the previous chapter, James the Less was the brother of Matthew. His family lived in Capernaum in

Galilee. James was the youngest son of Alphaeus and Mary. His family was quite blessed with the spirit of God. His mother and father were faithful followers of Jesus.

There is little known about James the Less. Information passed down through centuries of tradition states that he was a religious zealot before called to be an Apostle. Traditions are questionable, however, if not supported by Scripture. A zealot in Jesus' day was a Jew who revolted against the Roman government for its aggression against Israel. Zealots eventually resorted to violence against the Romans, but this violence would have taken place after James had left their cause to follow Christ. If James was a zealot, he would have been very angry with Matthew for becoming a publican who collected taxes from the Jews to give to the hated Roman government.

James the Less wrote the book of James which emphasizes the balance of faith and works in a Christian's life. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead." (James 2:17) We can learn much about James the Less by reading his practical and wise admonitions on character development.

Another item about James passed down through tradition is that he may have traveled to Spain to preach to the Jews in bondage there. It is said that he then traveled back to Jerusalem where he was stoned to death for preaching Jesus to the Jews.

Whether James the Less was a zealot before coming to Christ, or whether he died for the name of his Master is not clear. But certainly he must have been a firm foundation for his brethren in the early Church. The privilege to be called an Apostle and to witness the life, death and resurrection of the Lord would have made him an able teacher to his fellow Christians. Though we know little of him, we know that the Lord chose James the Less to be an Apostle, and Jesus loved and prayed for him. (John 17:11-12)

Another Apostle of whom little is known is Jude Thaddaeus. He is not to be confused with the Apostle Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jude Thaddaeus must have been of a very different character than Judas, for Jude Thaddaeus (also known as Lebbaeus - Matthew 10:3) means "dear heart."

There are very few references to Jude Thaddaeus in the New Testament beside those that list him as an Apostle. In John 14:22 when the Apostles were sharing the last Passover with Jesus, Jude Thaddaeus asked Jesus, "Lord, how can it be that you will show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus said to Jude and the other Apostles, "Those who truly love me and keep my Father's commandments will understand my sayings." Jesus revealed himself and his mission only to the humble in heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see [and understand] God." (Matthew 5:8) Jesus also wanted the Apostles to know that he and his Father would stay close to them and would guide and protect them. (John 14:23) Jesus was comforting Jude Thaddaeus and the other Apostles, because he knew that the next day he would no longer be with them physically, but would be put to death.

Jude Thaddaeus is the writer of the Book of Jude. We recall the words of Jesus to Jude, "Those who truly love me and keep my Father's commandments will understand my sayings." This is exactly the theme of the Book of Jude where he encourages the followers of Jesus to keep themselves in the love of God by keeping God's words. This is a very short, but powerful book of the Bible.

History of the Church in Armenia claims that it was the Apostles Jude and Nathanael who preached to this country. Armenia eventually became the first country to claim Christianity as its national religion in 301 A.D. But even with this national claim of Christianity, the Armenian government was at first violently angry with the preaching of Jude and Nathanael and was responsible for putting both to death.

Whether this history is true or not, the Apostle Jude was a faithful servant of the Lord, for he is listed with the other faithful Apostles as having received the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. (Acts 1:13) The Lord blessed



only those who would use these gifts wisely, for they were given to the Apostles to establish the early Church throughout the earth. As an Apostle loved and prayed for by his Master, Jude would have been faithful to his responsibilities.

Also a faithful Apostle of whom very little has been recorded in scripture is Simon the “Canaanite.” Canaanite is more properly translated “zealot;” (Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13). As defined earlier, a zealot was a patriotic Jew willing to rebel against the Roman government. But since a zealot was also a fanatic and eventually resorted to violence, Simon would have left this cause when he gave up all to follow Jesus. Jesus always preached nonviolence. (Matthew 5:39, 43-44; and Matthew 26:52)

It is claimed that Simon was killed for the sake of Christ and that before he died, he had preached even as far as England. But without trusted sources, there is no certainty that this is true. One certainty was that Simon, along with the other Apostles, witnessed the miracles and teachings of Jesus and the miracle of his resurrection. They were with him at the Last Passover and in the Garden of Gethsemane. They would have been present at the time Jesus appeared to Thomas. (John 20:26) All but Judas Iscariot were listed as receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and all were sent out as witnesses of the Gospel of Christ throughout the earth. (Acts 1:8, 13)

It was a privilege to be called an Apostle, and all three were given the title which means “he that is sent.” Each of these three had special powers given to them to establish the early Church. God was not unwise in selecting any of His chosen Apostles for Jesus. It is certain that by God’s power and grace, James the Less, Jude Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot were firm foundations of the Church and faithful to their calling as Apostles of the Lamb.

*When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake ... Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. The said Jesus unto him, Whatever you are going to do, do quickly. John 13:21-27*

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **The Apostle Judas Iscariot**

Judas was probably drawn to his Master by the preaching of John the Baptist. His heart was prepared to receive the teaching of Jesus, because John pointed the way to the coming kingdom and the Messiah. Along with the other Apostles, Judas had been called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and to share in his sufferings and self-denials. Judas, with the others, preached the kingdom, healed the sick, and cast out demons by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Judas was privileged to be constantly with his Savior for three and a half years. He witnessed the purity of Jesus’ life and his loyalty and obedience to his Heavenly Father. (Matt. 10:5-8)

The other Apostles and Jesus recognized in Judas a very good business sense and they placed him in charge of their treasury. Jesus and his Apostles didn’t have time to work at temporal jobs. They needed to devote their entire time to preaching the kingdom, and so some of Jesus’ followers voluntarily donated money for their financial support. (Luke 8:1-3) Judas was probably very trustworthy at first in his responsibilities with the treasury and in his duties to go forth and preach the kingdom.

All of the Apostles had the same privileges and special guidance of the Holy Spirit, all were tested as to their loyalty to Jesus, and all but Judas were submissive to their testing. Judas had certain expectations of what his Lord would do to bring about the kingdom. He thought that soon Jesus would force his political leadership against the Roman government and Israel would be in command under the leadership of Christ. Then, he might

have thought: "I will be more than just the treasurer of this lowly, despised band of Jesus' followers. I will be treasurer of a great and powerful kingdom!" But in time Judas saw his ambitions dashed when Jesus repeatedly talked of being put to death. Judas began to fear that Jesus was not working out the plans of God correctly, and soon these hopes of kingdom power would fail.

Judas' love and devotion to Jesus was tested more and more, and soon the seed of pride and self-will took root. In time it took over his entire character, as Judas became impatient with the loving, humble approach of Jesus' mission. With all the power of the universe at his fingertips, he might have thought, why doesn't Jesus use it in front of greater numbers of people so all can see his power and superiority? But each miracle of Jesus continued to be performed in a quiet, humble way. Judas didn't listen when Jesus explained how the "Son of Man" must die and that his kingdom was not of this world. He explained that he would someday return to do the work of a General in an army, but not now. The other Apostles didn't quite understand this either, but they submitted their wills to Jesus and trusted that he was doing the will of God.

There is an important lesson in this to young Christians today. Have we ever been very upset with our parents for not allowing us to do something our way? There are two ways of handling this situation. One way is to continue to be angry, to argue with them and then do things our way in spite of their wishes. The other method of handling our disagreement with our parents is to obey them and patiently trust that they are wiser than we are. The first way is called rebellion and the second way is called obedience. With which do you think the Lord is pleased? Certainly Judas was rebellious and a bad example when he constantly wanted his way even though he knew Jesus was wiser than he.

It is possible that the more time went on, the more Judas probably became entrenched in his own will. "My plans are sure to bring about the kingdom more quickly. God probably needs me to help things along. He must be speaking especially to me and using me to perform this wonderful plan to get Jesus the recognition he deserves." How it must have irritated him to see year after year go by with only a small number coming to believe in Jesus. The scheme might have been devised slowly which would bring his expectations to pass—or so he thought.

Judas, no doubt, thought of the treasury as a means to also bring about his plans. He hoarded the purse of money as if it were his own. He became obsessed with the idea of money. Six days before Jesus was crucified, Judas was so concerned about money that he rebuked the Lord for allowing Mary to pour her precious ointment upon his head. He exclaimed, "What a waste! This ointment might have been sold for a year's wage and given to the poor!" How wrong it was for Judas to have criticized this sweet sacrifice of Mary. And how doubly wrong to criticize his Master in front of all his followers. He even got some of the others to join in the criticism. But Jesus rebuked him back saying, "Leave her alone for she anoints me for my burial!" Judas' pretended zeal for the poor was really greed for his purse. (Matthew 26:7-12 and John 12:3-8) The love of money ensnared Judas and his love was in question for his Lord. (1 Timothy 6:10)

The final event of Judas' life proved that he no longer lived to serve his Lord Jesus, but he now lived to serve himself and his schemes. He no longer was inspired by his Lord Jesus, but was now inspired by the prince of evil, Satan. (John 13:2) After the incident with Mary, Judas went to the chief priests who had already been plotting to rid themselves of Jesus, and he said, "What will you give me if I deliver Jesus to you?" They contracted to pay him 30 pieces of silver. This was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12-13. From this point on, Judas sought an opportunity to betray Jesus. (Matthew 26:14-16)

When the night of the Passover had come, Jesus said to his Apostles, "One of you shall betray me... He that dips his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." Even with all of the many clues, still the other Apostles knew not of Judas' treachery. (John 13:26-29) When someone shared a meal with another it meant a vow of trust and friendship. For Judas to share a meal with Jesus and then be a traitor, would be considered a very serious wrong.

After this, Jesus told Judas to leave and be about his evil business. Judas left and went straight to the chief priests. Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas led a multitude of priests, servants and elders to his Master. Judas came to Jesus and said, "Hail, Master," and then he kissed Jesus. Even then Judas thought of Jesus as his Master and probably thought of this whole event as a way to get Jesus to take control. But the group seized Jesus and led him away to be crucified. When Judas saw that he was wrong and his plans had failed, he went back to the chief priests the next morning and said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." And they said, "So, why come to us, you are responsible for that!" Judas cast down the pieces of silver, ran away and hanged himself from a tree. (Matthew 27:3-5)

Did Judas repent of his crime? Only God knows for certain. All we can do is judge Judas' actions and apply lessons from his experiences to our own characters. Never did he cry unto his Master, "Oh, Lord, forgive! I am sorry, I was so wrong!" No, instead he went to his accomplices in crime, the chief priests who could grant no forgiveness. His pride kept him from facing his brethren and seeking their forgiveness and their help to recover from his sins. When the Apostle Peter sinned by denying the Lord three times, he humbly returned to his brethren and worked to correct his wrong. Judas acted pridefully to the end. In his mind he thought the only way out was to kill himself, for to turn back would have meant admitting to all that he was wrong. He didn't think of the special assistance of the Holy Spirit that he was provided and what a waste it would be to the Lord's cause if he died. (Matthew 13:11, 12) He selfishly ended his covenant to deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus. Instead, he committed suicide.

In Judas' life we see a very important aspect of God's law of love. Every man is free to decide whether he will or will not obey his God. This is known as a "free moral agency" or "free will." God doesn't interfere if someone wants to take an evil course, but allows the person to show his true character with each experience. If God did interfere, the person would be obedient only because he was forced to and not because he loved God and His will. Therefore, God allows us all to be tested, but throughout the testing, gives us warnings and ways to escape from our trials and temptations. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In the case of Judas, Jesus offered many opportunities for Judas to repent. Jesus was of a gentle and generous spirit toward Judas right up to the very last act when Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. (Matt 26:49-50) Judas still had a choice at that point to seek forgiveness from his Master. We should take to heart the lesson of this gentle manner of Jesus when dealing with those who oppose us. We must keep in mind that we are not the judges of our brethren's hearts. Both Peter and Judas opposed the Lord, but Jesus was loving and patient with them. He worked with them to help bring them back into harmony with God. God allowed Peter to stray far from faith for a time only to show Peter the lesson of his frail flesh. Some of our fellow Christians may stray far from the Lord as well, and, yet, there is still hope to the end. Let us all do what we can to help our brethren and leave the judgment and lessons of their lives with the Lord. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Judas Iscariot had every opportunity to be purified by the truth and useful in the work of the Lord, but instead he became a servant of Satan. Jesus said that of the twelve Apostles given to him by his Heavenly Father, none had been lost except the "son of perdition," Judas. Jesus also said, "Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." (Matthew 26:24 and John 6:70) Judas gave up the privilege as a faithful follower of Jesus: one who would be worthy to be called one of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. Though we learn lessons from the life of Judas Iscariot, we cannot claim him as one who is a firm foundation to the Church. Instead, the honored place he would have held as being part of the Messiah was filled by another.

*Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take. Acts 1:20*

## **Chapter Twelve**

### **Choosing a Replacement for the Betrayer**

After the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, the eleven faithful Apostles, along with about one hundred of Jesus' disciples were gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem, waiting for the promised blessing of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4-15) And while waiting, the Apostle Peter remembered the prophecies concerning Judas in the book of Psalms, "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric [office of an overseer] let another take." (Acts 1:20) From this, Peter urged his brethren that they should choose from among those who were faithful followers of Jesus a replacement for the betrayer, Judas.

This replacement had to be a believer who had witnessed the life and resurrection of their Lord. They selected two honored Christians from among them, Justus\* and Matthias, and prayed for the Father to bless which one He wanted to replace Judas. "...and they gave forth their lots: and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (Acts 1:21-26)

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\*It is possible that Justus is the same as Barnabas, also called Joses in Acts 4:36. Joses is the same as "Joseph called Barsabas who was surnamed Justus" in Acts 1:23. More will be written on Barnabas in the next chapter on the Apostle Paul.

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Now, Matthias was definitely a faithful example to the early Church. We know he was a Jew, because the call of the Church had not yet gone out to the Gentiles. He was probably from a faithful Jewish household, for his name means "Gift of Jehovah." It is very possible that he was a former follower of John the Baptist, for Peter noted this as one of the qualifications they looked for in a replacement. (Act 1:21,22) And by these qualifications, it is quite likely also that he was one of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out to preach by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 10:1) Matthias would have been a very responsible and active example of a believer, otherwise he would not have been selected to such a place of honor among the brethren.

Even though Matthias was quite capable as a good Christian example to replace Judas, and the Apostles in their zeal were trying to do God's will, for many reasons they were wrong to jump ahead of the Lord. One reason was that Jesus simply told them to stay in Jerusalem and "wait for the promise of the Father..." He did not direct them to take matters of great importance to the Church into their own hands. Another reason was that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, which would have given clearer wisdom in such matters. Finally, Peter should have known through the many lessons of his walk with the Lord, that he should beware of his tendency toward acting out first, before considering the consequences. He should have been very cautious with his impetuous nature. Even though the Heavenly Father appreciated the zeal of their hearts, He ignored their error and let time prove to them that He was quite able to make His own choice of an Apostle to replace Judas.

Jehovah had another plan and was preparing an instrument of His own choosing—Saul of Tarsus. But, Saul? The Apostles would never have chosen him! He would become known as one of the most noted persecutors of the Church and soon would even assist in the stoning of their beloved Stephen! (Acts 7:57-60) God would prove to the early Church and to all believers that He could take the misguided zeal of Saul, and by His Holy Spirit, transform him into the most noted of the twelve Apostles. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 and 2 Corinthians 11:5) Much is known of the faithful Apostle Paul through the Scriptures, and his conversion and life will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

But what of Matthias? When he saw that God had not blessed him to be the Apostle to replace Judas, did he become jealous or hurt and fight for his right to be an Apostle? Did he storm off in disgust and leave the flock of the Lord? It is likely that he did not. Uncertain tradition states that Matthias helped in spreading the Gospel as far as Armenia and Ethiopia. It is thought that he was imprisoned and blinded by the Ethiopians and then was rescued by the Apostle Andrew. However, some historians believe that the final mission of Matthias was in Jerusalem where he was stoned to death for his ministry to Jesus.

All Christians should learn a lesson by this humble loving spirit which would rejoice in the special blessings of others. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 we read that love envies not. The fact that others had chosen Matthias to replace Judas was a testimony of his loving character toward the Lord and his brethren.

We recall that Matthias and Justus were present with the 120 disciples gathered in the upper room who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is certain, through the Scriptural records that Matthias and Justus were well respected by the eleven faithful Apostles and even though they were not numbered as one of the twelve Apostles, they can be respected by the Church as faithful followers of the Lamb.

*My manner of life from my youth, which was among the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most staitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. Acts 26:4, 5*

## **Chapter Thirteen** **The Apostle Paul**

The Apostle Paul is the most remarkable of all the Apostles. As noted in the previous chapter, he was the one directly chosen of God to replace the betrayer, Judas. As we read of the wonderful experiences and blessings given to the Apostle Paul, we should think of what Judas lost by not being faithful and obedient. The Scriptures say if we continually waste our blessings, the Lord will take them away and give them to another who will appreciate them. Matt. 25:28 & Luke 19:24

Paul was also known as Saul of Tarsus. His father was a wealthy Roman citizen, and the name Paul was more commonly used in Rome. His family was strongly Jewish and of the religious Pharisees. Saul was well educated in a religious school attended only by the sons of the rich. Saul had advantages in every way: he was well educated, wealthy, extremely religious and honored by his family and countrymen. Acts 22:3

Because Saul was a very dedicated Jew, he served God with all the zeal and love that he could. But although he served God with zeal, it was not based on a knowledge of the wisdom of God. Rom. 10:2,3 He thought he was pleasing God when he severely persecuted the Christian Jews for what the law said was “heresy” punishable by death. He was responsible for giving the command to have the Christian disciple Stephen put to death by stoning.

The last act of persecution Saul would commit would be to order the Christians of Damascus to trial in Jerusalem. Saul set out with a group of men, probably soldiers and other religious men, on the road to Damascus to bring who they thought were hated Christians back to Jerusalem. But on the way, he was met with the most marvelous experience any human would ever know – an experience which would change his life forever!

As Saul traveled at around midday, suddenly there came upon the group of men a brightness that was even brighter than that of the sun. Saul and the others fell to the ground hearing, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul answered “Who are you, Lord?” The voice answered, “I am

Jesus, the one whom you persecute.” Saul replied, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Jesus answered, “Arise and go into the city, and there you will be told what to do.” Not only did Saul hear the voice of Jesus, but he saw Jesus in his glory as a Divine, Immortal Spirit Being! 1 Cor. 15:8 The other Apostles saw Jesus resurrected, but they did not see him as a Divine Spirit. Jesus chose to take on various human forms to appear to the others, so they would not be frightened. The other men who travelled with Saul did not see Jesus, they only heard his voice.

The brightness of this vision blinded Saul’s eyes, but it opened his mind. When Jesus said to Saul, “Why do you persecute me?” He meant, “Saul, why do you persecute those who believe in me?” But why would Jesus come especially to a man like Saul of Tarsus who persecuted to death his followers? Why didn’t he just honor the wishes of the Apostles and make Matthias the Apostle to replace Judas? God wanted to make a beautiful example out of Saul to show that He could take even the most feared of men and change his misguided heart to one of the most loving and merciful! I Cor. 1: 26-29 God also wanted to show how he could prepare such a man from even before his birth and give him the qualities and advantages needed to perform the work of a great Apostle. Gal. 1:15 Even before Saul was born, his family was wealthy, well educated and religious. His father was a Pharisee, and so Saul became a Pharisee. Both were more familiar with God’s law than most men. These qualities would make Saul naturally very useful in the spread of the Gospel to the Jews. But Saul would have to accept the call to leave all and follow Christ. God would not make Saul do anything. Saul had to choose for himself. Acts 9:1-8

Guided by the eyes of his travelling companions, Saul travelled on to Damascus as Jesus had asked. There he fasted and prayed earnestly to the Lord to show him what to do. Saul did not cry and say, “Oh, poor me, I’ve lost my sight!” No, he humbly waited for the direction of the Lord. And while he did, he received a vision that a man named Ananias would come to him to restore his sight. At this same time Ananias, a faithful disciple of Jesus, received a vision. The Lord said, “Ananias, arise and go to the house of Judas for there a man from Tarsus named Saul is praying. Go and restore his sight.” But Ananias said, “Lord, this is the man who persecutes the saints in Jerusalem!” Yet the Lord replied, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” And Ananias did just as the Lord had said. He went straight to Saul, and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me to restore your sight and fill you with the Holy Spirit.” Just then, loose scales of skin fell from Saul’s eyes and he regained most of his sight. Then he arose and was baptized. Saul was ready to serve the Lord and willing to suffer much for his name’s sake. Acts 9:10-20

Saul immediately began preaching in Damascus, proclaiming the name of Jesus in the synagogues saying, “He is the Son of God!” All were amazed to hear Saul, the persecutor of Christians, preach the very name he had despised. Soon the high priests of Damascus became hateful of Saul and plotted to kill him. But the Christians there helped him to escape the city and return to Jerusalem.

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to work along side of the other Christians there, but they were afraid of this persecutor who had sentenced their beloved Stephen to death! The Lord then provided for his disciple Barnabas\* to come to Saul’s defense. Barnabas explained all that had happened to Saul and what a wonderful change the Lord had created in him. He showed how Saul was such a zealous witness for Jesus that he was almost killed. Then the Christians of Jerusalem understood and welcomed Saul into their fellowship. They witnessed the great power of their Almighty God!

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\*It is possible that Barnabas, also called Joses in Acts 4:36, is the same as “Joseph called Barsabas who was surnamed Justus” in Acts 1:23. See also Acts 15:22 Remember that Justus and Matthias were the two on whom the Apostles cast lots when choosing a replacement for Judas.

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But imagine how Saul's family and friends must have felt to see his conversion. They saw this power of God as the power of Satan overtaking their beloved Saul. "What an embarrassment you are to the holy nation of Israel!" they thought. Saul was then persecuted by his family, and all that he had as a Pharisee and son of a wealthy man was taken from him. Saul was left a man without honor in his family and country, and he went from riches to poverty for the sake of Christ. Acts 9:19-30

Saul was not discouraged by this nor tempted to slow down his zeal for the Lord. No, he then traveled to Arabia to study the various prophecies and the law to see how they pointed to his Lord Jesus and how they made clear God's plan. For three years he studied, becoming mature as a Christian and more capable as the chosen instrument of the Lord. Filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom of God's plan, he was anxious to return and teach this plan to all. It is interesting to note that three years is about the same amount of time in which the other Apostles studied and learned with their master during his three and a half year ministry. Studying God's plan and will is most important for every Christian. II Tim. 2:15

And now the time had come for Saul to begin his mission for Christ. Again, the Lord provided Barnabas to help Saul see the direction he should take. Barnabas was a Levite--a Jewish convert to Christianity from the Gentile Island of Cyprus. He knew of the great need in Antioch for help in understanding the word of God. He encouraged Saul to go there that he might strengthen the faith of the new Gentile converts. Barnabas remembered what was said to Saul in the vision "...bear my name before the Gentiles..." Barnabas was known as the "son of consolation" or the "son of encouragement." Barnabas wanted to encourage his brethren in Antioch and thought of Saul as the best hope for doing so. Barnabas had a special concern for the Gentile converts because his home country, not far from Antioch, was also Gentile, and he had many friends there. Perhaps many had been converted by Barnabas.

Saul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for about a year until the new converts were strong in the faith. The brethren in Antioch knew that there were other churches waiting to be helped by Saul and Barnabas, and they unselfishly asked them to go on their way to establish new churches throughout other Gentile cities.

And so, Saul and Barnabas began their missionary journeys preaching to Gentiles and Jews. Saul used his name Paul for it was a more common name among the Gentiles. They used a different method of witnessing when presenting the message of God to the Gentiles. These were a people who had pagan gods, and they didn't understand the writings of the Hebrew prophets. Paul and Barnabas used the power of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick so that the people would listen to what they had to say. In the Gentile city of Lystra, the people were so amazed that they thought Paul and Barnabas were their pagan gods, Mercury and Jupiter. They immediately brought sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas and began praising them as their gods. But Paul and Barnabas quickly went among them and said that they were just men sent of the only true God who wanted to show them that these sacrifices were wrong. Many of Lystra listened and some even became believers, but then some Jews entered the city to preach against Paul and Barnabas and all began stoning them out of the city. There they were left for dead to be eaten by wild animals. But the few who believed came and ministered to Paul and Barnabas and restored them to health that they might preach again. Fearing for the lives of these new converts, Paul and Barnabas left Lystra so that these babes in Christ would not be harmed. Paul and Barnabas entrusted the care and providence of this young Church to God. Reprint 4369, 4364 & Acts 14:6-22

When the Apostle Paul and Barnabas preached to the Jews, they used a different method of witnessing, for the Jews were in expectation of the Messiah and were familiar with the prophecies. The two would enter into the synagogues, and when it was their turn to talk, they would share the prophecies which pointed to Jesus. Sometimes the Jews would listen and would accept Jesus as the Messiah. But, often times the high priests would get so angry that they would stone them or beat them with rods. Sometimes the priests convinced the Roman government to put them in jail. Little did the priests know that this is exactly what the Lord wanted, for being in jail gave Paul the opportunity to witness to kings. This fulfilled the vision to Ananias, that Paul would bring the

name of Christ “before the Gentiles,” “the children of Israel” and “before kings.” Yes, the Apostle Paul spent many years in prison, but because of this, he witnessed to King Agrippa and the two governors, Felix and Festus. Acts 23:12-35 & 24-26

During the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas, there arose a controversy about the Gentiles. Some of the Christian Jews began thinking that they were better than the Gentile converts. They thought that Christians should continue to practice certain ceremonies of the law, and they forced these practices on their Gentile brethren. But Paul clearly and forcefully preached that the law was done away with when Christ died on the cross. Col. 2:14 He said repeatedly to the Christian Jews in Jerusalem that the law kept men in bondage, but when Christ died, he freed men from slavery to the law if they accept him as their Savior. In living by the rules of the law, Christians were leaving the freedom in Christ and going back into bondage. Acts 15

As an illustration of bondage to the law, imagine that one day you went into a store and broke a very expensive lamp. The store owner said, “Now you must work two hours a day for the rest of your life to pay for that lamp.” One day when you were working and feeling very sad that you would be working for the rest of your life, a nice man came into the store and said, “I will pay for the lamp so you no longer have to work.” You were so thankful to the man, and for one week you stopped working. But then, the following week you started working again! Now, wouldn’t that be foolish? But this is very similar to what the Christian Jews did. Like the rest of mankind, the Nation of Israel was under bondage to sin and death. God used the Nation of Israel to prove that sinful man is incapable of living a perfect life. He gave them a perfect law to obey saying, “If you obey this law perfectly, you will live, but if you do even the slightest thing wrong, you will die.” They said to God, “All that you command of us, we will do.” Of course, they could not keep this vow, so Jesus came and obeyed the law perfectly for them. Because he was perfect, he was the only one who could keep the law, and as God had promised, he was given the right to live forever. Jesus wanted to help the poor world of mankind, and so he gave up his perfect life that they might live. So the Christian Jews no longer needed to live in bondage under the law when they accepted Jesus as their Savior. But what did they do? They started to do various rituals in the law again, telling the Gentiles that if they didn’t do these rituals too, they were not good Christians. Even the Apostle Peter and Paul’s faithful companion Barnabas started saying these things to the Gentiles.

Because of support from Peter and Barnabas on this error, some of the Christian Jews began to question whether Paul was really an Apostle with clear wisdom from God. At the Antioch Church, when the Apostle Peter started to treat the Gentile Christians with less respect than the Jewish Christians, the Apostle Paul became very angry. Paul defended his Apostleship and the truth. He told Peter in front of everyone that this bondage to the law was a terrible error and that Christ fulfilled all the commands of the law, making all men in Christ equally free. As Christians, we should keep in mind that no one is better than another. We should be loving and kind to everyone, but especially to the household of faith. Gal. 6:10

Eventually, through the loving zeal of the Apostle Paul toward all of the Churches, his Apostleship was fully accepted again by his fellow Christians. There were a few “wolves in sheep’s clothing” that he continued to warn the Churches about, but God permitted these false teachers to test the brethren. Those who truly loved the Lord and the truth remained faithful to Him.

The Apostles Peter and Paul, along with Barnabas, settled their differences and again in harmony preached that Christ died to free the slaves of death. Acts 15:7-12, 22, 25 These two Apostles were probably the most notable in establishing the faith of the early Church. This is why it was so important for the Apostle Paul to clear up this matter with the Apostle Peter. It is important that all of us do what we can to keep from error, for it spreads like weeds in a garden and chokes the beautiful flowers. This is a lesson to Christians today, that we should appreciate the care our elders take in keeping the truth pure.

The Apostle Paul opened the eyes of understanding to this and many other important doctrines. Through his



wisdom on the law, he showed how the law was given so that the Jews would be prepared in their hearts to receive Jesus as the Messiah. It was a “schoolmaster to lead them to Christ.” Gal. 3:24 The whole letter to the Hebrews is an explanation of the Tabernacle of the Jews.

He showed how it and the sacrifices of animals pictured Jesus, his church and their sacrifices for the world of mankind. He also showed in this and other letters to the churches how the selection of the Passover lamb pictured Jesus, the “Lamb of God.” So many beautiful truths like these are understood by Christians today because of the loving faithfulness of the Apostle Paul to all the Churches.

This loving zeal of Paul was seen in that he left all behind to follow Jesus: family, friends, riches, health and comfort. Paul never complained about being poor, he just worked as a tent maker when he needed money. Acts 18:3 When he had earned enough, he would go on his way, preaching the loving plan of God. He never begged for money from his brethren, for he knew that “...God would supply all his needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” And God did provide for Paul through the generosity of some in the early Churches who helped with financial assistance. Paul never got all tangled up in earthly work, for this would take him away from precious time needed to serve the Lord. Paul said to his beloved Philippian brethren, “I have learned that in whatsoever state I am, I will be content.” Phil. 4:11 & 18

Paul proved his contentment in his physical health as well. Although he thought of his poor eyesight as a “thorn in the flesh” and prayed three times that it might be removed, he concluded that it was far better to endure this loss of health than he might gain the lessons of humility and submission. He also learned from this lesson a compassion for others and a greater reliance on the strength of God. 2 Cor. 12:7-10 He trusted in God that all of his needs were being provided and that he need ask only for God’s will to be done. Phil. 4:19 All Christians must come to this same point of faith and trust in God’s provisions for their every need.

There were so many events in the Apostle Paul’s life covered in the Scriptures that entire books have been written about him. One small chapter cannot possibly cover every event and example of faith in Paul’s life. The Apostle Paul himself summarized his experiences to the Corinthian Brethren; “Seeing that many glory in their wonderful accomplishments, I will glory also, but not in myself. No, I glory in that which I have suffered for Christ. I have labored for the Churches and the Gospel more than any other through more stripes than can be measured. I have been in prison more than any other. Five times I received thirty nine stripes from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, and three times I suffered shipwreck. I have suffered perils from robbers, from my own countrymen, from heathens, and from false brethren. I ministered even when weary and in great pain. Often I went hungry and thirsty and fasted, or I went cold and naked. And not only this, but I have had the constant care of all the Churches.” 2 Cor. 11:18-31 paraphrased The Apostle Paul was not complaining of the sacrifices he had made on behalf of Christ and his Church. No, he was rejoicing to have the privilege for their sake. He wanted to let the Churches know how much he had endured and would endure for them, because he loved them. Col. 1:24 and Acts 20:24

The Apostle Paul ministered to his beloved brethren right up to the time when he knew he was about to die. He had a very dear companion, Timothy, and wrote many letters of encouragement to him. When Paul was around sixty-six years old, he was imprisoned by the wicked persecutor of Rome, Nero. Paul wrote to Timothy to be strong and to fight the good fight of faith, rejoicing always! Paul said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course: I have kept the faith.” 2 Tim.4:7 Soon after these final words, the Apostle Paul was put to death for his faithfulness to Christ. Some historians write that he was beheaded for the sake of Christ under Nero’s cruel orders.

From the time that the Apostle Paul was converted until the time he died, he never stopped serving the Lord. His life as a Christian was one of the most beautiful illustrations of self-sacrifice. He never boasted unless it directly pointed to Jesus and God. He never gloried in himself unless it was to defend his effectiveness as an Apostle. He

was a firm foundation to the Church and was truly one of the greatest examples of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. 2 Tim. 4:7, 8

*As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their word. John 17:18-20*

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **The Twelve Apostles: Their Mission Continues...**

Were the twelve Apostles of the Lamb successful in carrying out their mission to preach the kingdom to the “utmost part of the earth?” Acts 1:8 From their example as shown in the Scriptures, we know they were. Sometimes under great discomfort and suffering but always rejoicing in the privilege, they carried forth the message that Jesus died for all and will someday bring peace and everlasting life to the world.

Some people think that the only ones who will receive everlasting life are those who accept Jesus now. But we know by the writings of the Apostle Paul, “God is the savior of all men, but especially of those who believe.” 1 Tim. 4:10 The Apostles’ mission was not to convert the whole world now. They were sent to call out a people for God’s name from every part of the earth. If the Apostles’ mission was to convert the whole world, then we would have to say that they have failed. But, they did not fail, because the Lord told them that he only wanted a little flock of true believers who would sacrifice everything, including life itself, to one day bring the promise of Abraham to all the people of the earth. “In thee, Abraham, and in thy seed, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Gen. 22:16-18, Isa. 26:9 & 1Tim. 2:6 Although Jesus and the Apostles are well known throughout the world today, it is still just a “little flock” who truly believe.

Jesus appointed these twelve Apostles alone to be special “mouthpieces” to the Church. This meant that he would speak to his followers through the words of his Apostles. He said that whatever they would set forth as truth on earth would be the same in heaven. Therefore, we should respect what they say in the Scriptures as more important than any worldly wisdom of men. These twelve humble men, despised by the haughty and proud religious rulers, were able to impress kings and are still the most well respected writers to have lived. It was not by their own greatness as men, but by the Holy Spirit of God that they were able to bring about the greatest change in human history—a love of Jesus and a hope in the hearts of men that he will save them.

Now that we know the different Apostles better, we can see why Jesus sent them out in pairs of two to preach. Each one of the Apostles had certain strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Apostle Peter was bold and quick to act before thinking things through. He was paired with the Apostle Andrew who was more cautious and mild mannered. Jesus was able to make one wise and complete man out of two imperfect men.

Now that we know more about God’s dealings with the Apostles, we can see why Jesus told them not to take extra money and clothing with them on their journeys. They had to learn to totally trust that “God would supply all their needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:19 They were not to ask for extra money and clothes from the various homes that took them in. They were to watch for the Lord’s providence to give them a welcome place to stay, food, water, and when needed, clothing and money. The Apostles did just this, and by their experience they gained total trust in providence.

There is a similarity in the twelve Apostles to the twelve tribes of Israel. From the twelve sons of Jacob came the entire nation of Israel, God’s chosen people set apart for His wonderful purposes on earth. From the twelve

Apostles of God came the entire nation of spiritual Israel, chosen and set apart for His wonderful purposes in heaven. There is a new Jerusalem in heaven for spiritual Israel. In Revelation 21:14 we read: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." The twelve tribes of Israel were similar to the twelve spiritual tribes in that they were provided for in their wilderness journeys. But unlike spiritual Israel, natural Israel did not learn the lessons of trust and obedience. Instead, they constantly murmured against God for not giving them what they wanted. It is this spirit of ingratitude that hardened the hearts of the Jews, and they rejected the opportunity to be a part of the spiritual calling. They should have accepted release from their burden to the law and embraced the freedom in Christ offered by the twelve Apostles.

How thankful we should be that we have accepted the blessings offered through these twelve foundations of the kingdom. Through their lives we can see why Jesus cared for them so much. We can see how their lives changed from simple, sometimes rough characters, to God's special workmanship. We know that by their hardships we have the Scriptures today, and we can trust that they are true. And now, since our Lord's second presence, these twelve Apostles are in Heaven beside the Lord Jesus and in the presence of God: Simon Peter, Andrew, James the brother of John, John, Philip, Nathanael who was also called Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the Less, Jude Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite and Paul. These wonderful men of God are now glorious immortal spirit beings who will live on forever. When we read the Scriptures and listen to their words, we can now have a love and respect for them as never before. These are and always will be the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb—a firm foundation to the Church. And their mission continues...