

Who were the twelve (12) disciples / apostles of Jesus Christ?

The word disciple refers to a learner or follower. The word apostle means “one who is sent out.” While Jesus was on earth, His twelve followers were called disciples. The twelve disciples followed Jesus Christ, learned from Him, and were trained by Him. After His resurrection and ascension, Jesus sent the disciples out to be His witnesses (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). They were then referred to as the twelve apostles. However, even when Jesus was still on earth, the terms disciples and apostles were used somewhat interchangeably.

The original twelve disciples/apostles are listed in Matthew 10:2-4, “These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.” The Bible also lists the twelve disciples/apostles in Mark 3:16-19 and Luke 6:13-16. A comparison of the three passages shows a couple of minor differences in the names. It seems that Thaddaeus was also known as “Judas, son of James” (Luke 6:16) and Lebbaeus (Matthew 10:3). Simon the Zealot was also known as Simon the Canaanite (Mark 3:18). The Gospel of John uses the name “Nathanael” instead of “Bartholomew,” but Nathanael and Bartholomew were undoubtedly the same person. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, was replaced as one of the twelve apostles by Matthias (see Acts 1:20-26). Some Bible teachers view Matthias as an “invalid” apostle and believe that Paul was God’s choice to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle.

The twelve disciples/apostles were ordinary men whom God used in an extraordinary manner. Among the twelve were fishermen, a tax collector, and a revolutionary. The

Gospels record the constant failings, struggles, and doubts of these twelve men who followed Jesus Christ. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, the Holy Spirit transformed the disciples/apostles into powerful men of God who turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). What made the change? The twelve apostles/disciples had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). May the same be said of us!