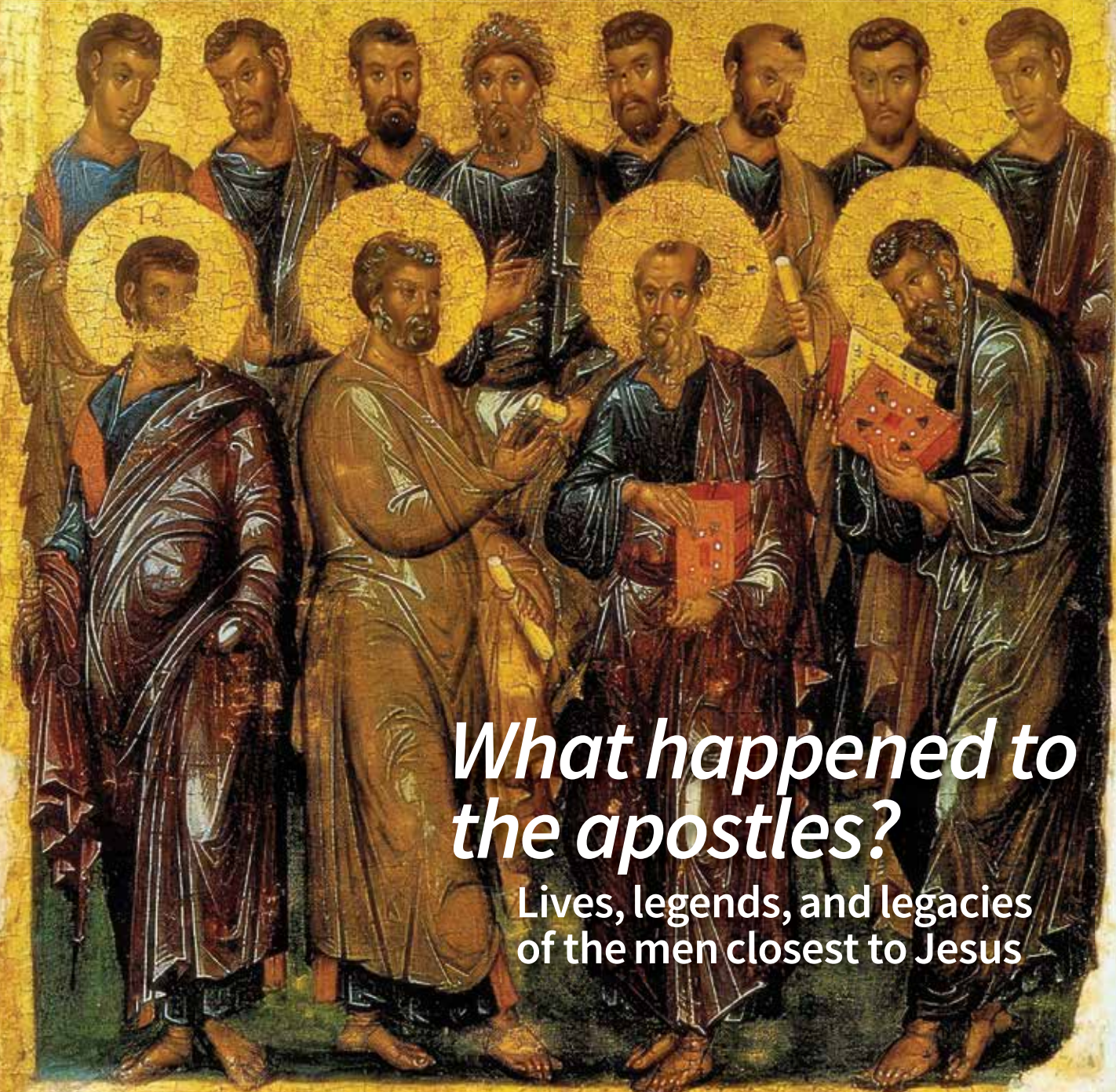


CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 156



*What happened to
the apostles?*

Lives, legends, and legacies
of the men closest to Jesus



ANDREW'S CROSS The Scottish flag displays a white X-shaped cross, a symbol of Andrew's martyrdom. He is the patron saint of Scotland, among other countries.

played most captured the imagination of Christian artists, who often portrayed him holding his own skin. For examples see the statue by Pierre Le Gros the Younger (1666–1719) in St. John Lateran Basilica and Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, both in Rome. Michelangelo (1475–1564) allegedly created the face on Bartholomew's skin as a self-portrait.

A *late legend* relates that when Paul was beheaded, his head bounced three times and a fountain miraculously sprang up at each place where it touched the ground. Today the Church of St. Paul of Three Fountains, located on the grounds of Tre Fontane Abbey in Italy, marks the spot of Paul's alleged martyrdom.

FANTASTIC PHILIP AND OTHER MYTHS

In the Acts of Philip, a leopard approaches Philip to confess his wounding of a kid goat, who wept and warned his predator of the coming messengers of God. Philip heals the goat; the leopard becomes a vegetarian; both animals raise their paws in prayer; and ultimately they request Christian sacraments and receive baptism and Holy Communion from Philip.

Philip's final acts took place in Hierapolis in Asia, known as the city of snakes, which residents worshiped. At the entrance to the city were two dragons and seven snakes guarding the city gates. The snakes prostrated themselves before the apostles, and Philip destroyed the dragons with rays from his eyes. For this reason Philip often is shown with his foot on the head of a serpent; for example he is depicted this way in the statue of him sculpted by Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644–1725) in St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome.

In the fourth century, Bishop Regulus of Patras learned from an angel that Emperor Constantius II (317–361) intended to invade Achaia and confiscate Andrew's remains and move them to Constantinople. Obeying the angel's instructions, Regulus removed several relics from Andrew's sarcophagus and then headed in a westward direction, ultimately landing in Scotland, where he founded St. Andrews Church.

THE SCALLOP POINTS THE WAY James is often shown with a scallop shell to symbolize pilgrimage and the journey to new life in Christ. Scallops mark the route on the Way of St. James in Spain.

Did you know?

THOUGH OFTEN CREATIVELY HYPERBOLIC AND OF DUBIOUS ORIGINS, APOSTOLIC LEGENDS HAVE INSPIRED BELIEVERS THROUGH THE AGES

LEGENDARY ENDS

Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 211) repeated a story that James's guard was so impressed by the apostle's testimony that he confessed his own faith in Christ. The guard asked forgiveness from James, who replied, "Peace be with you" and kissed him. Thus they were beheaded together.

Bartholomew's supposed martyrdoms were varied: he was crucified, drowned, beaten, beheaded, and flayed. But the image of Bartholomew being





THE ONE CALLED “FAITHFUL” Jesus called Levi and gave him another name: Matthew (left).

WHICH PHILIP? Philip the Evangelist converted the Ethiopian eunuch (below), but is he also Philip the Apostle? Read more on pp. 35–37.

was a twin. In fact *Thomas* is the Aramaic word for “twin,” while *Didymus* is the Greek one. But who was Thomas’s twin? The Bible provides no clues, but second-century heretical writings, purporting to be written by Thomas, claimed that his twin was Jesus himself.

When James the son of Alphaeus, often surnamed “the Less,” appears in the apocryphal acts, his story is

conflated with that of James the brother of Jesus, also known as James the Just. According to various legends, both were stoned and beaten to death by the Jews. The conflation of James the son of Alphaeus with James the brother of Jesus was often depicted in artwork. For example in St. John Lateran Basilica, the statue of the apostle identified as James the Less is shown with a book, representing the book of James, and a fuller’s club symbolizing the kind of death suffered by James the Just.

APOSTOLIC INSPIRATION

The air battle between Simon Peter and Simon Magus found in the *Acts of Peter and Paul* (see p. 23) was the inspiration for the helicopter flight of the Camerlengo in Dan Brown’s *Angels & Demons* (2000).

In 832 the Scottish Picts were at war with the Angles of England. King Óengus (or Angus, d. 834) heard the apostle Andrew’s voice from heaven, who promised victory and foretold the sign of the cross in the sky as proof. On the day of battle, the king saw rays of light forming the X-shaped cross in the blue sky, and his soldiers advanced with the battle cry: “St. Andrew, our patron, be our guide!” From the ninth century, Andrew has been the patron saint of Scotland, and the Scottish flag depicts St. Andrew’s white cross on a sky-blue field. **CH**



WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek *apostolos*, which means “one who is sent forth” or “messenger.”

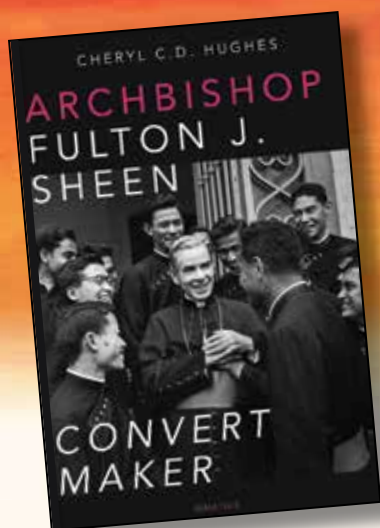
In the Gospels the apostle Matthew is also named Levi. Possibly Levi was his birth name, indicating his association with the tribe of Levites. When Levi got up from his tax-collecting booth, left everything, and followed Jesus, he received something very special for his sacrifice: salvation and a new name. *Matthew* means “gift of God” in Hebrew or “faithful” in Aramaic.

Twice in the Gospel of John, the author states that Thomas was also “called Didymus” (John 11:16, 21:2), meaning he

SUFFERINGS LIKE THEIR LORD A 15th-c. altarpiece depicts martyrdom scenes of the apostles. You’ll read about the many ways each may have died in this issue.



POWERFUL BIOGRAPHIES OF GREAT CATHOLIC CHURCHMEN



◆ ARCHBISHOP FULTON SHEEN Convert Maker

Venerable Fulton Sheen was one of the greatest spiritual leaders in the history of America. He was a powerful preacher and prolific writer whose incredibly popular television & radio shows impacted millions of people for many years. This in-depth work by historian **Cheryl Hughes** fully examines Sheen's life, priesthood and celebrity in the tumultuous 20th century.

Sheen's wit, and compassion inspired thousands of people from all walks of life to become Catholics. Among them were jazz legend Ada "Bricktop" Smith, Soviet spy Elizabeth Bentley, journalist Heywood Broun, Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce, composer Fritz Kreisler, Hollywood starlet Virginia Mayo, and Communist activists Louis Budenz and Bella Dodd. All their unique conversion stories are told here.

This book reveals what made Sheen such a magnetic figure and evangelist, and it offers a study in the inner dynamics of conversion. **AFSP** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95

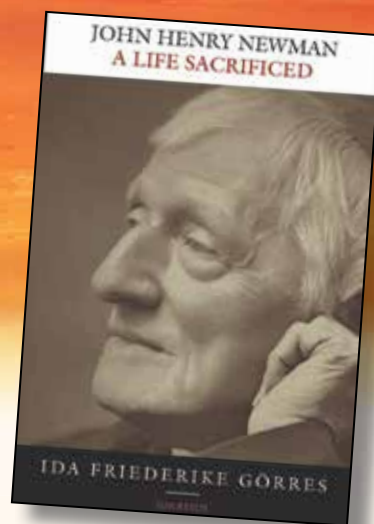
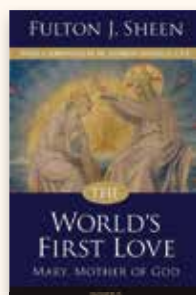
"Fulton Sheen was an unprecedented convert maker. This is a very clever idea for a book on the great man. Kudos to Cheryl Hughes!"
—**Paul Kengor, Ph.D.**, Author, *The Devil and Karl Marx*

"Fascinating portrayal of Venerable Fulton Sheen, and of the cast of thousands of converts, many who were celebrities in their day."
—**Mike Aquilina**, Author, *Rabbles, Riots and Ruins*

Also Available

◆ THE WORLD'S FIRST LOVE

Fulton Sheen presents a moving portrayal of the Blessed Virgin Mary that combines deep spirituality with history, philosophy and theology. All the major aspects of Mary's life are lovingly portrayed in this word portrait that is a source of information, consolation and inspiration. **WFLP** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$17.95



◆ JOHN HENRY NEWMAN A Life Sacrificed

Ida Görres, one of the greatest hagiographers of the 20th century, gives an unparalleled introduction to Cardinal Newman—mind, heart, soul, and personality. Drawing from his letters, writings, and journal entries with precision and poetic flair, the book is one of Görres' masterworks.

She shows how Newman, famous for his brilliance, lived a life of risk, sacrifice, and immense charity. His conversion to Catholicism rocked Oxford University, costing him his friendships, his livelihood, and his reputation.

In Görres' words, this is a portrait of "the boy who was startled and overwhelmed by God; the active, creative young prophet of his church in crisis; the hermit, who he was and wanted to be all his life; the fighter, and saint of humility, one perfected in sacrifice". **JHNP** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95

"This excellent book goes deeper than other biographies of St. John Newman, enabling us to see the man, his life and work with a fresh and penetrative perspective." —**Joseph Pearce**, Author, *Faith of Our Fathers: A History of True England*

"A must-read! As Görres reveals with effortless eloquence and insight, Newman stands as a spiritual and intellectual giant of the Victorian era, and a beacon of hope in our own troubled times."
—**Fiorella de Maria**, Author, *Father Gabriel Mysteries* series



◆ THE HIDDEN FACE

This study by **Ida Görres** of the life and character of St. Therese of Lisieux is a remarkable, penetrating search for the truth behind one of the most astounding religious figures of modern times. The work of a mind of rare intelligence and integrity, unique among the lives of saints. **HFSSTP** . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95



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Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

MY UTMOST'S WIDE REACH

Your magazine is passed around and read by all my friends and the latest [on Oswald Chambers] will be especially interesting to two in particular. [My friend] Janet had the opportunity to meet President George Bush and took my copy of *My Utmost* for him to sign as I'd heard he read it daily and could quote the particular page he appreciated. (Page 255, and he said it fit perfectly the circumstances of 9/11 we all remember so well!) I'd also heard Betsy DeVos was strengthened by reading *My Utmost* as she was grilled during her hearing on her confirmation as Secretary of Education. She also signed my copy of *My Utmost* and told me of its insight that helped her daily. Thanks for your excellent magazine.
—Charlotta Decker, Grand Rapids, MI

Thanks for your ongoing work at finding interesting and stimulating topics—and doing the digging to produce quality issues. I have kept my subscription going for many years and have almost all of the issues. Years ago, I even bought the CD-ROM of the first 50 issues—before things were available on the internet. I have just finished this issue and found it full of inspiration. I have a friend who has been a daily reader of *My Utmost for His Highest* for many years, and I would like to give him a copy of this issue. I could loan him mine, but I would rather that he has his own copy. How can I accomplish that?—Gregg Morton, Downers Grove, IL

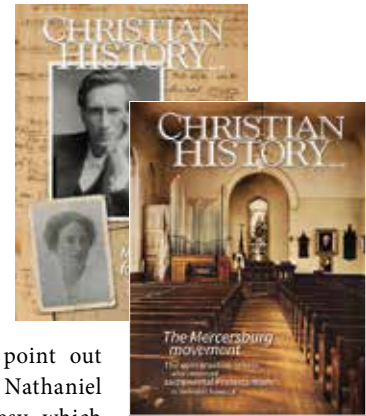
Thank you, Charlotta. We love it when one of our stories makes a personal connection with a reader. And great question, Gregg! You can purchase back issues of CH through our [online store](#) or call the office at 1-800-468-0458. We also offer the option of providing gift subscriptions.

THOUGHTS ON MERCERSBURG

Just a note to say I was really impressed with the latest issue. When it showed up and I saw the topic, I wondered how it would be handled. It is excellent—thoroughly contextualized, nuanced, and balanced. And I love that this came out soon after the revival series—it shows your attention to important tensions, historiography, and debates. I wrote one of my first grad school papers on Schaff, Nevin, etc. and I wish I had had this issue as an introduction to the lay of the land back then. So good!—Jared S. Burkholder, Warsaw, IN

I wanted to share how much my wife and I have enjoyed reading this most recent issue. I was first introduced by a

dear friend, Mrs. Brown, who has since gone home to be with our Lord. I have read every issue cover to cover. I work at Grove City College in Grove City, PA, and I truly feel like this is an incredible resource for all ages.—Brian Powell, Grove City, PA



In “Pursuit of ‘the common and the constant,’” I would point out that on p. 27, the teaching of Nathaniel Taylor is blatant Pelagian heresy, which Augustine had to contend with. Taylor did not “soften” Reformed teaching, he discarded BIBLICAL teaching. It is obvious that the modern “revival” is a dangerous phenomenon. It is, as the next subtitle in the article states, “IRREVERENT QUACKERY!”—Jonathan Edwards, West Valley City, UT

The latest issue which I received recently seemed to be a sympathetic treatment of the Mercersburg movement. I wanted to point out that Hegel's view of truth is unbiblical. The Bible presents truth as absolute and unchangeable. God himself is unchanging (Mal. 3:6). There is no synthesis of truth. There is no shadow of turning. We are to be separate and to reject idolatry even when it is the idolatry of reason. Yes, we are dependent on God's word. That's my synthesis.—Ken Clodfelter, Las Cruces, NM

Part of our mission is to see the best in every Christian tradition and to fairly represent the motives, theological thought, and practices of the figures involved. Often that means we tell the stories of believers of various theological frameworks and sometimes those with controversial or questionable philosophical underpinnings. Hegel, whatever we may think of him, influenced the thought of numerous believers throughout Christian history. (However, to be fair to Nevin and Schaff, they also disagreed with plenty of Hegel's conclusions—it seems they saw that Hegel was onto something but never arrived at biblical truth.)

All that to say, we don't expect our readers to agree with the theology of every figure we cover, but we do think it's important to share their stories and why they matter in the larger context of Christianity's past. Thanks for reading and engaging! CH

Editor's note

Do you see biblical narrative as living history?

This isn't a theological "gotcha" but a genuine question. As I began editing this latest issue of *Christian History* and reviewing familiar stories of the apostles found in the Gospels and in Acts, I realized something. Often, and unthinkingly, I was reading God's Word as a decontextualized story. Specifically I was reading about the apostles' lives as if they weren't really people, but more like literary supporting characters.

In one sense that's true. When we read the Bible, we're seeking to learn more about the God who reveals himself to us through it. But God reveals himself to us in a true story—one in which the Son of God really walked and lived with his family and friends.

MORE TO THE STORY

Insight into the lives of the 12 disciples who became Jesus's apostles—specifically, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the Younger, Thaddeus, Simon, and Matthias—gives us another dimension through which to understand our Savior. As you'll soon read, this was the goal of the early church fathers who served as both historians and theological encouragers when recording more on the apostles' lives.

In the following pages, *Christian History* will seek to do the same thing, using the Bible as our primary starting point. Though it's not covered explicitly in this issue, we operate from the understanding that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16) and that we can trust everything written in the biblical canon. It's why we begin with a scholarly look at the Holy Spirit's transformative role in the 12 disciples' hearts and how God empowered them to do all that he commanded.

Following our attention to Pentecost, you'll read what details scholars have gleaned about the apostles outside of Scripture. While reputable ancient sources tell us much of what we can be confident in, the apocryphal writings, as bizarre and as theologically suspect as they often are, corroborate some facts and provide a fuller picture of the apostles' lives. This includes the places the apostles may have evangelized and the fates they possibly suffered. Though less historically reliable, fantastic legends and miraculous deeds popularized in these apocryphal writings

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Don't miss our next issue #157 on the Second Vatican Council!



still inspired the imagination and faith of later believers, especially as they were retold in the superheroesque tales of the Middle Ages.

The next pages will also help you sift through the identities of the apostles and of other faithful followers—for example, by the end of this issue, you'll learn how to distinguish the stories of James the son of Zebedee, James the son of Alphaeus, AND James the brother of Jesus. Finally we'll get a closer look at other disciples important to the mission of the very early church, including the thirteenth apostle, Paul, the Gospel writers, and the women closest to Jesus.

THEY WHO WALKED WITH GOD

Just as I have at times neglected to contextualize the apostles in history, I also have forgotten these New Testament writers and figures were *people*—people who did normal things like eating and sleeping, laughing and crying, stumbling and failing. And yet they also walked with Jesus. They learned at his feet, despaired at his death, and exalted in his Resurrection. On these normal people came the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to write down what they heard and touched and saw: the living God, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world and opens eternity before us. It's a marvelous thought that forever after their encounters with Jesus, these regular men lived—and died—to proclaim him.

And now, reading Scripture with a little more understanding than before, I think marveling is the right response. How marvelous it is to read the conviction, joy, and love in the apostles' words, to see their transformation as ordinary people who came face to face with our extraordinary God. It's my prayer that as you read the apostles' stories in this issue, you may obtain their same confidence and hope: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and

rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8–9). **CH**



Kaylena Radcliff
Managing editor

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From deserters to defenders

THE POWER OF PENTECOST IN THE LIVES OF THE DISCIPLES

Craig S. Keener

Not long before his death on the cross, Jesus called Peter “Satan.” Peter then denied Jesus three times to protect his own life. And yet, within a matter of weeks, Peter preached boldly at the risk of his life.

Humanly speaking such a dramatic change hardly makes sense. In fact the former fearful actions are more in keeping with the 12 apostles’ original characters. Bible scholars emphasize how badly the disciples failed Jesus throughout Mark’s Gospel. Yet Mark wrote for followers of Jesus who knew how faithful those disciples (minus Judas) would become; Mark just hints at how that shift happened. Jesus promised Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew, “Follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of people!” (Mark 1:17). And John the Baptist summarized Jesus’s coming ministry like this: “He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit!” (Matt. 3:13).

Luke does not emphasize the disciples’ failures as much as Mark does. But because Luke has a second volume—the book of Acts—he gives us a fuller picture of

“PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU” This fresco found on a church wall in Cappadocia shows Jesus blessing his disciples. At the Last Supper, he promised them peace and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

what it means for Jesus to baptize his followers in the Holy Spirit. Luke’s account shows how the disciples developed and, through Jesus’s Resurrection, exaltation, and gift of the Spirit, received a new boldness for mission.

NORMAL PEOPLE

What would ordinary ancient readers assume about the disciples from the Gospel accounts? Commercial fishermen and tax collectors had a better economic standing than most of the population but fell far below the financial elite. They also lacked scribal education (Acts 4:13). And if Jesus’s disciples were like most ancient disciples of religious/philosophical teachers, most of them were probably in their midteens. Peter, who was married, may have



UNDERSTANDING, AT LAST The disciples often failed to grasp Jesus's true identity and purpose during his ministry. This painting (*above*) depicts Peter and John at the tomb, full of wonder at finding it empty.

been slightly older than the rest, and he seems to have risen quickly in prominence among them. Jesus had women followers too (see p. 54), but in that culture it was much more practical (and respectable) to send out teams of men.

The Gospels consistently show us that the disciples were human—normal people whose actions and words display common human strengths and weaknesses. For example while Jesus was training his disciples to take over much of his work after his Ascension, he still had to challenge them for their lack of faith in the midst of a storm. By this point in Jesus's ministry, they should have known that the boat was safe with Jesus in it!

The disciples kept failing to understand, though the Gospel of Luke explains that the meaning was hidden from them. They argued over who was the greatest and, though Luke explains their weariness was because of sorrow, they slept when they should have been praying. "Why are you sleeping?" Jesus admonished them in Luke 22. "Get up and pray so you won't fall prey to the testing that's coming!"

Jesus reproved James and John for wanting to call down fire on Samaritans. Who could imagine that John would soon join Peter in serving those same Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17)? Peter initially felt too sinful to be with Jesus. Luke tells us that he became a target for Satan (Luke 22:31). Peter insisted that he was ready to face prison and death with Jesus; Jesus warned that Peter would deny him three times that same night.

Most of the Twelve, and finally Peter, failed the master they loved. When Jesus was arrested, Peter followed at



GO THEREFORE, AND MAKE DISCIPLES

Jesus's 12 disciples became his bold apostles, carrying the gospel to the ancient world, often on Roman roads (*above*) and on foot (1st-c. sandal *right*).



a distance. As foretold he denied Jesus. Although he wept bitterly, with the others he left Jesus to face the rest of his mission alone.

And yet the risen Jesus restored, strengthened, and empowered them. Peter's encounter with his Lord transformed him, and Luke underlines an additional element that made Peter a particularly bold witness for Christ: the promised Holy Spirit. This factor is so important for the handing off of Jesus's ministry to the disciples that Luke both ends his first volume and begins his second by elaborating it.

PENTECOST'S PROMISE

Different parts of Acts 2 concerning the Holy Spirit's work have been prominent for different movements in history, such as Anabaptists, the Stone-Campbell movement, Pentecostals, and others. Similarly the Spirit is foundational for understanding the most dramatic phase in the disciples' transformation.

New Testament writers emphasize various aspects of the Spirit's work. While all agree that the Spirit seals us and initiates us into unity with Christ at conversion, they also recognize the importance of subsequent reliance on the Spirit. Acts, which provides our clearest narrative window into early Christian mission, illustrates that even the apostles had multiple empowering experiences with the Spirit.



While the Spirit leads and empowers us in various ways, Acts especially emphasizes power for mission: “But you’ll receive power, when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you’ll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the world” (Acts 1:8). Jesus addressed this promise to the 11 apostles and those who were with them, who could attest to the events of Jesus’s public ministry.

This promise was for both young and old as seen in elderly Anna (Luke 2:36–38) or in Philip’s young daughters (Acts 21:9). Pentecost fire also fell on a mixed group of men and women. That the promise embraced both genders is not a new interpretation. Many leaders in the nineteenth century already emphasized this passage, such as African Methodist Episcopal evangelist Julia A. J. Foote (1823–1901), Baptist leader A. J. Gordon (1836–1895), and Salvation Army cofounders William (1829–1912) and Catherine (1829–1890) Booth.

So what does this promise involve? First it is a foretaste of the future age of the kingdom. Earlier biblical prophets had announced that God would pour out his Spirit on his people at the time of their restoration (see Isa. 32:15 and 44:3; Joel 2:28, Ezek. 39:29, and Zech. 12:10).

Besides “pouring,” prophets used other fluid images for the gift of the Spirit: “I will sprinkle on you clean water . . . and I will put my Spirit in you” (Ezek. 36:25, 27), just as Luke uses fluid images such as “baptized” and “filled” in the books of Luke and Acts. The context of all the earlier prophecies, however, was the time of future restoration (see e.g., Ezek. 36:24; 39:27–28; Joel 3:1).

This is why, when Jesus talked about God’s kingdom and being baptized in the Spirit in Acts, his apostles asked, “Is this the time that you’re restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus told them it was not for them to know the Father’s timing, but laid out their mission to the nations for the time in



THE MISSION AND THE HELPER Jesus promised his disciples power from the Holy Spirit, enabling them to be his witnesses (*above left*). As Acts records, the Helper came as tongues of fire at Pentecost (*above*).

between. It is no surprise that Paul later treats the Spirit as the foretaste of our future inheritance in God’s kingdom in his letters to the churches. This promise was for all flesh—which meant more than Peter understood at first. When Peter later saw God give the Spirit to Gentiles, he realized that God was welcoming them also into his people!

PROPHECY AND PREPARATION

Second the promise includes prophetic empowerment. Scripture often has the Spirit enabling people to speak God’s message (e.g., Num. 11:25–26; 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 19:20, 23; 1 Chron. 12:18; Luke 1:41–45; 67–79; 2:25–38; Acts 13:1–2; 19:6; 21:9). On Pentecost, Peter is explicit that what has happened to him and his colleagues fulfills Joel’s promise that God’s people would prophesy (Acts 2:17–18). Although “prophecy” in Scripture may foretell the future, more fundamentally it involves speaking God’s message, guided by his Spirit. Moses had wished that all God’s people would be prophets (Num. 11:29); Joel 2:28–29 insists a democratization of the gift is to come, and Peter describes it as being fulfilled in Jesus’s new movement. No wonder the apostles turned their world upside down!

Jesus introduces this empowerment to speak for God already in Acts 1:8: it is power to bear witness about Jesus. When his disciples are filled with the Spirit at Pentecost in the next chapter, however, they speak in other people’s languages. One connection between 1:8 and 2:4 seems clear: the Spirit led their speaking, like prophesying. But aside from getting a multilingual crowd’s attention, how



SPIRIT-LED WITNESS Images of Jesus's twelve disciples, such as this Serbian icon (*above*) and this illuminated manuscript from Spain (*above right*), can be found throughout the ancient world, attesting to the Spirit-filled success of their gospel witness.

did their worship in tongues relate to witness? Luke mentions spontaneous, collective speaking in tongues on two other occasions, where no multilingual crowd was present (10:44–46; 19:6). At Pentecost, however, tongues underlined the purpose of the empowerment: to testify about Jesus to “the farthest ends of the world.” No longer was Hebrew the exclusive holy language; God had now consecrated all languages for the service of the good news.

Jesus warned the disciples that the Spirit's power was so essential that they should not begin their urgent mission without it (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). So, for more than a week, the disciples regularly prayed together until they were filled with the Spirit. Outpourings followed after some other occasions of prayer as well (Acts 4:31; 8:15–17). This model has often resurfaced in history, whether among the Moravians, the Great Awakenings, the Welsh Revival, or the Azusa Street Revival (see *CH*'s revival issues #149, 151, and 153 for more).

While waiting the disciples also took care of one other item of business: replacing Judas. Jesus had appointed 12 leaders for his new movement, but one of them, Judas, had fallen away. (Scandals are not an exclusively modern problem.) Getting ready for their mission in faith, they also trusted God to give them a replacement (see p. 49).

A HOLY DIFFERENCE

The Spirit empowered the disciples. Church father Jerome (d. 420) pointed to Peter's striking example: “Lacking the power of the Spirit, Saint Peter trembled at the voice of a maid-servant. With the Spirit, he withstood princes and kings.”



When challenged for his preaching after Pentecost, Peter, filled with the Spirit, confronted the leaders of his nation, shocking them with his boldness (see pp. 18–22). When the civic elite warned them against preaching further, Jesus's followers prayed that God would continue to give them boldness to preach and to heal in Jesus's name (4:29–30).

Just as Jesus raised a widow's son and a synagogue leader's daughter (Luke 7:14–15; 8:54–55), Peter raised Tabitha (Acts 9:40–41). The same disciples who had once abandoned Jesus soon celebrated that God counted them worthy to be beaten for Jesus's honor (5:40–41).

These same apostles also passed the torch to others full of the Spirit, such as the seven bicultural leaders in Acts 6:3–5 appointed to serve the Hellenistic Jews. The Spirit guided each new phase of this transition and expansion of the church. And because the Spirit pushed Peter across a cultural barrier in Acts 10, he was prepared to defend the cross-cultural mission to the Gentiles in 15:7–11.

Luke's Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem; Acts begins in Jerusalem but ends in the heart of the empire where his readers lived. While Jesus's movement remained grounded in its heritage, the Spirit also pushed it across barriers so that the Spirit could truly be poured out on all peoples—paving the way for what minister and historian Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884–1968) called the “history of the expansion of Christianity.”

THE MISSION CONTINUES

Despite various foreshadowings in Acts, these first apostles and even Paul did not complete the mission “to the ends of the earth.” Thus the risen Lord Jesus continues to empower his people with the power of the Spirit for mission. The promise is not only for Peter's hearers in Jerusalem, but for their descendants and for whomever God calls around the world (Acts 2:39). Peter declared that the promise of the Spirit is for the “last days”; if that was already true when he spoke, it is certainly no less true for our day, 2,000 years later. **CH**

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“We cannot stop speaking”



THE POWER OF PENTECOST This 20th-c. painting by German artist Gebhard Fugel depicts Peter preaching to the crowd as John baptizes a new convert. Their boldness and knowledge astonished Jerusalem's religious leaders.

apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let's warn them not to speak any longer to any person in this name."

And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man on whom this miracle of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

THROUGH THE NAME OF JESUS

When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported everything that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, "Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth

Acts 3–4 recounts one story of the apostles' boldness after Pentecost. After Peter healed a crippled beggar at the temple, he preached the gospel to bystanders, framing the miracle as only possible through faith in the resurrected Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Sadducees, a Jewish religious and political group who denied the resurrection of the dead, arrested Peter and John for this reason. The two apostles were brought before Jewish leaders, including the high priest, to explain.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, "What are we to do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is

of our father David Your servant, said,

Why were the nations insolent,
And the peoples plotting in vain?
The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant it to Your bond-servants to speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

—Acts 4:13–31 (*Legacy Standard Bible translation*)

Who are the apostles?

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDENTITIES OF THE TWELVE

W. Brian Shelton

Jesus called them out of their livelihoods and out of other ministries. He appointed them as his key disciples, and later, apostles (messengers). He even gave some of them new names. Lists in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts give us their names, and John's Gospel shows intimate stories of their encounters with Jesus. But who were these 12 men who walked with God incarnate and carried his gospel to the world—whose stories have fascinated and inspired Christians through both their great faith and relatable human weaknesses?

SONS OF JONAH; SONS OF THUNDER

Simon Peter was a fisherman from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. At times his blunt and bold actions revealed a conflicted follower trying to understand the ministry of Jesus. He saw Jesus walking on the water and requested to do likewise before sinking in fear. He impulsively cut off a soldier's ear who came to arrest Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane.

That very night he denied Jesus three times. He had objected to Jesus's plan to go to Jerusalem and be arrested, leading Jesus to rebuke him, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). At other times the dedicated disciple was affirmed. When Simon declared Jesus to be the Son of God at Caesarea Philippi, he was renamed Peter, "Rock." The book of Acts tells of his Spirit-led leadership of the early church. He eventually died in Rome, martyred on Vatican Hill (see pp. 18–22).

Andrew was Simon Peter's brother, both a "Son of Jonah" and a fisherman. He could quite possibly be the first disciple of Jesus and was a former disciple of John the Baptist. The Byzantine tradition depicts him as the *Protokletos*, the "first called" (see pp. 24–26). Andrew was the disciple who wondered how the crowds could be fed with limited bread and fish before witnessing the miracle of the mass feeding. He and Philip coordinated a way for interested Greeks to see Jesus. Andrew's ministry beyond the New Testament seemed to occur in Scythia around the Black Sea before he was martyred in Patras, Greece.

James was likely the older of the sons of Zebedee because he is often listed before his brother, John. Jesus gave them both the additional names "Boanerges, which means, 'Sons of Thunder'" (Mark 3:17), perhaps because



BECOMING FISHERS OF MEN Renaissance artist Raphael imagines the moment Jesus's first disciples witnessed his power in the miraculous catch of fish. Luke 5:11 says they "left everything . . . and followed him."

of their request to rain down fire from heaven on the Samaritan villagers who would not host them. Both were fishermen when Jesus called them. Both unabashedly requested to sit enthroned on either side of Jesus in glory. However, while John was likely the longest living apostle, James was the first to die. Legends exist of him ministering in Spain, but it is more likely that only James's bones are at the end of the popular pilgrimage route, the St. James Way, at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

John seems to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23), an attribution for the Gospel writer who does not provide his own name. He may have been the youngest of the 12 disciples. John shared the spotlight with his brother, James, in the events above and was also with Peter in Acts at the incredible healing of the lame man. Paul names him as a pillar of the church in Galatians. While church tradition tells of ministry stories across modern Turkey, he was most noted for his exile to the island of Patmos where he wrote his vision of Revelation. Three New



SYMBOLS OF THEIR STORIES Art and icons throughout the ages often identify the apostles' personalities and stories with certain visual cues. For example, in this altarpiece (above), Peter holds the keys of heaven and James holds a pilgrim's staff.



Testament epistles are also generally attributed to him before he likely died of old age in Ephesus.

STORIED CALLINGS

Philip was the other disciple of John the Baptist whom Jesus called alongside Andrew. He was also from Bethsaida. With Andrew he received the Greeks seeking Jesus and participated in the feeding of the crowd. He also invited Nathanael to come see Jesus, revealing a close network of some disciples at the time of their calling. It was Philip who asked Jesus in the Upper Room to show them the Father as the disciples attempted to navigate Jesus's purpose. Scholars are divided

where he was likely martyred.

Thomas is forever remembered for doubting Jesus's Resurrection after he was absent from Jesus's Easter evening appearance: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were...I will not believe" (John 20:25). Belief came immediately upon seeing Jesus three verses later, however, as he declared, "My Lord and my God!" He was impressive on two other occasions in the Gospels that are often overlooked. When Jesus was going to Bethany in the Lazarus account, Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). In the Upper Room, Thomas admitted that they didn't know the



THE PROBLEM OF JUDAS Satan influences Judas Iscariot in this 15th-c. depiction of the Last Supper (right). His death leads the others to choose a replacement in Matthias (statue far right), another disciple who probably saw the risen Jesus and was present at Pentecost (fresco at left, p. 12).

way to where Jesus was going, after which Jesus proclaims, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Church tradition gives us a remarkable legacy of Thomas’s extensive influence in India, where four million today often call themselves “Thomas Christians” (see pp. 41–43).

Matthew has one of the simplest but most powerful callings among the apostles. As a tax collector, he was sitting in his office when Jesus said, “Follow me”; he simply left all and followed (Matt. 9:9). When Jesus was at a banquet feast afterward, it was a gesture of humility that Matthew did not name the host, but Luke names him as Matthew himself. Still his dubious position of collecting Roman taxes from his own Jewish people surely caused moments of resentment among his peers (see pp. 38–40). In two Gospel accounts, he is given the Jewish name Levi. The early church claimed the first Gospel was written by him. Legend has him ministering in Palestine, around the Black Sea, and in Ethiopia, before his martyrdom, likely in modern Iran.

LESS ATTENTION, BUT NOT LESS

James, “Son of Alphaeus,” is so named in all four lists to distinguish him from the son of Zebedee. He is sometimes called “the Lesser” because less attention is shown to him. Church father Jerome thought that James’s mother, Mary of Clopas, and Jesus’s mother were sisters-in-law because of the common root of “Alphaeus” and “Clopas,” making James and Jesus first cousins (see pp. 38–40). Yet these facts are as uncertain as the facts around his legacy, which has him ministering in Egypt and around the Caspian Sea before his likely martyrdom in modern Iran.

Likewise little information about Jude appears in the Gospels. Some lists call him Thaddeus and Labbaeus, associating the root “Theudas” with “Judas,” shortened to Jude to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. In the Upper Room, this disciple asked Jesus why he did not reveal himself to



the whole world. Jude has an extensive legacy of ministry in Syria, along with a Persian ministry where he may have suffered martyrdom alongside Simon.

Simon is noted in church history, with Jude, as participating in a dramatic exorcism story of demons around the sun and moon god in Persia before their deaths. Little is known of Simon, and the appellation “Zealot” is either due to a political affiliation or another ardent ideal that characterized him. One tradition says that he ministered in Britain but without significant historical evidence.

Finally, Matthias is elected by the other apostles in Acts upon the death of Judas Iscariot. Their criterion was one “who accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21), which means Matthias was an active disciple for three years (see p. 49) though not one of the original Twelve. Church father Origen claims he witnessed the resurrected Lord. One tradition has him imprisoned by cannibals around the Black Sea before his miraculous deliverance, with additional ministries in Syria, modern Iraq, and modern Georgia where he was likely martyred.

While the identity of these individuals fascinates Christians, it is their collective commitment to serving the resurrected Lord that marks their legacy. These 12 normal disciples became 12 bold apostles as they took the gospel “as far as the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). **CH**

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Historical wheat or heretical chaff?

EXTRABIBLICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE APOSTLES' LIVES INCLUDE THE FANTASTIC AS WELL AS GRAINS OF TRUTH

Bryan M. Litfin



When people talk about the lives of the apostles beyond what is recorded in Scripture, they often refer to a vague entity called “tradition.” A pastor might declare in a sermon, “Christian tradition says Peter was crucified upside down” or “According to an early tradition, Thomas evangelized India.” Paul went to Spain, Mary lived in Ephesus, Bartholomew was skinned alive—all according to ancient church tradition. But what exactly does this word mean? And whatever it means, can it be trusted as a reliable historical source?

The tradition of the Christian church doesn’t form a single, monolithic bloc. As always when studying history, each text that came down to us from ancient times must be evaluated on its own merits. Various scholarly criteria can help assess validity. How early is the text? Could it be related to eyewitness accounts, or is it full of legends from a later era? Do multiple texts—or at least more than one—corroborate a certain point? Does the text show evidence of an oral prehistory? Does it come from the pen of a known writer, and if so, how reliable does the writer tend to be? What sort of community composed or used the text? How widespread was its usage? What was the original purpose of the text—historical record or spiritual edification?

THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

As historians evaluate claims about the apostles, the writings of the early church fathers provide some of the best information. These patristic writers, whom we usually

LARGER THAN LIFE Accounts of the apostles were rooted in fact, but stories often grew to legendary proportions. Still, such tales served to encourage the young, embattled church.

know by name, recorded the apostolic traditions that were common knowledge in their day.

Of course, as we all know from personal experience, things considered common knowledge by a certain group don’t always turn out to be true. Sometimes we participate in shared delusions: the earth is flat, the moon landings never happened, Elvis is still alive. Nevertheless, a community’s knowledge is often based on some kind of collective memory, so it has more likelihood of veracity than one person’s offhanded statement or the quirky beliefs of a marginal sect.

Consider the question of whether the apostle Peter was martyred in Rome. Hints of this can be found in John 13:36–38, 21:18–19, and 1 Peter 5:13. But what does tradition say? An early pastor in Rome named Clement (d. 99) declared that “the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter . . . when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him.”

Later patristic writers confirm this belief in Peter’s Roman sojourn and martyrdom. Irenaeus of Lyons (130–c. 202) asserted that “Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and laying the foundation of the church” until their “departure.” Likewise Tertullian of Carthage (160–240) said Peter endured “a passion like his Lord’s” at Rome. Widespread early attestation from Christians makes the tradition of Peter’s martyrdom believable despite conflicting details (see pp. 18–22).

Among the writings of the early fathers, the 10-volume *Church History* (c. 313) by Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339) stands out as special. In the early fourth century, Eusebius was the curator of the ancient church’s greatest library, which had been assembled at Caesarea Maritima by his martyred mentor, Pamphilus (c. 240–309). The library’s collection had its roots in the impressive textual work of the church’s foremost scholar, Origen (c. 185–c. 253), who had lived in Caesarea for a time. Because Eusebius had access to many Christian documents—augmented by his own investigation of eyewitness accounts—he was in a position to produce a reliable work of ecclesiastical history.

Of course, Eusebius had purposes for writing beyond mere historical record. He wished to advance a pro-Constantine imperial agenda through his vision of the church’s origins, persecutions, triumph, and ultimate destiny. Even



CHURCH FATHER, FACT CHECKER Eusebius is a reliable historical source. Scripture (papyrus fragment of Acts, *above right*), research, and common knowledge bolstered his claim that James was Jesus's brother, an early church leader, and a martyr (*above*).

so, Eusebius often recorded bare statements of fact or copied firsthand quotations that can be taken at face value.

When Eusebius called James “the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopal seat at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the apostles,” he was repeating a common Christian understanding of James’s ministry. Modern historians, of course, will immediately remind us that the term “episcopal” would have meant something different in Eusebius’s time than in James’s. The multiple overseers of the first-century Jerusalem church didn’t have the same singular authority as civic bishops in Eusebius’s day. Nevertheless the tradition that James held a primary leadership role in the Jerusalem church (implied in New Testament texts such as Acts 15:13, 21:18, and Gal. 1:19, 2:9) finds corroboration in Eusebius.

Eusebius strengthened this claim by digging into his library and quoting an earlier historian named Hegesippus (110–180), whose writings are now lost. Hegesippus had recorded salient points about James. Because Eusebius’s *Church History* contains many such quotations, it serves as a vital source for reconstructing lost apostolic biographies.

THE “HIDDEN THINGS”

The term “apocrypha” means “hidden things.” Here, we aren’t talking about the Apocrypha that is included in Roman Catholic Bibles. Rather we are referring to a body of early Christian writings that remained outside the formal biblical canon, yet might have some value as historical texts. Though these books were kept “hidden” in the storage cupboards of the ancient church—not read aloud publicly like Holy Scripture—they can still provide a few details that help us understand what happened to the apostles.



Unfortunately these apocryphal acts of the apostles didn’t tend to come from the mainline, orthodox communities that we associate with the writings of the church fathers. They were used by—and sometimes even penned by—dubious authors or marginal sects considered to have sketchy doctrines and practices (such as extreme asceticism or a bias against marriage). Quite often the texts are tinged with gnosticism, a heresy condemned by the ancient church that claimed Jesus saves people through secret knowledge and enlightenment, not his death on the cross. This kind of thinking got woven into the apocryphal acts, making it hard for modern scholars to separate the grains of historical wheat from the gnostic chaff.

For example, many Christians have heard that Peter was crucified upside down. Why? The common answer is that the humble apostle felt himself unworthy of being crucified in the same manner as his Lord. But did the Romans really honor their victims’ wishes and crucify them the way they requested? Of course not! Peter’s humble request doesn’t show up as an explanation for the upside-down crucifixion until the late fourth century. A much earlier text, the second-century *Acts of Peter*, instead uses Peter’s upside-down posture (that may well have been preserved in eyewitness memory) as an occasion for him to give a gnostic-themed speech about the fall of the primordial man and the inversion of the universe. So perhaps modern historians can accept Peter’s upside-down crucifixion—the Romans often crucified their victims in strange postures—without affirming the pious reasons put forward by later traditions as fact.

QUESTIONABLE LEGENDS

A final category of source material about the apostles can be loosely categorized as medieval hagiography (literally, “writing about saints”). In late antiquity and especially during the Middle Ages, the narration of apostolic stories became a big business. Legends multiplied as cities vied to connect themselves to an apostle or his tomb. Powerful city-states rose and



FAN FICTION The *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (above) captured Christian imagination and inspired heroic medieval depictions of the apostles, such as Bartholomew's martyrdom by being skinned alive (below) or other tales in the *Golden Legend* (right). But these fascinating narratives hold no canonical weight.



fell based on whether their cathedrals could claim to house apostolic relics beneath their altars. In 828 two crafty merchants of Venice stole the supposed bones of Mark from Egypt in a theft worthy of a spy novel. To this day tourists can visit St. Mark's Basilica in its beautiful Venetian plaza, where the bones of the city's patron saint are said to rest. While this assertion comes from "tradition," it almost certainly isn't true.

SIFTING THROUGH STORIES

Eventually a lot of these free-floating medieval traditions about the apostles and martyrs came to be collected and written down. A central figure in this task, Italian bishop Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1228–1298), compiled hagiographical accounts of saints' lives in the *Golden Legend* (c. 1260), which became an international bestseller. Through this wildly popular work, the stories of the apostles reached many ears as preachers repeated them on the church's feast days.

Modern scholars, however, consider most of these fanciful accounts as folklore. They describe things out of place in apostolic times or too fantastic to have actual grounding



GOSPEL TRUTH This Ethiopian illustration depicts Eusebius (left) handing off a letter about the harmony of the Gospels, which he trusted as the ultimate authority on the apostles' lives.

in history. Medieval writers, motivated by pious edification more than the objective recording of facts, imagined a lot of fiction surrounding the lives of the apostles, making the *Golden Legend* and related works questionable as historical sources.

In the end the lives of the apostles—especially the more obscure members of the Twelve—are difficult for historians to reconstruct. Everything has to be taken with a grain of salt. No traditions are unassailably secure. Scholars must sift the evidence, giving primary weight to early works or statements that corroborate one another.

Yet when careful historical methods are used, a few plausible assertions, along with many possible ones, can be made about the apostles. Even so we can't know the apostolic stories in rich detail. Perhaps that will be one of the great pleasures of heaven: to ask these admirable forefathers of our faith, "What really happened to you after Acts?" **CH**

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Thaddeus and the legend of Abgar

Not much is known about the life of the apostle Thaddeus, also called Jude (see pp. 11–13), but early church historian Eusebius wrote down traditional accounts of his life and of the other apostles in his Church History (c. 313). In this narrative Thaddeus preaches the gospel to Prince Abgar of Edessa (modern-day Turkey). Eastern Orthodox, Syrian, and Armenian traditions celebrate Abgar as a saint.

Then Abgar asked Thaddeus if he were in truth a disciple of Jesus the Son of God, who had written saying, “I will send you one of my disciples, who will heal you and give you life.”

Thaddeus replied, “Because you believed strongly in him that sent me, therefore I have been sent to you. Furthermore, if you believe in him, the petitions of your heart shall be granted to you.”

And Abgar said to him, “I believed in him so strongly that I wished to take an army to destroy those Jews who crucified him, but I decided against it because of the Romans’ dominion.”

Thaddeus responded, “Our Lord fulfilled the will of his Father, and having fulfilled that will, he has been taken up to his Father.”

Then Abgar said, “I believe in him and his Father.”

So Thaddeus said to Abgar, “Therefore in his name, I place my hand upon you.” And when he had done so, immediately Abgar was healed of his disease and suffering.

ARMENIAN APOSTLE Armenian tradition holds that Thaddeus (possibly depicted *above left*) evangelized Armenia and Persia. The monastery named for him, located in ancient Armenia (*above right* in modern-day Iran), is among the oldest church buildings in the world.

And Abgar marveled that, as he had heard concerning Jesus, so he received indeed through his disciple Thaddeus, who healed him without medicines or herbs....

THADDEUS GIVES THE GOSPEL

And afterward, Abgar said, “O Thaddeus, you do these things by the power of God, and we marvel. But in addition to these things, I pray you to inform me about the coming of Jesus—how he was born; and in regard to his power, by what power he performed those deeds of which I have heard.”

Thaddeus replied, “At this time, I will keep silent because I have been sent to proclaim the word publicly. So tomorrow assemble all your citizens for me, and I will preach in their presence and sow among them the word of God concerning Jesus, his birth, his mission, and his purpose for which he was sent by the Father.

“And I will preach concerning the power of his works and the mysteries he proclaimed in the world . . . and concerning his new preaching. Furthermore, I will preach about his humiliation, how he humbled himself, demeaning his divinity, was crucified and died. He descended into Hades and broke the bars which had not been broken from eternity, and he raised the dead; for he descended alone but rose with many, and thus he ascended to his Father.”

Therefore Abgar commanded his citizens to assemble early in the morning to hear Thaddeus’s preaching, and afterward he commanded gold and silver to be given to him. But Thaddeus refused to take it, saying, “If we have forsaken that which was our own, how shall we take that which is another’s?”

—Church History by Eusebius, translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert and adapted by Rex D. Butler



Peter's fate

CHURCH TRADITION VERSUS CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

Sean McDowell

The earliest reference to the death of Peter is found on the lips of Jesus in the last chapter of the Gospel of John (21:18–19, ESV):

“Truly, truly I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

The context of this verse matters for proper interpretation. In verses 15–17, Jesus had just restored Peter from his threefold denial (18:15–18, 25–27). Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, and after each response Jesus replied by commanding Peter to either “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” or “Feed my sheep.” The implication is clear—Peter, an under-shepherd of Jesus, was called to care for the flock and sacrifice his life for them, just as Jesus did (John 10:11–18).

“FEED MY SHEEP” In this study for a tapestry, Jesus charges Peter, kneeling and holding the keys to the kingdom, to shepherd God’s people. Pope Leo X commissioned Raphael to create tapestries depicting acts of the apostles for the Sistine Chapel.

While scholars disagree significantly over the particular details surrounding the fate of Peter, commentators have agreed that this passage predicts his martyrdom. As skeptical New Testament critic Bart Ehrman writes in *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, “It is clear that Peter is being told that he will be executed (he won’t die of natural causes) and that this will be the death of a martyr.” Even though the passage itself provides no details of when or where, Peter’s coming death in this passage is undoubtedly the earliest reference to Peter’s martyrdom.

And given that John’s Gospel was probably written in the last decade of the first century, it seems unlikely that this section would have been included had there not already



REIGN OF TERROR Nero, the fifth emperor of Rome (*above*), infamously set the city on fire and blamed the carnage on Christians. He persecuted them mercilessly.



REMEMBERING PETER Gospel writer Mark (*above right*) received Peter's account firsthand and gives us accurate insight into his experience. Letters from church father Clement (*above middle*) confirm later life details, such as the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.

been a strong tradition that Peter died in the way that Jesus predicted before John finished his Gospel. The question is: what can we know today about the life and death of the apostle Peter?

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

Early evidence consistently and unanimously points to Peter's martyrdom in Rome. After an extensive ministry in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Syrian Antioch, and beyond, he traveled to Rome, where he was killed at some point between AD 64 and 67, during the reign of Nero (54–68). 1 Peter 5:13 provides the earliest indirect evidence for Peter's stay there: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son." Modern scholars recognize that "she who is at Babylon" likely refers to the church in Rome, from which 1 Peter was written.

Other supporting evidence includes the possibility that Mark wrote his Gospel based on the testimony of Peter while in Rome. Church father and bishop Papias (d. 163) reports that Mark was Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately all that Peter remembered from his experience with Jesus.

Since the middle of the second century, early Christian writers unanimously concurred that Peter visited Rome. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Romans, Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons in *Against Heresies*, Bishop Dionysius of Corinth, as well as the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Acts of Peter* collectively put Peter there toward the end of his life. Nonetheless the location of his martyrdom is less critical than the fact of his martyrdom. Even if Peter didn't

make it to Rome, as traditionally conceived, the evidence for his martyrdom is strong.

First Clement is the first noncanonical document that refers to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Church father Clement of Rome (d. 100) wrote this letter to the Corinthian church around 95. This document has special significance because it is the only noncanonical, first-century document directly attesting the deaths of Peter and Paul, and it was written within one generation of the deaths of the apostles.

This early section of *First Clement* particularly focuses on Peter and Paul:

But to stop giving ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletic contenders in quite recent times. We should consider the noble examples of our own generation. Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most upright pillars were persecuted, and they struggled in the contest even to death. We should set before our eyes the good apostles. There is Peter, who because of unjust jealousy bore up under hardships not just once or twice, but many times; and having thus borne his witness he went to the place of glory that he deserved.

Clement tells us that both Peter and Paul were persecuted and struggled in the contest "unto death," likely referring to their martyrdom. Clement also says that Peter, after experiencing much hardship and persecution, had borne his "witness" and then went to the place of glory. As historian Richard Bauckham writes, "Clement



probably knew that Peter was martyred, not from any written source but simply as a matter of common knowledge in the church at Rome when he wrote.” *First Clement*, then, provides strong evidence that the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul were part of the living memory of Christians in Rome, and likely in Corinth, toward the end of the first century.

PETER’S PROMISED CUP

Other works, though less reliable, also attest to Peter’s martyrdom in Rome. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, a pseudepigraphic work (falsely attributed to the named author) that begins with Jesus sitting upon the Mount of Olives as he teaches Peter and the disciples about the end of the world, clearly presents Peter as the lead disciple, just as in the Gospels and Acts. The *Apocalypse of Peter* probably dates from the first half of the second century (c. 135).

Historian Dennis Buchholz has provided a translation with corrections from the Greek text:

Behold, I have shown you, Peter, and I have explained everything. And go into a city ruling over the west and drink the cup which I have promised you at the hands of the son of the One who is in Hades in order that his destruction might acquire a beginning.

The “city ruling over the west” is likely a reference to Rome. The phrase “drink the cup which I have promised” indicates that Peter would die as a martyr. As Christ followed the Father’s will and drank the cup prepared for him, so too Christ called Peter to follow him even unto death. The author



NERO’S GOLDEN HOUSE This illustration shows the emperor’s palace reconstructed after Rome burned (above). Nero called it the *Domus Aurea*, or “Golden House,” which was fitting considering its opulence.

REMORSE AND RESTORATION This painting imagines Peter (above left) moments after he denied Christ. Jesus restored the regretful disciple after the Resurrection.

of the *Apocalypse of Peter* fully understood this phrase’s martyrological association.

Though somewhat odd, the expression “the son of the One who is in Hades” likely refers to Nero. In this statement, “in order that his destruction might acquire a beginning,” Peter’s preaching and martyrdom in Rome act as the channel through which God overcomes the power of Satan. Buchholz emphasizes the significance of this passage: “This is possibly the oldest known unambiguous allusion to Peter’s death in Rome.”

AFTER EL GRECO, SAINT PETER, EARLY 17TH CENTURY, OIL ON VELLUM, LAYARD BEQUEST, 1916 (NG3131); © NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON / ART RESOURCE, NY
 FILIPPINO LIPPI, CRUCIFIXION WITH SIMON MAGUS AND CRUCIFIXION OF PETER, 1482 TO 1487, FRESCO, CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA DEL CARMINE, FIRENCE—MONDADORI
 PORTFOLIO ARCHIVO ANTONIO QUATTRONE/ANTONIO QUATTRONE/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES
 JEAN-CLAUDE GOLVIN, DOMUS AUREA, ROME, WATERCOLOR, MUSÉE DÉPARTEMENTAL ARLES ANTIQUE—© JEAN-CLAUDE GOLVIN / ÉDITIONS ERRANCE



TAKING UP HIS CROSS According to the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, executioners honored Peter's request and crucified him head down (*above right*). Though the imagery is powerful in art, such as this depiction of Nero presiding over Peter's death (*above*), an upside-down crucifixion seems unlikely.

Tertullian, who comes just after the close of the living memory of the apostles, wrote *The Prescription against Heretics* and *Scorpiace* near the turn of the third century (c. 208). In the former work, Tertullian explicitly mentions that Peter was crucified like Jesus: "How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's!"

It is true that this statement must be received with caution, especially since it occurs in the company of an incredible story about John surviving execution by boiling oil before his exile (see pp. 24–26). Nevertheless Tertullian is even more specific in *Scorpiace*, where he states that the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul took place under Nero:

And if a heretic wishes his confidence to rest upon a public record, the archives of the empire will speak, as would the stones of Jerusalem. We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross.

Tertullian was so confident of his claims that he told his doubters to examine "the archives of the empire." If no such public records existed, Tertullian would have automatically undermined his credibility by saying this. His appeal to them indicates his confidence that they existed and, if examined, would corroborate his testimony. Therefore Tertullian was likely relying upon even earlier public records about the Neronian persecution and the fates of Peter and Paul (see pp. 50–53).

Agreeing with Tertullian's assessment is the apocryphal work, the *Acts of Peter*. Most but not all scholars date

it between 180 and 190, which falls within living memory of the life of Peter and thus may have some historical value for this investigation. The *Acts of Peter* clearly contains substantial legendary material from earlier oral tradition, and yet, despite these legendary accretions, the document still has value as a historical witness.

The writer(s) of the *Acts of Peter* did not simply invent material but retold received tradition. We have reason to believe that earlier traditions, and in particular martyrdom traditions, had been incorporated into the text. The traditions behind this writing trace back to the first century, though the narrative also reflects the situation of the churches in the second and third centuries when they were written.

A DEATH LIKE HIS LORD?

Given both the early reference in John 21:18 and the fact that crucifixion was a common form of punishment for slaves and non-Roman citizens, the crucifixion of Peter is historically plausible. However, the claim that Peter was crucified upside down is less likely. In the *Acts of Peter*, when Peter approaches the place of execution, he addresses the people and the cross. He concludes by saying: "But it is time for you, Peter, to surrender your body to those who are taking it. Take it, then, you whose duty it is. I request you therefore, executioners, to crucify me head-downwards in this way and no other." Peter speaks his last while upside-down on the cross and then dies.

Many assume that Peter's request shows humility, in that he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. But the text does not say this outright. According to Bryan Litfin in his book, *After Acts*, the victims of Roman crucifixion were not given the chance to make requests about the method of their impalement. The intent was to shame them in a grotesque way, not to accommodate their wishes.



Perhaps a better understanding of Peter's request in the apocryphal account is theological: such a fate symbolizes that fallen humanity has now been restored through the cross. The narrative indicates a turning point in cosmic history, in the cross of Christ as well as the cross of Peter. The world has been turned upside down by sin, and so Peter can see the upside-down nature of the world clearly while hanging with his head downward on the cross. His speech makes clear that Adam, the "first man," fell head-downward and turned the cosmos upside down, but only through Christ can the world be seen "upright."

A FIERY FATE?

Is the upside-down crucifixion of Peter a reliable tradition? The earliest church father to mention it, Origen, in volume 3 of his *Commentary on Genesis* in the mid-third century (c. 230), makes no mention of Peter's prolonged speech. It is uncertain whether Origen derived his story from an independent tradition or from the *Acts of Peter*. However, we do have evidence Roman executioners varied their crucifixion practices for their own sadistic pleasure. Either way Peter's upside-down crucifixion is not intrinsically implausible—but evidence is inconclusive.

A definitive conclusion regarding the nature of the martyrdom of Peter becomes more difficult due to a notable dissenting view from historian Timothy David Barnes, who contended that Peter was likely burned alive, not crucified. Barnes rationalized that execution by burning harmonized better with Jesus's prediction of Peter's death that "when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you" (John 21:18 NIV). Victims of crucifixion were stripped naked, not dressed. On the other hand, victims of burning often were clothed in a special tunic treated with

FINDING THE FIRST POPE Peter (*above left*) is considered the first pope of the Catholic Church, as well as the first patriarch of Antioch in Eastern Orthodox tradition. In 1968 Pope Paul VI announced that Peter's tomb was found beneath the foundations of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Evidence is speculative, but the site (*above*) draws thousands of pilgrims each year.

inflammable materials. Furthermore Barnes determined that "later Christians suffered martyrdom by being burned alive tied to a stake or upright post, sometimes with their arms splayed wide as if they were being crucified."

Of the dissenting voices, this is the most convincing. The fact that victims of an execution by burning would often have their arms splayed wide is consistent with the statement in John 21:18 that Peter would stretch out his hands; and the statement that he would do so having been dressed by another is more consistent with a death by burning than with crucifixion. Barnes's interpretation, therefore, is favorable.

Even so, when considering the evidence, the traditional view that Peter died as a martyr during the reign of Nero stands on solid historical ground. A fitting end this was for the disciple who walked closely with Jesus, living and dying in the same promise the apostle also gave the persecuted church (1 Pet. 5:10):

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself confirm, strengthen, and establish you. **CH**

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Legends of Peter

The apocryphal Acts of Peter and Paul dates back to the fifth century. Its author is anonymous, though some versions claim a “Marcellus” as the writer. The narrative below perpetuates the legend of Peter’s martyrdom and shares an account of the conflict with the sorcerer Simon Magus who is written of in Acts 8.

SIMON VERSUS SIMON

Then Simon [Magus] went up upon the tower in the face of all, and, crowned with laurels, and began stretched forth his hands, and began to fly. And when Nero saw him flying, he said to Peter: “This Simon is true; but you and Paul are deceivers.”

To whom Peter said: “Immediately shall you know that we are true disciples of Christ; but that he is not Christ, but a magician, and a malefactor.”

Nero said, “Do you still persist? Behold, you see him going up into heaven.”

Then Peter, looking steadfastly upon Paul, said, “Paul, look up and see.”

And Paul, having looked up, full of tears, and seeing Simon flying, said, “Peter, why are you idle? Finish what you have begun; for already our Lord Jesus Christ is calling us.”

And Nero hearing them, smiled a little, and said: “These men see themselves worsted already, and are gone mad.”

Peter said, “Now you shall know that we are not mad.”

Paul said to Peter, “Do at once what you do.”

And Peter, looking steadfastly against Simon, said, “I adjure you, you angels of Satan, who are carrying him into the air, to deceive the hearts of the unbelievers, by the God that created all things, and by Jesus Christ, whom on the third day He raised from the dead, no longer from this hour to keep him up, but to let him go.”

And immediately, being let go, he fell into a place called Sacra Via, that is, Holy Way, and was divided into four parts, having perished by an evil fate.

SIMON PETER’S MARTYRDOM

And Peter, having come to the cross, said, “Since my Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from the heaven upon the earth, was raised upon the cross upright, and He has deigned to call to heaven me, who am of the earth, my cross ought to be fixed head down most, so as



FALL OF THE FLYING SORCERER This 15th-c. painting depicts Simon Magus flying by the power of demonic forces. When Peter (seen with his hand raised at left) commands the demons to let him go, he crashes to the ground and dies at the feet of the Roman emperor Nero.

to direct my feet toward heaven; for I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord.”

Then, having reversed the cross, they nailed his feet up.

And the multitude was assembled reviling Caesar and wishing to kill him. But Peter restrained them, saying: “A few days ago, being exhorted by the brethren, I was going away; and my Lord Jesus Christ met me, and having adored Him, I said, ‘Lord, whither are You going?’ And He said to me, ‘I am going to Rome to be crucified.’ And I said to Him, ‘Lord, were You not crucified once for all?’ And the Lord answering, said, ‘I saw you fleeing from death, and I wish to be crucified instead of you.’ And I said, ‘Lord, I go; I fulfill Your command.’”...

And having thus spoken, he gave up the ghost.

—Translation by New Advent

Andrew, James, and John

THE LIVES AND AFTERLIVES OF THE OTHER DISCIPLES CLOSEST TO JESUS

Stefana Dan Laing



While Jesus called each of the 12 disciples with loving purpose, the Gospels show his closer friendship with three in particular—Peter, the rock upon whom he built his church; James, the first apostle to die for him; and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Also occasionally included in this intimate group is Andrew, Peter's brother. The New Testament tells some of their stories, but church tradition and apocryphal accounts share just how far their witness of the risen Savior reached.

ANDREW: THE FIRST DISCIPLE

Andrew, who was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, was ever the missional and relational disciple and as the first disciple of Jesus, introduced his own brother Peter to the Messiah. He seemed especially close to another disciple, Philip (both were from Bethsaida), as they attempted to find solutions to feed the large crowd of 5,000 (John 6) and later to connect a group of Greeks with Jesus (John 12).

All the apostles were commissioned to take the gospel to the world, and Jerome states that each apostle died where he ministered. Third-century bishop Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 235) summarized Andrew's mission in *On the Apostles and Disciples*: "he preached to the Scythians and Thracians, and was crucified, suspended on an olive tree, at Patrae [Patras], a town of Achaia; and there too he was buried." Other texts indicate that he may have traveled with a partner, Matthias,

with whom he witnessed in regions north of the Black Sea, under Scythian rule (see pp. 46–48).

Andrew returned south to Pontus and began a missionary journey westward across the cities of northern Turkey and further into Greece through Macedon and its major cities: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Patras (or Patara). As he traveled, Andrew worked the same kinds of signs and wonders as Jesus—healing, raising the dead, exorcisms, calming storms, and supernaturally defeating armed opponents. As Andrew preached the gospel, many people believed in Christ based on his testimony and miraculous authority.

At Patras in Achaia (Greece), Andrew was the object of the governor's envy and malice; he executed Andrew by hanging him from a cross by the seashore. After three days Andrew breathed his last, still preaching to passersby or any who gathered near to him. Thus Andrew's mission work of preaching, teaching, healing, and battling demons culminated in his crucifixion, in likeness to his Lord, between AD 60 and 70.

After his death some of his remains were removed to various locations around Europe, which still claim a connection to Andrew through his mission work.

Several countries hail him as their patron saint including Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and Romania, as the late Roman provinces of Scythia and Thrace are located between southern Romania and northern Bulgaria. Less likely is his connection to places further west like Scotland, although the tradition remains that some of his relics were moved there in the fourth century (see "Did you know?" inside front cover).

JAMES: EARLY MARTYR

According to tradition, all 12 apostles were martyred except John. However, James—the brother of John—is the only apostle whose death is recounted in Scripture. Acts 12:2 records James's beheading at the order of Herod Agrippa. We are not told why Herod ordered his execution, except that it was part of a larger campaign against the fledgling church.

James's early martyrdom, along with his place within the closest circle of Jesus's followers, might suggest that he was the movement's leader. Some factors favored him over Peter and John—he was John's older brother, he had not denied Jesus as Peter did, and his death at the hands of Herod Agrippa may be viewed as mirroring the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas.

Some scholars have even speculated that James, nicknamed "Son of Thunder," had a fiery preaching style that led him to confront Herod (like John the Baptist), but Peter's simultaneous arrest and a lack of details from Luke speak

ANDREW'S FATE Medieval church tradition often depicts Andrew's martyrdom on a "saltire," or X-shaped cross, (right) in Patras, Greece (below).

BROTHERS AND BEST FRIENDS Andrew, James, and John, pictured on this vestment band (p. 24), were considered among Jesus's closest friends.



against such speculation. Tradition claims that James's head is buried under the floor of a chapel inside the Armenian Apostolic Cathedral of St. James, which is built over the alleged site of his martyrdom in Jerusalem.

James's death in 44 (the same year as Herod Agrippa's death, Acts 12:23) has elicited some legendary attention. Eusebius cites sources claiming that James's escort to trial, a scribe named Josias, was converted by James's defense at the trial and martyred along with him, having also seen James heal a paralytic on his way there.

The book of Acts is silent about James's actions apart from his brief local ministry. A tradition preserved in the collected apocryphal writings *Pseudo-Abdias* asserts that James and Peter traveled to Lydia in North Africa, where they performed healings and confronted idols before being arrested. The soldiers tasked with extracting confessions were supernaturally prevented from torturing them and were forced to release them. In the Latin Ethiopic tradition, James confronted two magicians, converting one named Philetus to the faith and helping him defeat the other in spiritual battle.

Probably the most famous but least likely tradition surrounding James's ministry is related to his alleged travel to Spain. An anonymous medieval account, the *History of Compostela*, claims that in northern Spain, James was granted a vision of Mary, Jesus's mother, seated on a pillar, encouraging him to continue his ministry in Spain and to build a church at the site of the vision. This vision was apparently the first Marian appearance, and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Pillar is built over the site of the encounter. James then returned to Jerusalem, where he was martyred.

Another tradition claims James's remains made it back to Spain, eventually to be housed in a shrine at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. This shrine is a major pilgrimage



site and is accessed by the Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James), a network of routes through France and northern Spain that culminate at the cathedral. The route contains indicators in the form of scallop shells symbolizing his miraculous sea voyage back to Spain.

JOHN: ELDER AND APOSTLE?

The apostle John's life and ministry following the biblical period are difficult to trace, partly due to questions regarding his authorship of key New Testament works and to conflicting extrabiblical source accounts. Most New Testament scholars believe the author of John's Gospel—the disciple Jesus loved—is indeed John, son of Zebedee, and the younger brother of James, both of whom Jesus nicknamed "Sons of Thunder." Some scholars doubt that the apostle John is the same John who authored Revelation, 2 John, and 3 John, instead attributing these works to another figure, John the Elder.

These assessments impact our understanding of John's ministry following Jesus's Ascension, since John the Elder oversaw churches in Asia Minor (Turkey) and was exiled to the Greek island of Patmos, most likely during the reign of Domitian (81–96), though some think it was under Nero (54–68). Despite relatively recent misgivings, the apostolic authorship of Revelation received virtually unanimous support in the early church, including Justin Martyr (c. 105–165), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215), Hippolytus, Origen, and Athanasius (293–373). If the apostle is also the Elder, then we can reasonably accept testimony regarding John's advanced age at his death. The vast majority of evidence indicates he died in old age of natural causes.



“CAN YOU DRINK THIS CUP?” A manuscript page (left) pictures James and John with a cup symbolizing the suffering they would share with Jesus (Matt. 20).

RESTING PLACES James probably never went to Spain, but this cathedral (above) claims some of his bones. John may be buried in Turkey (below left).



The bulk of John’s ministry unfolded in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) at Ephesus, where, according to tradition, John also took with him Mary the mother of Jesus. Abdias claims John was chosen by lots to take the gospel to Anatolia, and the *Acts of Philip* places John in Hierapolis, rescuing Bartholomew from martyrdom (see pp. 35–37). The *Acts of the Holy Apostle John* offers the most information about John’s activities in Turkey, but as a gnostic-leaning text, it is considered the least reliable, despite its second-century date.

In it John travels first to Miletus and then on to Ephesus around 48, where he establishes a church. He endears himself to the Ephesians by first healing the governor’s wife, Cleopatra, and then by raising the governor himself from the dead and healing many other people. His fiery preaching shatters the altar at the Temple of Artemis (Diana), and her priest is killed when the roof collapses. The people

respond in faith, awed by “the God of John,” and pledge to worship the Lord. During John’s second tenure in Ephesus (after exile), he demonstrates to pagan leaders the power of the true God by remaining unharmed, drinking a poison that killed two other prisoners.

Legends attesting his miraculous deliverance from martyrdom in Rome and his peaceful death in Ephesus are not confined to Gnostic texts. Tertullian wrote of John’s miraculous survival of being boiled in oil in *Against Heretics* (see p. 27; pp. 30–33). Referencing this story alongside Peter’s crucifixion and Paul’s beheading suggests that it had widespread acceptance among early church leaders, who almost unanimously accepted that John lived into Domitian’s day and suffered under his authority.

A less reliable account claims Domitian unsuccessfully tried to poison John prior to his execution attempt. In a more fantastical account of John’s death, his body is translated to heaven and a fountain emerges at his burial site (*Acts of John*). Nonetheless Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome claim that John died in old age and was buried at Ephesus. Today pilgrims can visit the supposed site of John’s burial in Selcuk, Turkey (near Ephesus), at the ruins of the Basilica of St. John, where archaeologists have confirmed a tomb below the ruins that dates to at least the second century. **CH**

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John's Golden Legend

The Golden Legend (c. 1260) by Jacobus de Voragine is a large collection of hagiographies popular in the late Middle Ages. The excerpt below expands on legends about John, some of which date back to Tertullian, who wrote in *Against Heretics*, "How happy is [Rome's] church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! . . . Where the apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and from there sent to his island exile!"

UNBOILED AND UNDETERRED

At this time, the Roman Emperor Domitian, who was persecuting Christians, had the Apostle John arrested and brought to Rome. There he had John cast into a vat of hot oil. By God's help, John came out of the vat without suffering from the heat.

Afterward, the emperor saw that John did not cease to preach Christ, so he sent him into exile on the Island of Patmos. There by revelation of our Lord, John wrote the Apocalypse, which contained the secrets of the holy church and of the world to come. . . .

DESTROYING DIANA'S TEMPLE

After this, when the blessed Apostle John had preached through all Asia Minor, the idol worshipers stirred up the people against him and drove him into the Temple of Diana to force him to sacrifice to that idol. John said, "If you believe that your goddess Diana has such great power, call upon her to overthrow the church of Christ, and if she does so, I will sacrifice to her. But if she does not, then let me pray to my God Jesus Christ that he overthrow her temple, and if he does so, you believe in him."

Most people consented to this idea, and they prayed. But they could not prevail against the church of Christ. But when John prayed, the Temple of Diana was overthrown. The foundation was turned upside down and the statue of Diana was destroyed. That same day, 12,000 Gentile men plus women and children were converted to faith in Christ.

Then Aristodemus, bishop of the idols, stirred up sedition among the people. Then the apostle said to him, "What must I do to appease you?" The bishop replied, "If you want me to believe in your God, I will give you poison to drink, and if it does not hurt you, then your Lord is truly God." John answered, "Do as you have said."

And the bishop said, "First, I want you to see others die from the poison so that you may fear it all the more." Then Aristodemus went to the proconsul of the city and demanded two men sentenced to execution, and before



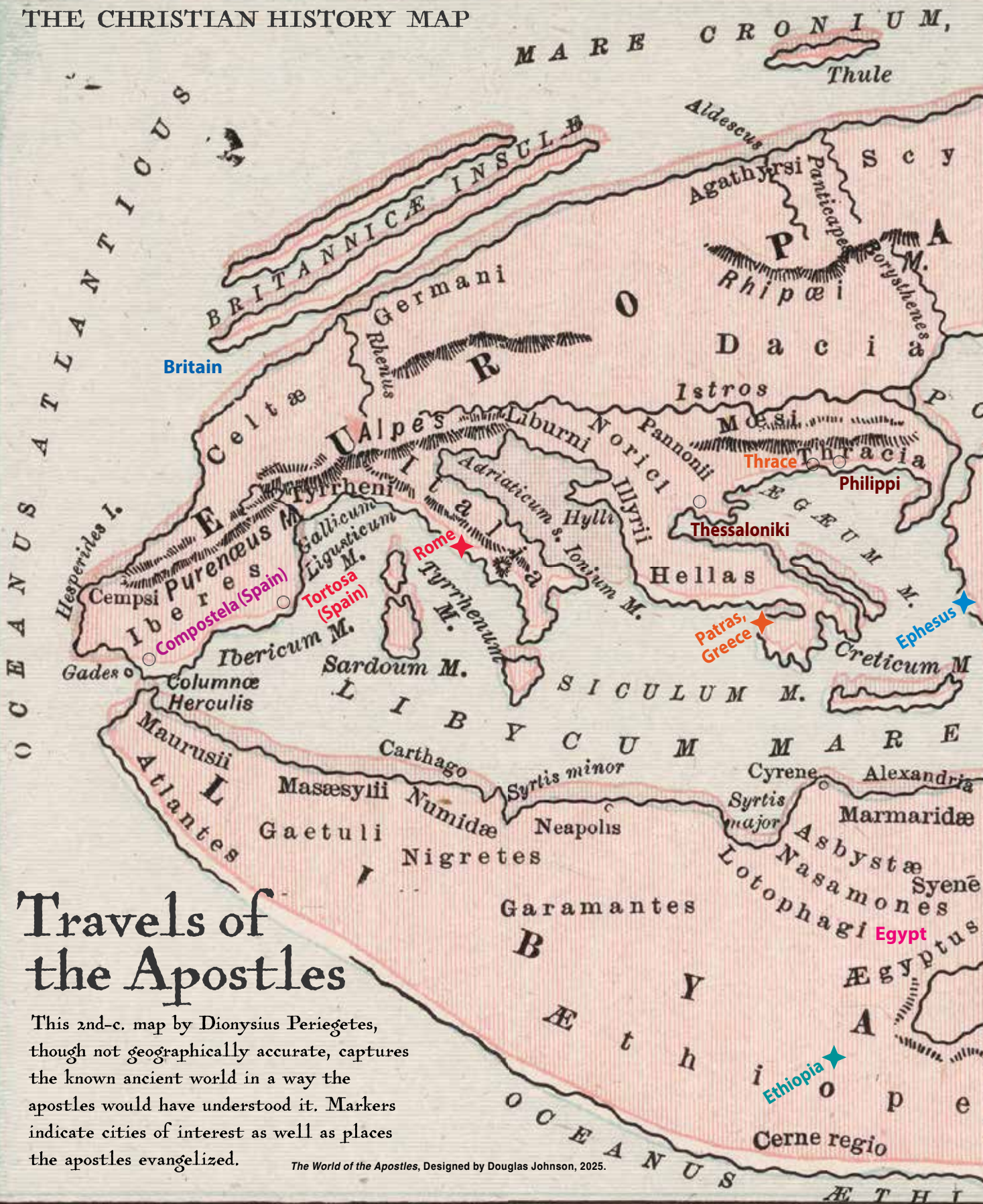
"AN INVIGORATING BATH" Some sources state that John experienced his boiling oil ordeal more like a refreshing bath than a tortuous execution attempt. Legend contrasted John's miraculous deliverance with Domitian's assassination by recording them in the same year.

everyone, he gave them poison to drink. Immediately, these men fell down dead. Then John took the cup of poison and drank every drop of it, and he felt no harm. Therefore, all the people gave praise to God. Aristodemus then said, "I still have a doubt, but if you are able to raise these dead men to life again, then I will believe."

Then the apostle said, "Go and lay my coat over the bodies of the dead men, saying 'The apostle of Christ sent me to you so that you will arise in the name of Christ.'" When the bishop did this, the two men rose from death to life. Then the bishop and the proconsul believed, and John baptized them, with all their family and friends. Afterward, they broke their idols and in honor of John, they built a church to worship God.

—The Golden Legend, or Lives of the Saints by Jacobus de Voragine, translated by William Caxton and adapted by Rex D. Butler

THE CHRISTIAN HISTORY MAP



Travels of the Apostles

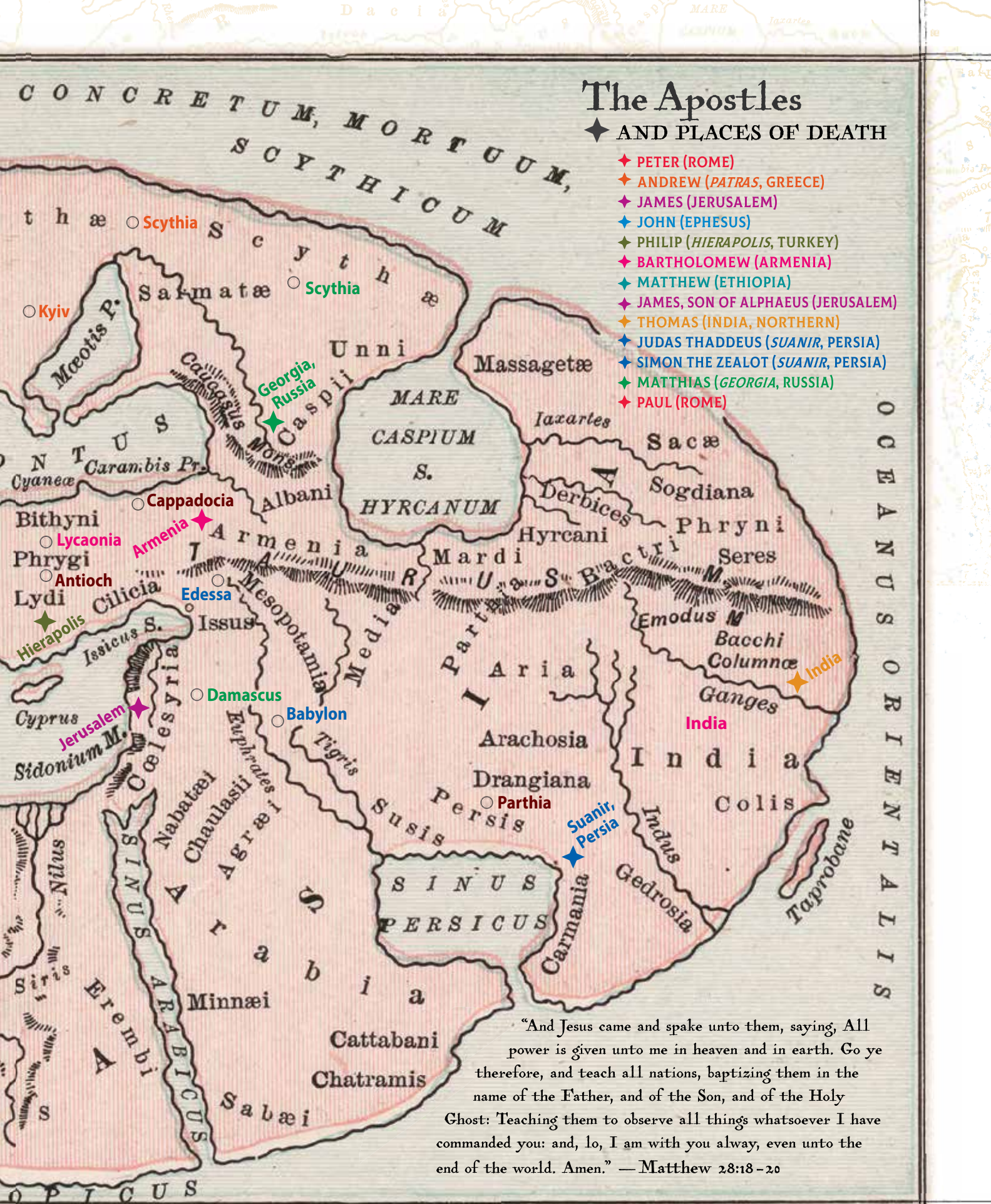
This 2nd-c. map by Dionysius Periegetes, though not geographically accurate, captures the known ancient world in a way the apostles would have understood it. Markers indicate cities of interest as well as places the apostles evangelized.

The World of the Apostles, Designed by Douglas Johnson, 2025.

The Apostles

AND PLACES OF DEATH

- ♦ PETER (ROME)
- ♦ ANDREW (PATRAS, GREECE)
- ♦ JAMES (JERUSALEM)
- ♦ JOHN (EPHESUS)
- ♦ PHILIP (HIERAPOLIS, TURKEY)
- ♦ BARTHOLOMEW (ARMENIA)
- ♦ MATTHEW (ETHIOPIA)
- ♦ JAMES, SON OF ALPHEUS (JERUSALEM)
- ♦ THOMAS (INDIA, NORTHERN)
- ♦ JUDAS THADDEUS (SUANIR, PERSIA)
- ♦ SIMON THE ZEALOT (SUANIR, PERSIA)
- ♦ MATTHIAS (GEORGIA, RUSSIA)
- ♦ PAUL (ROME)



“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” — Matthew 28:18-20



MESSENGERS OF THE RISEN LORD This icon shows the calling, ministry, and deaths of the apostles while also telling of Jesus's death, Resurrection, and exaltation.

acts, however, have some historical facts in their background.

Though little is certain about the apostles' post-biblical lives, we can know what early Christians valued about the apostles—their apostolic authority, missions, and martyrdom. Our sources for the acts of the apostles, no matter how fanciful, repeatedly emphasize these three themes.

THE PRESTIGIOUS 12

We know that early in his earthly ministry, Jesus chose from his many followers 12 men to be his special disciples "so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons" (Mark 3:14–15). The number 12 made plain that Jesus was ushering in a new covenant people; these 12 disciples represented the 12 tribes of Israel. Often the biblical writers referred to this select group as simply "the Twelve" (Mark 3:16), but at other times, "disciples" (Matt. 10:1) or "apostles," which means "sent-out ones, ambassadors, messengers" (Luke 6:13).

In the book of Acts, Luke, writing about the church after Jesus's Resurrection, calls the Twelve mostly by their title, "apostles," and the term takes on specific parameters and authority. In selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot, Peter defines "apostle" as one who accompanied Jesus and the other disciples from the beginning, when John was baptizing, until the Ascension. This apostle would be "a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:21–22).

In the book of Acts, other than the listing of the 11 disciples who went to the Upper Room after Jesus's Ascension, the author Luke does not mention any of the Twelve by name except for the inner three: Peter, John, and James. As a group, however, the apostles played an important role in the church. New believers were "devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42); "many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles" (Acts 2:43); "with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). Furthermore the church recognized the authority of

Authority, missions, and martyrdom

HOW DID THE CHURCH REMEMBER THE APOSTLES?

Rex D. Butler

Anyone who seeks an answer to the question "What happened to the apostles?" must admit in the end that the destinies of most of the apostles remain mysteries. Yet we have many clues and hopeful hints, but the seeker must review many different sources. One source, of course, is the Bible. Early church fathers provide other historically reliable sources of information. But many of our sources are apocryphal acts, accounts written by anonymous authors with fantastic imaginations (see pp. 14–16). Even these apocryphal

Upper Room after Jesus's Ascension, the author Luke does not mention any of the Twelve by name except for the inner three: Peter, John, and James. As a group, however, the apostles played an important role in the church. New believers were "devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42); "many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles" (Acts 2:43); "with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). Furthermore the church recognized the authority of



DEVOTED TO PRAYER Acts 1 says that after witnessing Jesus's Ascension (*above*), the apostles, together with the other disciples, returned to Jerusalem to pray (*above right*). By that time Jesus's followers already recognized the Twelve's unique calling.

the apostles: those who gave their property to be distributed among the poor lay their gifts at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:35); the apostles made administrative decisions about selecting the seven who would distribute the food fairly among the widows (Acts 6:6).

Outside the Twelve others earned the title "apostle," chiefly Paul, the "Apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15, Rom. 1:5, Gal. 1:16, Eph. 3:8, 1 Tim. 2:7). Indeed some scholars, but not all, believe that God chose Paul, not Matthias, to be the twelfth apostle, replacing Judas (for an argument for Matthias, see p. 49). Other named apostles include Barnabas (Acts 14:14, 1 Cor. 9:5–6), James the brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:19), Andronicus, and Junia(s) (Rom. 16:7). Whatever the criteria by which these last four were considered apostles, however, the chief apostles in the Bible and the early church were the Twelve plus Paul.

These 13 apostles bore considerable authority in the early church. The Bible and church history portray them as evangelists, missionaries, and church planters throughout the known world. Their influence shaped the early church as they passed on the tradition that they had received from Jesus himself. As Paul said: "I delivered to you as of first importance



what I also received" (1 Cor. 15:3). Jude spoke of "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). The belief that the apostles were the source of the tradition—the rule of faith—that guided the church in belief and practice led to the doctrine and practice of apostolic succession.

According to this idea, the apostles received from the Lord Jesus true belief and practice and then passed on these traditions to their followers. From these followers the apostles ordained bishops, who not only taught the rule of faith but also ensured the orthodoxy of the churches they oversaw. Most ancient churches kept lists of bishops that linked them with the apostles, thus securing the so-called apostolic succession in the early church.

MIRACLES, MARTYRS, AND MISSIONS

The concept of apostolic succession elevated the prestige of the 13 apostles, including Paul. Subsequently churches gained status if they claimed that they were founded by apostles or were established near the apostles' sites of martyrdom. Stories about the missions and martyrdoms of apostles proliferated, resulting in the varied, often fantastic apocryphal acts that provide many of our sources outside the Bible about the lives and ministries of the apostles.

The reader of these apocryphal acts of the apostles encounters the beheaded Paul, whose neck bled milk; Matthias, struck blind in a land of cannibals; and a variety of talking animals who accompanied Peter, Paul, Philip,



WE BELIEVE (far left) An apostle holds a scroll containing a creed, symbolizing the creed's authority.

WORLDWIDE WITNESSES This North African mural shows the passing of apostolic authority through space and time: from Jewish, 1st-c. Peter to a Nubian, 10th-c. bishop. St. Andrew's Church in Kyiv, Ukraine (below left), is built on the hill where it is believed Andrew erected a cross and prophesied.



Matthew, Ethiopia; Bartholomew, India; and Matthias, Myrmidon, "the country of the man-eaters."

The apostles' mission fields, however, were much more far-flung than these brief statements suggest. Thomas, once he finished his mission in Parthia (if he ever actually evangelized there), continued his southwestern sojourn toward India, which is the site of his best-known ministry.

Andrew was assigned by lots to evangelize Scythia, a region that now includes Ukraine and western Russia. St. Andrew's Church in Kyiv, Ukraine, commemorates the northernmost point of the apostle's travels in Scythia. Moving westward, Andrew reportedly ministered in Anatolia, or western Turkey. Andrew's most famous mission took place in Achaia, southern Greece, where he died on an X-shaped cross.

John's mission to Asia Minor, contemporary Turkey, is well documented in the book of Revelation, where we find him exiled on the island of Patmos, having overseen churches in Ephesus and the surrounding area. Less well known is a Latin legend about John reported by Tertullian in *Against Heretics*. During



his persecution against Christians, Emperor Domitian had John brought to Rome. There Domitian attempted to execute John by plunging him into a cauldron of boiling oil (see p. 27). According to legend John survived, calling his ordeal an "invigorating bath." After this failed execution, Domitian ordered John to his exile on Patmos.

Although Eusebius's account indicates that Bartholomew evangelized India, various accounts place him also in Hierapolis, Turkey; Naidas, Parthia; Egypt; and Armenia. And the same can be said for other apostles, many of whom were reported to minister in multiple sites.

One of the more incredible stories about an apostle is the extravagant and yet persistent legend attached to James, the son of Zebedee, and his mission to Spain. There he is revered as "Santiago" (i.e., "Saint Iago," that is "Saint James"), the national patron saint. All the literary sources that connect

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Living up to the meaning of their titles, the apostles took seriously the commissions given by their Lord Jesus Christ, who told them to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19) and to "be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). According to sources such as Eusebius and Socrates Scholasticus (c. 380–c. 450), the apostles cast lots for the targets of their missions: Thomas was allotted Parthia; Andrew, Scythia; John, Asia Minor;

James to Spain are late, the earliest dating from the seventh century. According to these accounts, James evangelized Spain before being martyred in Jerusalem. His disciples carried his remains to Spain and buried them in Santiago de Compostela, which is a pilgrimage site to this day (see pp. 24–26). This story is widely doubted today, but it is an example of the kind of legends related to the apostles that arose in ancient times.

James is not the only apostle who traveled to the far west in the imagination of early Christians. According to Bishop Dorotheus of Tyre (255–362), Simon the Zealot traveled through Mauritania and other regions of Africa before he sailed to Britain, where he was crucified and buried.

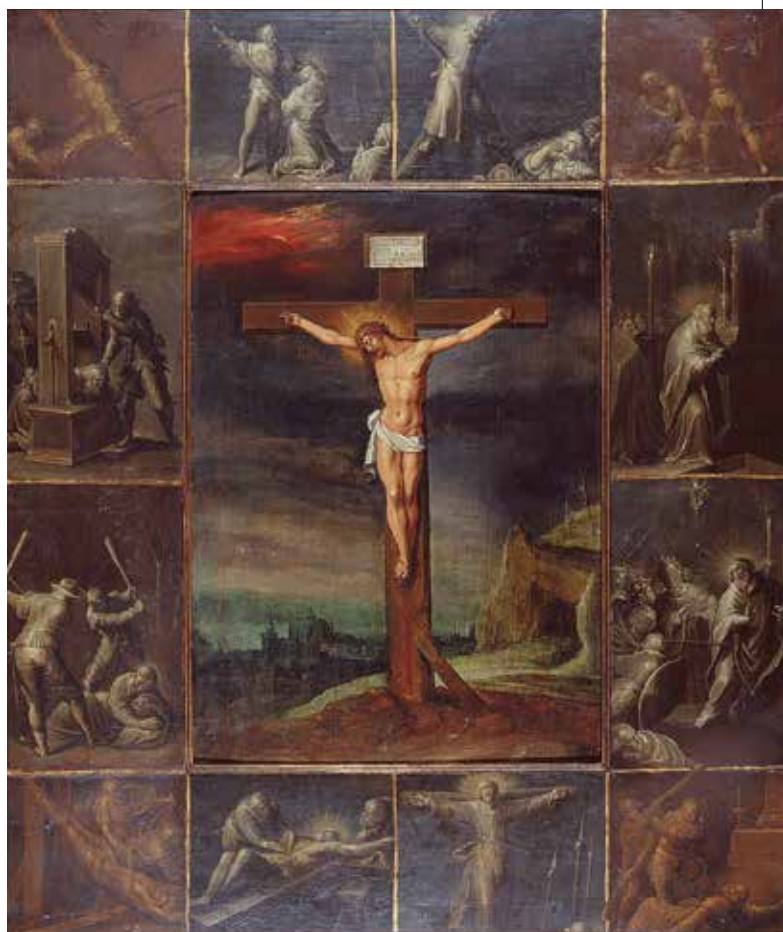
LEARNING FROM LEGEND

Although this survey sketches only briefly the far-flung missions of several apostles, the sites of their evangelism clearly spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. From Spain and Britain in the west to India in the far east, with the Middle East, Europe, and Africa in between, the mission work of the apostles was impressive, even if only in early Christian imagination. One important lesson that we learn from the apocryphal acts is that evangelism and missions were imperative to early Christians, who envisioned their apostles as fulfilling the Great Commission to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Another significant feature of the apocryphal acts is the high value placed upon Christian suffering as a testimony to the truth of the gospel. In the biblical Acts of the Apostles, we see the disciples, who had cowered during Jesus's Passion and death, take courage after his Resurrection (see pp. 6–9). When they were arrested for witnessing publicly to the lordship of Christ, they endured willingly the punishment administered by the Sanhedrin. In fact they rejoiced "that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

The apocryphal acts, whether trustworthy or fanciful, continued to emphasize the apostles' willingness to suffer and even to die for Jesus Christ's name. The beloved John was the only apostle without any story of martyrdom. His extended life was implied by Jesus in John 21, and most biblical scholars envision John as an old man when he was exiled to Patmos as he records in the book of Revelation. According to Jerome in *Lives of Illustrious Men*, John lived until the end of the first century and died of old age, 68 years after Jesus's Passion.

Other than John, there are only two other apostles who possibly died of natural causes. Hippolytus, in *On the Twelve Apostles*, wrote that Matthew and Matthias "fell asleep," the former in Hieres, Parthia (see pp. 39–41), and the latter in Jerusalem. Bishop Abdias of Babylon said of Matthias that he "slept a good sleep and rested from his labors in Judah" (see p. 48). To counter these vague suggestions of natural death, however, we have three separate accounts of Matthew's martyrdom and four more about Matthias.



“EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY” One enduring proof of the gospel’s truth is the suffering each apostle endured for Christ. This 17th-c. painting borders Jesus’s crucifixion with scenes of his apostles’ martyrdoms.

Sean McDowell, author of *The Fate of the Apostles*, concluded after his extensive research that, with the exception of John, all the apostles probably or plausibly died as martyrs. Despite conflicting answers and various accounts of their possible martyrdoms, that they all died faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ remains the most certain fact. This is attested to by the church’s respect for the apostles as authorities and the many (if not all) traditions that relate their unflinching witness to the end.

Though we may not know exactly what happened to the apostles, those who composed and carried on their legacies emphasized the apostles’ passion for evangelism and missions as each of the Twelve shared Christ throughout the known world. They also made it clear that the apostles truly believed in Jesus as the risen God and Savior. Indeed, their faithfulness in the face of persecution and martyrdom adds to the proofs of Jesus’s Resurrection and his promise of eternal life to all who believe in him. **CH**

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Memory and preparation



MARTYRS AND MEMORY A Byzantine work shows Timothy's death and believers honoring his remains. By the Middle Ages, devotion to relics was ubiquitous.

Sometime around the year 155 (or possibly 167), Polycarp, aged bishop of Smyrna and former disciple of John the Evangelist, was martyred by the Roman government. His martyrdom account, one of the earliest we have, states that his own disciples took his bones and placed them in “a fitting place”; there, they added, “the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already finished their course, and for the exercising and preparation of those yet to walk in their steps.”

This is the earliest reference to honoring both the death date and the earthly remains of someone who had died for Christ. What began with Polycarp's disciples meeting for prayer at his grave, grew, after the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, into a much more systematic engagement with both the memory of saints and the relics (body parts and possessions) they were believed to have left behind.

RELICS AND SHRINES

Christians began to attribute miracles to the saints' intercession and to nearness to their relics, and a devotion to the “cult of the saints” became a huge aspect of medieval Christianity. As historian Bryan Ward-Perkins notes:

Churches were built over their graves; pilgrims flocked to the major shrines, many of them seeking a specific remedy; saints' relics were assiduously collected and distributed; their lives and miracle stories were written; altars, chapels and churches were dedicated to them; communities adopted them as their special protectors.

Saints were initially locally recognized (canonized) as worthy of veneration, especially on the date of their death, by bishops and other leaders; in 993 the pope began to make this determination for the Latin church, and in 1170 it became the pope's sole prerogative.

The apostles were no exception to this process. All the apostles (except Judas Iscariot) are recognized today as saints with feast days in both Roman

Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and numerous places became famous for having the apostles' relics. (Relics were often moved for reasons of civic pride, fluctuating Christian control of Jerusalem and Constantinople, and the fear of lack of access for pilgrimage or desecration of the relics.)

- St. Peter's Basilica in Rome was erected over the apostle's grave by Constantine; remains believed to be Peter's were found there in the 1930s. Relics of Jude and Simon the Zealot, both believed to have been originally martyred in Persia, also rest at St. Peter's.

- The basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls in Rome possesses bones that it attests to be Paul's.

- John's grave in Turkey was covered by a succession of buildings, ending with a mosque that was destroyed in the fifteenth century. The tomb there is empty today.

- James the Less was buried in Jerusalem, but his relics were later moved to Constantinople and then Rome. Philip was buried in Turkey, but his relics, like James's, went to Constantinople and then Rome, where the two are now interred together.

- Relics of Thomas are venerated in a basilica named for him in India, but a portion of them also went to Turkey and to a basilica in Ortona, Italy.

- Matthias's grave was supposedly discovered in Jerusalem in the fourth century by Helena who took some relics to Trier, Germany, where they remain.

Devotion to all the saints, including the apostles, was both widespread and widely criticized; no matter how many times church leaders tried to distinguish veneration (i.e., reverence) for holy (but human) people from the worship due only to God, the history of medieval Christianity proves that many of the laypeople were not listening. The way that miracles had to be attributed to a holy person to launch the process of canonization, and the extensive practice of pilgrimage, were both processes that were easy to corrupt and exploit (see more on relics in issues #12 and #39).

Nevertheless beneath the centuries of structure and earthly power that grew up around the stories and relics of the apostles and thousands of other saints and martyrs, we can still glimpse the desire of those first disciples of the early church as they gathered around the grave of Polycarp two millennia ago: let us honor the person who followed Christ, and let us pray to be made like this person when our time comes to suffer too.

—Jennifer Woodruff Tait, senior editor, *Christian History*

Partners in mission

THE WITNESSES OF PHILIP AND BARTHOLOMEW

Alan S. Bandy

The Lycus River valley forms a plateau in southwestern Asia Minor as a valley between two mountain ranges. Its rich, well-irrigated volcanic soil made it a prosperous area and gave rise to the cities of Colossae, Laodicea, Tripolis, and Hierapolis.

Perched upon the dazzling white travertine cliffs of a low volcanic mountain, Hierapolis—meaning holy or sacred city—was the valley's crown jewel. Nine miles to the north of Laodicea, the city boasted of natural pools and channels from its geothermal hot springs. People from all over would travel there, prizing the healing properties of the springs.

High above the city are the remains of the octagonal-shaped martyrium of St. Philip the Apostle, dated to the fifth century. A martyrium is a church built upon or near the site where the martyrdom occurred. In 2011 Francesco D'Andria, an Italian archaeologist, discovered the tomb of Philip about 40 yards to the side below the martyrium. Here the missionary legacies of Philip and Bartholomew, Philip's fellow apostle and partner, began and perhaps also ended.

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST?

The earliest Christian tradition locates Philip and his virgin daughters in Hierapolis. Eusebius, in his *Church History*, quotes sources that confirm this; however, he also identifies this Philip as Philip the Evangelist (or Deacon), one of the seven deacons set apart for ministry (Acts 1:13; 6:5), whose daughters had the gift of prophecy. By the end of the second century, Christian tradition appears to conflate Philip the Apostle and his virgin daughters with Philip the Evangelist and his prophetess daughters. Some suggest only one Philip existed, who was both an apostle and an evangelist, but this seems unlikely due to the differing roles of Philip the Apostle and Philip the Deacon.

Regardless, a clear consensus emerged placing Philip the Apostle and his daughters in Hierapolis, with the most detailed account of his ministry and martyrdom coming from the *Acts of Philip*. This apocryphal text is a hagiography, or biography of a venerated saint, with a varied textual and reception history. Most likely the text was written in the fourth century, a period that witnessed the condemnation of the Encratite communities of Asia



PAGANS AND DRAGONS This imaginative chapel painting shows the apostle Philip driving Hierapolis's deity, depicted here as a dragon, from the city's temple.

Minor. The Encratites, a Christian sect later deemed heretical, renounced wealth, denounced marriage, and practiced celibacy. In the *Acts of Philip*, much of the preaching includes instructions to remain pure, avoid marriage, and remain celibate.

The text contains a total of 15 acts chronicling Philip's ministry in Galilee, Athens, Parthia, Azotus, Nikatera, and in the wilderness; it ends in Ophioryme (Hierapolis), where the fifteenth act recounts his martyrdom. The unusual name *Ophioryme* for Hierapolis means "promenade of the serpents" because they worshiped the mother of serpents called the Viper—possibly Cybele, a goddess of Asia Minor. In this story Philip is accompanied by his sister Mariamne, Bartholomew, a talking leopard, and a talking goat. They entered the city, passing seven men guarding the city with snakes that would bite strangers, and at the city gate they defeated the two dragons that spewed poisonous vapors causing blindness.

Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamne then established a spiritual healing center. There they healed a man named Stachys who had been blind for 40 years. His



healing prompted Nicanora—a woman also suffering from eye problems and the wife of the governor Tyrannognophos—to hear Philip’s words, resulting in her salvation and healing. When Governor Tyrannognophos found out about her conversion, he responded with rage and dragged her out of the house. He then arrested Philip, Bartholomew, and Mariamne and had them beaten with rough straps of leather. Then he bound them by their ankles and dragged them across the city to the gate of the temple of the Viper. The governor also ordered them to be stripped naked, but when they stripped Mariamne, a bright cloud of fire surrounded her, obscuring her nakedness.

PHILIP’S FATE

The governor’s soldiers brought large iron hooks and skewered them through Philip’s heels and ankles. They hoisted him upside down from a tree in front of the Viper’s temple. Then they did the same to Bartholomew, nailing his hands to the temple gate. At this point the apostle John entered the city and encouraged Philip to forgive the people and follow Jesus’s example to not return evil for evil. Philip being angry, however, ignored the urging of John, Bartholomew, and Mariamne and uttered a curse upon the people.

At his curse the ground opened in the temple and swallowed over 700 people, including Tyrannognophos. Jesus appeared to Philip rebuking him for his curse. Jesus informed Philip that because of this he would not be allowed to enter paradise for 40 days, but then he would be admitted. He also said that Bartholomew would be released to continue his ministry but would be martyred in Lycaonia. Likewise, Mariamne would continue but would be martyred when she was thrown into the Jordan River. Jesus then rescued all those who fell into the pit by making a sign of the cross that became a ladder for them to climb out, but Tyrannognophos refused. The crowd of believers tried to release Philip, but he told them to release



HEALING HOT SPRINGS The pools that drew many to Hierapolis still exist today (*above left*). The place is called *Pamukkale* in Turkish, which means “Cotton Castle.”

ARCHAEOLOGICALLY APPROVED Philip’s martyrium (*top*) and his tomb’s recent discovery (*above*) confirm church tradition concerning Philip’s ministry in Hierapolis.

Bartholomew instead, and he appointed Stachys as bishop of Hierapolis.

This tradition surrounding Philip’s ministry and martyrdom leaves us with several questions. The earliest traditions make no mention of his martyrdom, but they do indicate Hierapolis as his final resting place, and the martyrdom coupled with the recent discovery of Philip’s tomb further supports the early traditions. Given the date and legendary characteristics of the *Acts of Philip*, the circumstances around his ministry with Bartholomew and his death might retain a kernel of historical basis, but they are suspect at best.

BARTHOLOMEW’S STORY

Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael (see pp. 11–13) and associated with Philip in John 1:45, became Philip’s partner in Hierapolis. He stars in several of his own apocryphal acts, which report five different accounts of his martyrdom. The *Acts of Philip* ends with Bartholomew’s rescue from crucifixion in Hierapolis, his departure to Lycaonia, and the prediction of his crucifixion there. Elsewhere, in the *Preaching of St. Bartholomew in the Oasis*, the allotment fell to Bartholomew to evangelize Egypt. After miracles—healing one man of blindness and a rich man of



EXCRUCIATING ENDS While tradition generally agrees Philip was crucified (*above*), Bartholomew is a different story. Popular accounts imagine he was skinned alive. Bartholomew carries his own skin at *right*.



brother Astreges refused Bartholomew's God. He challenged Bartholomew to prove that his God was greater, and immediately Astreges's idols were cast down. In anger he commanded that Bartholomew be beaten and beheaded.

BARTHOLOMEW'S MANY DEATHS

Bartholomew's possible ministry in India receives corroboration from Eusebius in his *Church History* and Jerome in *Lives of Illustrious Men*. Both church fathers reported that when Pantaenus the philosopher traveled to India, he discovered that the apostle Bartholomew had preceded him (see also Hippolytus, *On the Twelve*).

And yet one more tradition remains; this one places Bartholomew in Armenia, an ancient country north of Parthia. According to Tertullian and Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, there existed a considerable Christian community by the second and third centuries, and by the fourth century, Armenia entirely converted to Christianity. Details about Bartholomew's martyrdom in Armenia were recorded late, but several sources reported that he was flayed alive before being either crucified or beheaded.

Bartholomew's legends placed him in a variety of locations: Hierapolis and Lycaonia, in Anatolia; Egypt; Parthia; India; and Armenia. His martyrdoms were also varied: he was crucified, drowned, beaten, beheaded, and flayed. What we can know with confidence about both Philip and Bartholomew is that they followed Christ's commission to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). **CH**

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a snake bite—he gathered a congregation of believers. The rich man built a church, and Bartholomew appointed him as a priest before leaving for his next destination.

According to the Encratite document, *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, this next destination was Naidas, located upon the shore of Parthia to the east of the Roman Empire. There he successfully preached the Beatitudes and healed a man of his blindness and his withered hand. However, when he told married women, including the queen, to live with their husbands without sex, King Agrippus commanded the apostle's execution. Soldiers filled a sack with sand, put Bartholomew in it, and threw it in the sea. The next day, the body washed ashore and the believers gave him a proper burial.

Yet another account, the *Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew*, placed Bartholomew's death in India. After Bartholomew arrived in the deepest, darkest region of India, he confronted demons, who were deceiving the people by alternatively sickening and then healing them. Bartholomew confounded the demons with a ministry of healing in the name of the true, almighty God.

An interesting feature of this account is the demon's description of Bartholomew in the *Passion of Bartholomew*: "He has black hair, a shaggy head, a fair skin, large eyes, beautiful nostrils, his ears hidden by the hair of his head, with a yellow beard, a few grey hairs, of middle height, and neither tall nor stunted, but middling." Although most of the king's family were converted and baptized, the king's



BOUND BY FAITH OR BLOOD? Historically the church paired Matthew and James the Less (or the Lesser) as brothers, but later Western historians think the evidence is lacking.

of Matthew and James reinforce the same conclusion for believers today: Jesus called and used all sorts of people.

TAX COLLECTOR TO EVANGELIST

We know the name Matthew from the Gospel attributed to that disciple, who was called by Jesus while at work: “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (Matt. 9:9). In Mark and Luke, Matthew is first described by his given Jewish name, Levi (Mark 2:13–14; Luke 5:27–28). The fact that Mark and Luke use the name “Matthew” in their apostle lists after describing Jesus calling “Levi” the tax collector may mean that Jesus gave him the name Matthew (meaning gift of the LORD) to demonstrate his transformation.

In all three of the calling passages, Matthew responded to Jesus’s call by immediately hosting him in his home along with many friends who were also “tax collectors and sinners.” While the Gospel authors report the Pharisees’ consternation at Jesus’s table-fellowship in this episode, Matthew’s place among the disciples became a constant sign that Jesus

accepted reviled people among his closest followers. The Pharisees’ disgust continued throughout Jesus’s ministry because of the social stigma placed on Jews who served the Romans (they subjected their fellow Jews to fines and fees for the occupying government). Tax collectors were also known to be selfish and oppressive in their own right. For example Zacchaeus admitted to defrauding others through his profession (Luke 19:8). Calling a tax collector like Matthew into his inner circle was a clear sign that Jesus came for those who would repent, leave behind the things of this world (cf. Luke 5:28), and serve the Kingdom of God.

Ironically Matthew’s experience as a tax collector likely helped when it came to his greatest contribution to the church, his Gospel. As a tax collector, he would have been skilled in taking notes quickly, which helped assure faithful records of Jesus’s sermons and parables. According to the accounts of church fathers such as Papias of Hierapolis, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Jerome, Matthew spent many years in Israel and Syria, writing his Gospel with a Jewish audience in mind. In fact Irenaeus of Lyons reported that “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.” It is possible, then, that Matthew wrote his Gospel in

Sons of Alphaeus

FACTS AND MYTHS ABOUT “BROTHERS”
MATTHEW AND JAMES, DISCIPLES OF JESUS

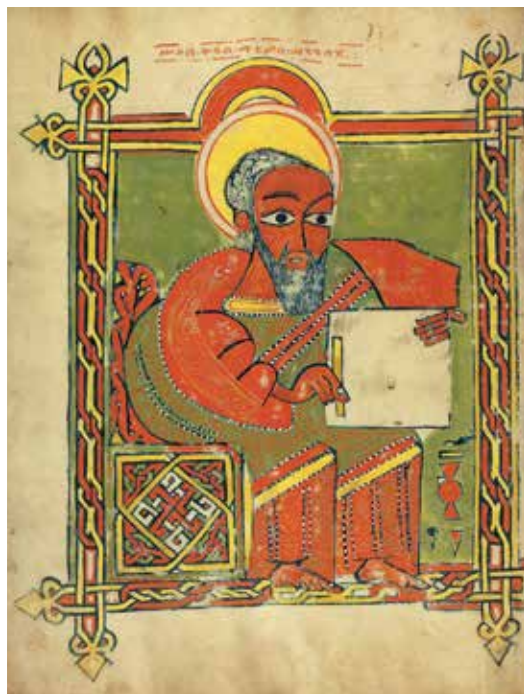
Thomas G. Doughty Jr.

Brothers abounded among Jesus’s earliest disciples, most notably Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee. According to Eastern Orthodox tradition, another pair of brothers features in the crew of apostles: Matthew, also called Levi, and James the Lesser. James is called the son of Alphaeus in all four New Testament lists of the Twelve. While this definitely distinguishes him from James the son of Zebedee and James the half-brother of Jesus, it also associates him with the better-known Matthew who is called Levi the son of Alphaeus in Mark 2:14.

Scholars debate whether Matthew and James shared the same father named Alphaeus, and the evidence is scant. Like Peter and Andrew and James and John, Matthew’s name is listed adjacent to James’s in Matthew 10:3 and Acts 1:13. This pattern is not matched in Mark’s and Luke’s lists, though, and James the son of Alphaeus is always listed ninth in the pairings of the Twelve, whereas all four lists pair Matthew adjacent to Thomas. While it could be reasoned that Matthew and James were brothers and Matthew was closely associated as a ministry partner with Thomas (cf. Luke 10:1), most Western historians have concluded it more probable that the two were not brothers at all. Even still the stories



LOVING THE UNLOVELY Jesus called Matthew, a despised tax collector, to follow him (*above*). Joyfully the disciple dropped everything; later he wrote his Gospel (*above right*) to confirm Jesus as the promised Messiah.



HAZY HISTORY We know little about James the Lesser, but many believe he was stoned or beaten to death in Jerusalem. This 17th-c. painting (*right*) pictures him with a fuller's club, a tool used to beat impurities out of wool, and possibly the tool of his martyrdom.



the Aramaic language of the people of Palestine before it was then translated into the Greek lingua franca of the East.

MARTYRED, PROBABLY...BUT WHERE?

The trajectory of Matthew's life and ministry after his time in Israel and Syria is much in doubt. Several stories have contradictory endings set in numerous locations: Egypt and Ethiopia, Parthia and Persia. In the Jewish Talmud, we find a late account that Matthew never left Israel and was condemned and executed by the Sanhedrin.

Socrates Scholasticus claimed in his fifth-century work, *Ecclesiastical History*, that Matthew was assigned by lot to evangelize Ethiopia. In the *Apostolic History of Abdias*, purportedly written by the bishop of Babylon in the first century, Matthew traveled to Ethiopia, where he encountered the eunuch converted and baptized by Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:26–40). When King Aegrippus's son died, Matthew raised him from the dead. As a result Matthew baptized the king and all his family. The apostle supposedly ministered there for 23 years, raising up the Church of the Resurrection in Ethiopia, planting other churches, and ordaining clergy. Aegrippus, however, was succeeded by his brother Hyrtacus, who demanded that his niece Ephigenia should marry him. Having taken vows of virginity, she opposed her uncle, and Matthew preached against such an incestuous act. In retaliation Hyrtacus commanded a soldier to pierce the apostle with a spear.

Other accounts placed Matthew in Parthia, or Persia. The *Acts and Martyrdom of Matthew* detailed the apostle's sojourn to a city of cannibals, where a demon-possessed king nailed him to the ground and set him on fire. The fire took on the appearance of a dragon that chased the king, but even though Matthew commanded the fire to spare the king, the apostle was burned to death. Subsequently a vision that showed Matthew receiving his crown of martyrdom inspired the conversion of the king.

Abdias's *Conflicts of the Holy Apostles* reported that a wicked man came to the Parthian city in which Matthew was serving, and he accused Matthew of ruining the city with his preaching about Jesus of Nazareth. Believing these false accusations, the king sent soldiers to behead Matthew, cut up his body, and scatter it as food for the birds.

Yet one more account of Matthew in Parthia was provided by Hippolytus of Rome in his treatise, *On the Twelve Apostles*. Of Matthew, Hippolytus briefly stated that after the apostle published his Gospel, he "fell asleep at Hieres, a town of Parthia." The implication here was that Matthew simply died of natural causes.



In light of so many contradictory accounts of Matthew's life, all we can conjecture is that he obeyed the Great Commission with which he concluded his own Gospel.

LESS ABOUT JAMES THE LESSER

If some testimonies of Matthew's ministry are contradictory, the situation is even more complicated for James. While we see Matthew featured in one Gospel narrative (his calling), James is hardly ever mentioned by name. Tradition usually identifies James the son of Alphaeus with James the Lesser (or Younger, see Mark 15:40), a name he was given to contrast with James the son of Zebedee, who appears more prominently in the Gospels together with his brother John.

Church fathers Papias of Hierapolis and Jerome deduced that James the son of Alphaeus was the first cousin of Jesus on the basis that James's mother was the sister of Jesus's mother (see pp. 50–53). Although James the son of Alphaeus was clearly distinguished from James the son of Zebedee, stories regarding James the Lesser seem to have been conflated with the story of James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus. Multiple accounts describe a martyrdom of James the Lesser similar to that of James the Just: stoned by enraged Jews near the Jerusalem Temple. According to Abdias of Babylon, writing in his *Conflicts of the Holy Apostles*, James the Lesser came to Jerusalem and preached the gospel to the people assembled at the temple:

James, the son of Alphaeus, spoke many things, and declared the faith in the only Begotten Son, the true Word of God, who was from all eternity Jesus Christ the Son of God in truth; for He was with the Father, and He



STONES, SWORDS, AND SAWS A 17th-c. painting chooses the sword (above left) as Matthew's mode of martyrdom, while James's killers (above) use stoning and a bucksaw. However, the bucksaw is usually associated with the death of Simon the Zealot.

is the Word of the Father. The Apostle spoke thus in the midst of the assembled people without fear of anyone.

Later traditions placed James the Lesser in Persia and Egypt, but these seem even less reliable. It appears that in his relative anonymity, any confidence about James's ministry and martyrdom has been lost to confusion.

SURPRISING SERVANTS

The stories of some apostles are hazy, but we can have confidence in the calling of Jesus. In the case of the two sons of Alphaeus, we see that Jesus called the unexpected, like Matthew, and the unknown, like James. Not all of Jesus's disciples have miraculous or momentous testimonies, and not all have clear martyrdom traditions. Yet every person called by Christ, no matter their history or personality, can be used in the service of the Kingdom of God. Matthew was reviled by Jesus's opponents because of his background and colleagues. James was forgotten or confused with others. Yet these same brothers, in Christ at least, were counted worthy to be sent out by Jesus, to see him resurrected, and to take the gospel into the world. **CH**

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“Doubting” or “daring” Thomas?

HISTORY’S MOST FAMOUS DOUBTER RECOVERED HIS FAITH AND
PIONEERED A BOLD MISSION TO THE EAST

Bryan M. Litfin

Nobody likes to be remembered for their mistakes or be defined by their failures. Yet Jesus’s disciple Thomas suffered exactly that fate. Everyone knows him as the doubter who refused to believe that the Savior had risen from the dead. Thomas famously declared, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

Ever since Thomas uttered his dubious dictum, he has been scorned as unfaithful. Throughout art history—whether on an ancient Roman coffin, a Byzantine icon, or a Renaissance altarpiece—the image of Thomas probing the wounds of Christ has served to highlight his wavering faith. Caravaggio’s renowned painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (c. 1602) portrays the disciple’s probing of his Lord’s gashed side with such intimacy and gritty realism that Thomas seems to be performing a crude autopsy.

But does Thomas deserve to be remembered only as a doubter? After all he was the lone disciple who was willing to risk danger when Jesus faced mob violence. “Let us also go,” he urged the other disciples, “that we may die with him” (John 11:16). And if his courage in the face of death isn’t sufficient proof of his faith, let’s also remember his foundational acceptance of Jesus’s deity in his acclamation, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The truth is Thomas had more faith than he’s often given credit for. He was actually quite daring!

MISSION TO THE EAST

Once Thomas got past his temporary doubt and recovered his faith, he became a bold missionary for his risen Lord. How do we know this, since it isn’t recorded in Scripture? Evidence strongly suggests that Thomas traveled eastward from Jerusalem with the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven. He may even have reached India. Where do we learn about this?

The ancient Christians loved the biblical Acts of the Apostles so much that they produced many subsequent imitations. Modern scholars call these writings “apocryphal acts” because they’re all in the same genre but aren’t part of the New Testament canon (see pp. 14–16). Just because these texts aren’t divinely inspired doesn’t mean they can’t contain nuggets of truth. When the layers of frivolous



ICONIC INCREDULITY An 18th-c. Syriac gospel lectionary pictures Thomas with his finger in Jesus’s side. History often remembers the apostle for his infamous doubt, though Scripture also details his faith and courage.

folklore and deviant doctrine are peeled away, historical kernels often remain, especially when a given data point can be corroborated by other lines of evidence.

Sometime in the early third century, the church’s oral traditions about Thomas came to be written down in a Syriac text called the *Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas*. Shortly afterward it received a Greek translation and became popular among speakers of that language. Interrelated versions of the *Acts of Thomas* proliferated in the Syrian and Mesopotamian contexts as different scribes and editors—many of whom were less than orthodox in their theology—applied their creative powers to the text. Although this resulted in some confused remembrances and unlikely elaborations, the basic storyline remained intact—and deep inside it, we might be able to catch an actual glimpse of Thomas himself.

TIMID THOMAS

The story recounts 13 distinct episodes in Thomas’s ministry, culminating in his martyrdom. At the beginning of



TOKENS OF TRUTH Parthian coins verify the reign of King Gondophares (*above left*) in the Indus River area (ancient map copy of the region *above*), lending some credence to the mostly unbelievable *Acts of Thomas*.

TENACIOUS THOMAS According to apocryphal works, Thomas ministered and died boldly. In this painting (*left*), he holds the spear that martyred him.

He sells him Thomas as the needed slave, even providing a bill of sale for his (supposed) twin brother. At last Thomas can only declare, "I go wither thou wilt, Lord Jesus; thy will be done!" Abban takes his new slave back to King Gundaphorus. In this way Thomas finds himself in India, where he embarks on a series of evangelistic escapades and marvelous miracles. His bold witness for the gospel makes many joyful converts—but also some deadly enemies.

After many years of courageous ministry, a different king orders Thomas's execution by spearing. The soldiers dutifully run him through. Even after his death, Thomas's faith is confirmed when the king tries to exorcise a stubborn demon from his son by putting the boy in contact with the saint's relics. Although Thomas's bones have been removed to the West, enough sanctified dust remains in the former grave to cast out the demon. The grateful king believes in Jesus, proving that Thomas's powerful ministry continues beyond the grave, just as it does through the Savior himself.

PLAUSIBLE PROOFS

Though the *Acts of Thomas* contains many legends and a false spirituality in its overly ascetic bent, it also makes some plausible historical claims. The king whom Thomas served, Gundaphorus, can be associated with an actual first-century ruler in the Indus River area, Gondophares IV, who controlled the Parthian territory in what is today Pakistan and India. Likewise the ancient church

the narrative, all the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem, where they draw lots to determine which lands they should evangelize. When Thomas's lot falls to India, he declines the assignment because his body is too weak for travel. He asks, "How can I, who am a Hebrew, go and preach the truth among the Indians?" Even after Jesus appears to him with the promise of assisting grace, Thomas refuses to go where he has been called. "Send me where thou wilt—but somewhere else! For I am not going to the Indians," he stubbornly declares. Surely he is a notorious doubter!

But Jesus is more clever than Thomas is timid. An Indian merchant named Abban has traveled to Jerusalem at the behest of his king, Gundaphorus. Abban has been instructed to buy a slave to serve as a carpenter for the royal palace. The resurrected Jesus spots Abban in the marketplace and approaches him with a proposition.



BRINGER OF GOOD NEWS Many Christians in India trace their faith back to Thomas. This church (*above*) in Kerala, India, memorializes his missionary journey.

historian Eusebius recorded a statement by Origen that “Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor.” Certainly it would have been possible in those days for a Judean traveler to reach India, either overland via the trade route called the Silk Road, or by water from the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean. Numerous Roman coins have been found along India’s western coast, proving that a lively commercial exchange existed between the two lands.

The statement that Thomas’s bones couldn’t be found by a later king has also attracted scholarly interest. The *Acts of Thomas* claims that an unknown Christian had taken them back to “the West.” In antiquity Thomas’s tomb and relics were believed to reside at Edessa, a city in the borderlands between the Parthian and Roman Empires. The great poet of Edessa, Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373), wrote a hymn in which the devil laments, “The apostle whom I slew in India is before me in Edessa!” A few years later, the Spanish nun Egeria passed through Edessa during a pilgrimage from 381 to 384 and prayed at Thomas’s tomb where his relics lay at rest. She described the shrine as “very great, very beautiful and of new construction, well worthy to be the house of God.” Today the most important bone of Thomas’s holy skeleton—the supposed finger that probed the wounds of Christ—can be seen behind glass in Rome’s Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.

TO THE ENDS OF INDIA

Did the apostle Thomas actually found the Indian church? At the very least, it’s possible that he traveled on the Silk Road through Edessa to evangelize the northern Indian lands of King Gondophares. The modern Saint Thomas Christians (such as the Mar Thoma [St. Thomas] Church, along with other ancient denominations) also claim his presence in the south of India, along the Malabar Coast in the state of Kerala. While that is more doubtful, enough international trade existed with the Roman Empire to leave it within the



PIECES OF THE PAST Thomas’s remains rest in several places, including pilgrimage sites in Chios, Greece, and Chennai, India. Most of his relics reside in the Ortona Cathedral in Italy, where this tombstone (*above*) covers his grave. In Rome this reliquary (*right*) displays what is believed to be the finger that was placed in Jesus’s side.

realm of possibility. Yet because the records of an apostolic visit rely on sacred songs and texts preserved through centuries of oral tradition, historians can’t be sure that Thomas ever visited that southern region.

Nevertheless the history of Christianity in Kerala is very old. Eusebius records that a second-century scholar named Pantaeus traveled from Egypt to India and found Christians already worshipping there and reading the Gospel of Matthew. Zealous missionaries had followed the apostolic model of overseas evangelism. The roots of the Indian church may go back to a first-century foundation, even if Thomas himself never made it there.

All of this journeying, evangelizing, miracle-working, and maybe even dying by a spear thrust doesn’t sound like the work of a “doubter.” For any Judean man to travel as far as Edessa would have been a major undertaking—much less all the way to India! If Thomas achieved even a small part of what is attributed to him, he was a brave man. Perhaps it’s time to retire his unfortunate nickname. Though he did experience a moment of doubt, he didn’t remain locked in unbelief. According to the best evidence we have, his encounter with the risen Christ launched him on an evangelistic mission to the East. History’s most famous doubter should be rechristened with the much better name of Daring Thomas! **CH**

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Did Thomas evangelize China?



STORIES IN STONE Some have suggested a Christian influence is evident in these 2nd-c. carvings found on Kongwang Mountain in China's Jiangsu Province. However, most scholars agree these reliefs depict Buddhist and Daoist influence instead, providing no evidence of Thomas's early evangelization of China.

However, these claims have no basis in fact. The Lianyungang carvings may date to the first century, but they are generic Chinese figures, and no Chi-Rho symbol is to be found. This Greek abbreviation would have been meaningless to Semitic-speakers like Thomas! The Han-era tombs of Xuzhou have typical

Chinese decorations of the period with nothing to indicate Christian influence. Furthermore the Jewish community in Kaifeng was founded only in the tenth or eleventh century. And, finally, no evidence exists that the White Horse Monastery in Luoyang was ever anything other than a Buddhist temple. The truth is that we have no evidence of a Christian mission to China in the earliest centuries.

Debating the apostle's steps eastward

Some recent publications assert that Thomas not only evangelized in India but also as far east as ancient China. These claims cite a Syro-Malabar (eastern Catholic tradition rooted in the Malabar Coast of India) liturgical prayer that remembers Thomas, through whom "the Chinese and the Ethiopians were converted to the truth."

Recently a few Christian authors have picked up on this prayer and made it part of their arguments for an early Christian presence in China.

Two such proponents of Thomas visiting China are Wang Weifan, a Chinese seminary professor, and Pierre Perrier, a Catholic layman from France. The latter has gone so far as to give a precise chronology of Thomas's visit to China, claiming that in AD 64 he traveled up the Yellow River from Lianyungang via Xuzhou and Kaifeng to Luoyang, where he founded a church in 68 before returning to India and martyrdom in 72.

THE EVIDENCE?

These authors base their theory on rock carvings on Kongwang, a mountain in Lianyungang, which they date to the first century and interpret as images of Thomas, the Virgin Mary, and the Chi-Rho symbol; Han Dynasty tomb carvings in Xuzhou that purportedly show biblical stories as well as a Passover lamb and the Christian fish symbol; a claim that the medieval Jewish community in Kaifeng actually goes back to the early Christian period; and reinterpreting the history of the Buddhist White Horse Monastery in Luoyang, which they see as originally a Christian church founded by Thomas.

EXCHANGING AND EVANGELIZING

Both overland and maritime trade did exist between China and the West in Roman times. Yet this trade was segmented: Romans and Arabs sailed as far as India; Indians or Malaysians took the goods from there inland, or farther across the Bay of Bengal to Malaysia; Malay or Chinese traders then took the products to the ports along the South China Sea, and then inland. The overland route was just as compartmentalized. Chinese goods were passed on to Kushans (in modern Afghanistan), who sold them to Parthians and Arabs, who in turn passed them on to merchants from the Roman Empire. As far as we know, virtually no traders went continuously from the Mediterranean to China.

Generation by generation Christians did spread the gospel eastward, and individual Christians may have penetrated China. We have no evidence, however, of a Christian church in China in the first five centuries. Rather, Christianity's entrance into China was an extension of the larger picture of Christianity's slow permeation of Mesopotamia and Central Asia via the areas along the Silk Road.

—Glen L. Thompson, retired professor emeritus of church history at Asia Lutheran Seminary and author of *Jingjiao: The Earliest Christian Church in China*

Doubting no more

The Acts of Thomas, an extrabiblical text dating back to the third century, narrates the events of Thomas's evangelistic efforts. Much of what exists today was a part of church oral tradition, though various versions incorporate creative elaborations. This excerpt narrates the legend of Thomas's martyrdom.

King Misdaeus considered how he would put the Apostle Thomas to death, but he was afraid because many people were following him, including many nobles and those in authority who believed in him. Therefore, Misdaeus took Thomas and went out of the city, and armed soldiers also went with him. The people supposed that the king desired to learn something from him, so they stood still and watched. And when Misdaeus, Thomas, and the soldiers had walked one mile, the king delivered Thomas to four soldiers and an officer and commanded them to take him to the mountain, where they should pierce him with spears and put an end to him and then return to the city....

Then some men ran after Thomas, desiring to deliver him from death. But two soldiers were on the right hand of the apostle, and two on his left, holding spears, and the officer held Thomas's hand and guarded him. Then the Apostle Thomas said, "O the hidden mysteries which are accomplished in us even until our death! O riches of his glory, who will not suffer us to be swallowed up in this passion of the body! Four are they that cast me down, for of four parts am I made [meaning unknown, though could possibly refer to four humors]; and one is he that draws me, for by one I am made, and unto him I go. And this I now understand: that my Lord and God Jesus Christ, being of one was pierced by one, but I, who am of four, am pierced by four."

LOVING HIS ENEMIES

And when the Apostle Thomas went up the mountain to the place where he was to be slain, he said unto them that held him and to the rest, "Brethren, hearken unto me now at the last, for I am come to my departure out of the body. Let not then the eyes of your heart be blinded, nor your ears be made deaf. Believe on the God whom I preach and be not guides unto yourselves in the hardness of your heart. Instead, walk in all your liberty, and in the glory that is toward man, and the life that is toward God...."



A SPEARED SAINT Church tradition usually shows Thomas martyred with spears, and scholars agree that he probably died in India. Saint Thomas Christians especially preserved the story of his ministry and martyrdom there, documented as far back as Marco Polo in the 13th c.

And the blessed Thomas went to pray and kneeled down and rose up and stretched forth his hands unto heaven....

And when he had thus prayed, he said unto the soldiers, "Come here and accomplish the commandments of the one who sent you." And the four came and pierced him with their spears, and he fell down and died.

And all the brethren wept. Then they brought beautiful robes and much fair linen and buried him in a royal sepulcher where former kings had been laid.

But his disciples would not go down to the city but continued sitting by him all day. Then the Apostle Thomas appeared to them and said, "Why do you sit here and keep watch over me? I am not here, but I have gone up and received all that was promised to me. Rise up and go down! For after a little time, you also will be gathered unto me."

—Acts of Thomas (164–169), adapted by Rex D. Butler from *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by M. R. James (1924)



Courage, zeal, and faithfulness

ACCOUNTS OF JUDAS THADDEUS, SIMON THE ZEALOT, AND MATTHIAS
HELP EXPLAIN THE GOSPEL'S FAR REACH

Rex D. Butler

Two of the remaining apostles always linked together are Judas Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot, both among the least known of Jesus's disciples (see pp. 11–13). In Matthew 10:3 (King James Version), Thaddeus is listed as a surname for Lebbaeus; both of which are Greek versions of a Hebrew word meaning “beloved” or “courageous,” or possibly “big chested.” Judas Thaddeus speaks only once in the Gospels—a question in John (John 14:22–23). Simon is called “the Zealot” by Luke and “the Cananaean” by Mark and Matthew; the latter descriptor, instead of a geographical reference to Canaan, is an Aramaic translation of the Greek *Zēlōtēs*.

Matthias, chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, served as the new twelfth apostle; his election is reported by Luke in the first chapter of Acts. Mostly these three apostles receive only name mentions. Still each one is commemorated by various acts and tales of martyrdoms.

In his *Church History*, Eusebius mentions Thaddeus in a story about Abgar Uchama, the prince of Edessa, who allegedly sent Jesus a letter requesting him to come and heal his suffering (see p. 17). Abgar offered Jesus refuge, safe from the Jewish plots against him. Jesus declined Abgar's offer but promised that, after his Ascension, he would send a disciple to Abgar to heal him. As a result Thomas took it upon himself to send his colleague, Judas Thaddeus, to Abgar.

STARTING LINE UP Simon the Zealot and Judas Thaddeus typically sit in the tenth and eleventh positions of apostle depictions while Matthias occupies the last.

Realizing that Thaddeus had come in response to his letter, Abgar confessed his faith in Jesus and the Father. Thaddeus placed his hand on Abgar in Jesus's name, and the prince was healed immediately and miraculously, just as Jesus had healed the sick, without medicine and herbs. When Abgar asked for more information about Jesus, Thaddeus instructed him to assemble all the citizens of Edessa so that he could preach to everyone about Jesus's mission, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Later Christians of Edessa pointed to Thaddeus's mission as their church's founding.

Judas Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot are paired together in a late story of martyrdom preserved supposedly by Bishop Abdias of Babylon. In the *Acts of Simon and Jude*, these two apostles partnered in a mission to Persia to the east of Edessa. There Judas and Simon encountered two magicians, Zaroës and Arfaxat, whom the apostle Matthew had driven out of Ethiopia. These Persian magi were Manichaeans, teaching that the God of the Old Testament was the god of darkness, that the body is evil and only the soul is good, and therefore, that the incarnation of Christ was in appearance only.



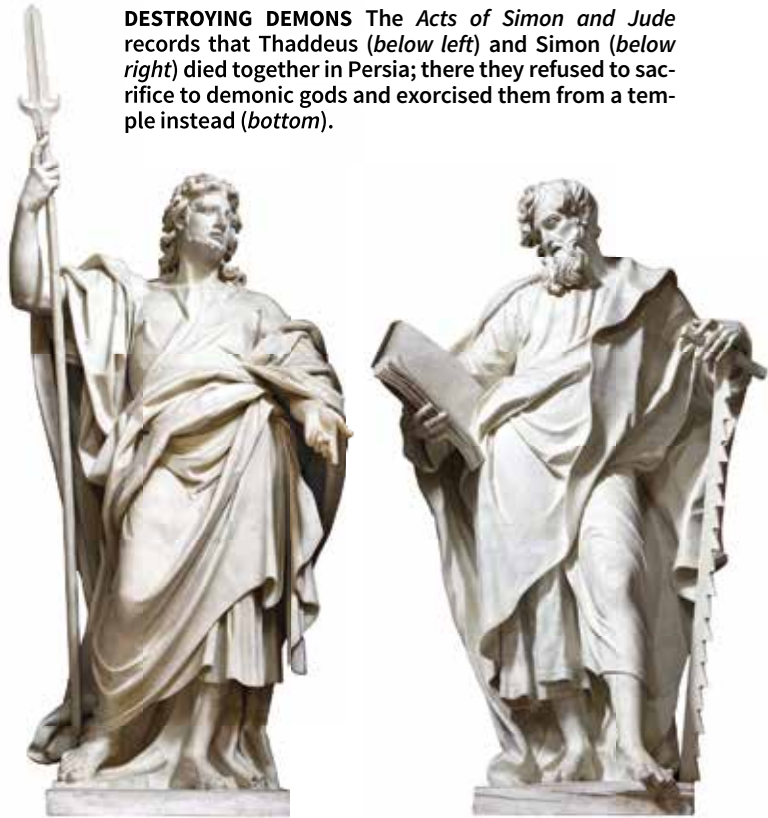
ABGAR'S ANSWER Prince Abgar of Edessa received answers to his questions about Jesus from Thaddeus, who shared the gospel and healed him (*above*). This icon includes Simon in the story as well.

Proceeding further into Persia, the apostles and the magicians met General Varardach, leader of Xerxes's army, preparing for battle with India. He asked for a prediction, and the magicians prophesied a great battle with many casualties—a likely scenario. But the apostles retorted that the Indians would sue for peace and submit to Persia. When the apostles' prophecy came true, Varardach threatened to execute the false magicians, but the apostles interceded for their opponents' lives. Once freed, however, the magicians continued to slander the apostles, sowing lies among the people.

CHOOSING THE PALM

Nonetheless Thaddeus and Simon remained in Persia, preaching throughout the empire. They healed the sick and performed many miracles. In Babylon alone they converted 60,000 new believers and ordained new ministers, including Abdias. The final ministry for Thaddeus and Simon occurred at a temple dedicated to the sun and moon, which the Persians worshiped. Zaroës and Arfaxat aroused the people to demand that the apostles sacrifice to the gods or be executed. The apostles, however, preached that the true God whom they serve created the sun and moon, and they proceeded to exorcise the temple's demons. Although two demons, appearing as gruesome black figures, fled the temple, the people attacked the apostles.

DESTROYING DEMONS The *Acts of Simon and Jude* records that Thaddeus (*below left*) and Simon (*below right*) died together in Persia; there they refused to sacrifice to demonic gods and exorcised them from a temple instead (*bottom*).



Judas then said to Simon: "I see the Lord calling us." Simon replied: "I see him also among the angels." An angel then gave the apostles a choice: either the death of all present, or the palm of martyrdom (the palm was a symbol for such a death, as referenced in Revelation 7:9 and seen in martyr icons). According to the *Acts*, "they chose the palm."

The deaths of Judas and Simon were described variously as being effected by sticks and stones, or by swords and spears, with Simon additionally being sawn in two. In St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome, Judas is depicted with a spear (more specifically, a halberd) and Simon with a saw.

GIFT OF GOD

After Judas Iscariot died, the other apostles needed to choose another disciple to complete the Twelve (see p. 49). Matthias, whose name means "gift from God," served as the providential replacement. But the New Testament says little of



MARTYRDOM MYSTERY No one knows how or where Matthias died. The Gonio Fortress in Georgia (*left*) claims his grave, while this painting (*above*) speculates he was beheaded in Jerusalem.

Matthias after this: Luke writes that he had accompanied the Lord Jesus from his baptism to his Resurrection and Ascension (Acts 1:21–26). Once he was elected as an apostle, he would have served alongside the other 11 during the preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 37), the ministries of teaching and praying (Acts 2:42–43), and the persecutions instigated by the Sanhedrin and Saul (Acts 5:18, 40; 8:1). According to Eusebius, Matthias had originally been included among the 72, the larger group of Jesus’s disciples.

IMAGINING MATTHIAS’S MINISTRY

One of the earliest accounts of Matthias’s mission work is the *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*. In this story Matthias was assigned to preach in Myrmidon, the Scythian city of cannibals. When he entered the city, the pagans drugged, blinded, and imprisoned him, intending to eat him in three days. Jesus, however, appeared to Matthias, healed him, and promised to send Andrew to him. Andrew arrived and rescued his fellow apostle, and together they healed other blinded men in prison. Andrew remained for a time in Myrmidon, but a cloud appeared and took him and Matthias to a city to the east where they met up with Peter.

Another Eastern tradition claims that Matthias and Simon teamed up with Andrew on a mission to Georgia, located to the west of modern-day Russia. In Asparos, Georgia, a gravestone marks the spot of Matthias’s alleged death and burial.

With so little known about Matthias, writers felt free to invent details. For example a late account from a Byzantine historian claimed that Matthias journeyed to Ethiopia. There he preached and then died as a martyr by crucifixion.

Hippolytus of Rome wrote, however, that Matthias died naturally: “And Matthias, who was one of the Seventy, was numbered along with the eleven apostles, and preached in Jerusalem, and fell asleep and was buried there.” In another tradition Matthias was stoned to death by the chief priests and Pharisees in Jerusalem. Still others claim that he died by axe or lance.

One fantastic legend by Abdias records that Matthias preached in Damascus, where the men of the city seized him and tried to burn him alive on a griddle. He endured this torture for 25 days. The citizens finally declared that Jesus must be a mighty God. Through Matthias’s survival many converted. The new Christians tore down idols, razed temples, and built a church. Abdias concludes: “After this preaching and proclaiming of good news, he slept a good sleep and rested from his labors in the city of Phalaon, which is among the cities of Judah.”

From these varied and contradictory traditions, we see that very little can be known for certain about Matthias’s later ministry and death. Most likely he evangelized in Jerusalem with his fellow apostles and then traveled beyond Judea, possibly to Damascus, Myrmidon, Georgia, or Ethiopia. Whether Matthias died of natural causes or as a martyr, he was at the least a confessor, who remained a faithful witness to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Despite the obscurity of these three apostles, churches still sought prestige from their memories by claiming their evangelization of the region or their martyrdoms nearby. In spite of conflicting stories and various accounts of martyrdoms, we can be certain that early Christians honored the memories of these apostles. **CH**

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Replacing Judas

Who became the twelfth apostle, and why were 12 necessary?

What is in a number? For those who believed the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (what we know as the Old Testament today) and awaited the coming Messiah, the number 12 held great theological purpose. A symbol of completion and perfection in the Scriptures, the number related directly to God's redemptive plan for his people, most pointedly seen at the time in the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus Christ, in his earthly ministry, selected 12 disciples, which his Jewish followers would have recognized as no accident.

But when Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and lost his place among the Twelve, many of those who were in the Upper Room, as described in Acts 1, may not have understood just how significant this loss was. These 12 men, standing as "Israel," were necessary to give witness to the gospel; the death, burial, Resurrection, and most recently the Ascension of Jesus. They soon learned of the loss's importance through Peter's leadership.

A CRUCIAL DECISION

As Peter explained to Jesus's other followers, all the extraordinary events they had experienced fulfilled prophecy, but also pointed to the need for 12 apostles to continue scriptural fulfillment. In Acts 1:20 Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8, declaring "the Scripture had to be fulfilled," interpreting Judas as the betrayer spoken of in these passages. Both passages are from David and may have been a part of a messianic grouping of prophetic Psalms that Christians interpreted as foreseeing the Passion of Christ, such as Psalm 22. Peter, in communal prayer, and perhaps understanding the spiritual significance of the moment, called for the replacement of Judas. There must be 12.

To choose this twelfth apostle, the other apostles had to consider necessary qualifications. This replacement must be one who had been with the remaining 11 and Jesus from the beginning, "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John" until the Ascension that had just occurred. This man must also have been a witness to the Resurrection. This person would have had many of the same experiences with Jesus that the surviving 11 had. They too could testify of the sign miracles, the teachings, the sinlessness of Jesus, and ultimately Jesus's victory over death. Two men were



DISCERNING GOD'S WILL In this 16th-c. altarpiece, the remaining 11 apostles pray around Matthias (center in light blue), blessing him as a replacement for Judas.

put forward, both demonstrating these qualifications: Joseph, called Barsabbas and also called Justus, and Matthias.

LEAVING IT TO GOD

After these considerations, the apostles awaited divine selection. For the last time in the Bible, the congregation that was present "drew lots," the common way of discerning the will of God. While it is not completely understood how the "lots" worked, at a minimum a yes or no answer was given. Always the parties needing the answer deferred to God, as did Peter and his friends in Acts 1:24, and the lot fell on Matthias.

While not well known to modern readers, Matthias certainly was known to God, the one who selected him. As he had been anonymous in Scripture prior to this, he remained so from here forward, too, with this being all we know of him—but what a commendation of his life it is.

—Jim Parker, professor of biblical interpretation and archaeology, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Leading the “Way”

STORIES OF OTHER NOTABLE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

Lloyd A. Harsch



BARNABAS, ENCOURAGING MISSIONARY

Barnabas means “Son of Encouragement” and was the name given by the apostles to Joseph, a wealthy Levite (Acts 4:36–37) from Salamis, Cyprus. He probably studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel along with Paul, who later traveled with him on his first missionary journey around 47 to Cyprus and Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Clement of Alexandria lists Barnabas as one of the 72 disciples of Luke 10:1, and Luke calls him an apostle (Acts 14:4, 14). He is the traditional founder of the church in Cyprus.

Tertullian believed Barnabas to be the author of Hebrews, and Clement confirms him as the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* (not to be confused with the *Gospel of Barnabas* written in the sixteenth century). The *Epistle* describes Old Testament practices as understood from a New Testament perspective and stresses duties toward widows and orphans. The early church valued the *Epistle* and included it in a fourth-century Bible known as Codex Sinaiticus after Revelation, but never considered the work canonical. Later scholars question his authorship. Conflict with the Jewish community in Salamis resulted in a mob stoning him to death in about 61. John Mark, who witnessed



WHO WROTE HEBREWS? Tertullian identified Barnabas (*above left*), not Paul, as the author of Hebrews, breaking with prevailing church tradition.

FAMILY MATTERS Alphaeus (Cleophas or Clopas) and his wife, Mary, are pictured as parents to James the Less and Judas Thaddeus (*above*)—an interpretation that preserves the perpetual virginity of Mary mother of Jesus.

the event, recovered his body and buried it west of Salamis in an old, undisclosed tomb, which was then reportedly discovered in 488. A monastery now marks the location.

JAMES AND JUDE, BROTHERS OF JESUS

The first record of James and Jude occurs in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus’s mother and brothers try to see him, and he replies that those who do the will of the Father are his family (Matt. 12:46–50). Later, when Jesus speaks in Nazareth, critics note the presence of his family (Matt. 13:55–56). Matthew gives the names of his brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Judas and Judah are variants of Jude (similar to William, Bill, and Billy). Paul later alludes to “the Lord’s brothers [*adelphoi*]” (1 Cor. 9:5) as having wives.



BROTHERLY LOVE However James the Just (above; epistle right) and Jude (epistle fragment above right) were related to Jesus, their letters show their devotion to him foremost as Messiah and God.

Three interpretations exist to explain how these “brothers” were actually related to Jesus. The first, favored by most Protestants, is that after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had children of their own. These younger brothers did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah until after the Resurrection. Critics of this view question why Jesus would entrust his mother to John if other brothers were available.

The next two explanations hold to Mary’s perpetual virginity. The Coptic and Greek churches believe that Joseph had a prior marriage. With his first wife, he had four sons and two daughters, Jesus’s half-siblings. This would make Joseph considerably older than Mary and more a guardian than a husband. While this arrangement was not unheard of, critics say Scripture gives no hint of it. It would also mean that Jesus was not Joseph’s eldest son or natural heir in the Davidic line.

The last explanation, favored by the Latin West, believes they were cousins. In this view, Mary, the wife of Cleophas (Clopas) or Alphaeus (both names relate to the same person), was the sister of Jesus’s mother, Mary, and Cleophas was Joseph’s brother. This preserves the perpetual virginity of both Mary and Joseph and claims James and Jude as part of the 12 apostles as James the Less and Thaddeus. Critics note this view assumes that both sisters were named Mary, that the brothers were active followers of Jesus prior to the Resurrection, and that this is the most problematic way of interpreting the word for “brothers.”



James is now known as the author of the general epistle that bears his name, but he identifies himself as the servant of Jesus (James 1:1). All descriptions of him are as a pious and holy man, called James the Just. Hegesippus (110–180), a second-century church historian, notes that James prayed in the temple so often for the forgiveness of the Jewish people that “his knees became hard like a camel’s.” He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5) until Jesus appeared to him after the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem following the execution of John’s brother, James. Jewish Christians valued his leadership, and he held the position for some 30 years, presiding over the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Because of his piety, the Sanhedrin brought him to the temple parapet at Passover to have him “persuade the crowd not to err regarding Jesus.” When he affirmed Jesus as the Messiah, the leaders claimed even James was deceived and they threw him over the wall. The fall did not kill him so they stoned him, all while James was praying for their forgiveness. Then one attacker hit James on the head with a club, killing him. While Hegesippus puts this in 69, the Jewish historian, Josephus, writing a generation earlier, has him stoned between the procuratorships of Festus and Albinus about 62.

Jude wrote the canonical letter bearing his name, describing himself as the brother of James and servant of Jesus (Jude 1:1). One tradition pairs Jude with Simon the Zealot in ministry in Persia, a part of the Parthian Empire, where they led a revival and were martyred in 65. Armenians partner Jude with Bartholomew in

ministry there, where they were later martyred.

JOHN MARK, GOSPEL WRITER

John Mark was a cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10). It was in the home of his mother, Mary, that the church in Jerusalem prayed for Peter’s release (Acts 12:12). Barnabas brought him along on the first missionary journey, but Mark left them (Acts 13:13). When Barnabas wanted to bring him on the second missionary journey, Paul objected so strongly that they parted company (Acts 15:39). Paul and Mark later reconciled (Philem. 24, 2 Tim. 4:11). Mark is also connected with Peter in Rome (1 Pet. 5:13) who considered him his son in the faith. As a result of this connection, Mark penned his Gospel, writing down stories Peter had preached with Peter’s blessing. Mark could also be the unnamed “young man” who





GOSPEL WRITERS John Mark and Luke (left) are best remembered for the Gospels they recorded, but they should also be remembered as active missionaries.

PROLIFIC PAUL Paul, pictured with those he disciplined (below), also taught many churches through his letters.



escaped naked at Jesus's arrest (Mark 14:51). Coptic tradition has Mark founding the church in Alexandria, Egypt, and being martyred in 68. In 827 his relics were moved from Egypt to Venice, Italy, where they are housed in the Basilica di San Marco. A separate tradition claims he was the bishop of Apollonia (multiple cities named Apollonia claim this honor). In this tradition Mark was hung upside down with boulders tied to his hands and left to die.

LUKE, JOURNALING DOCTOR

A Gentile physician (Col. 4:14) from Syrian Antioch and a sometime companion of Paul (recorded in the "we" sections of Acts and in Philemon 24), Luke is the author of both the Gospel that bears his name and Acts. The Gospel is the result of his researching the life of Jesus by talking to eyewitnesses. Much of Acts comes from his own personal experience. Luke was with Paul at the end of Acts in 63 and just prior to Paul's execution in 65 (2 Tim. 4:11). What he did between these events is unknown. He may have traveled with Paul to Spain or to Ephesus. Early reports state he did not marry and died "full of the Holy Spirit" at the age of either 74 or 84 in either Bithynia (modern Turkey) or Boeotia (modern Greece). Jerome (c. 345–420) notes that Luke's relics, along with Andrew's, were moved from Greece to the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople in 357 during Emperor Constantius's reign. In 1204 crusaders took his relics to Padua, Italy, but a rib was returned in 1992.

phal *Acts of Paul*, written about 160, describes Paul as "a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel."

A persecutor of the early church, Paul was converted to become a follower of Jesus on his way to Damascus (Acts 9). Opposition to his preaching led to his return to Tarsus. Barnabas later welcomed him to help with the church in Antioch, which sent them on the first missionary journey. It was on this trip that Saul took the name "Paul" possibly because Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, was his first convert. Returning from his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, jailed in Caesaria Maritima, and ultimately sent to Rome to appeal his case.

Acts ends in 63 during the second year of Paul's house arrest. Jerome states that after two years in custody, Paul's case was dismissed. As support he cites 2 Timothy 4:16–17, where Paul refers to this "first defense" and being "delivered from the lion's mouth." Early traditions suggest that after Paul was acquitted, he traveled east (perhaps to Ephesus and/or Crete), then west to Spain before a second imprisonment in Rome and execution. Clement of Rome's letter to Corinth about the year 96 claims that Paul "taught righteousness throughout the whole world" and "reached the limit of the west." The Muratorian fragment (late second century) has an introduction to Acts that notes the omission of Paul's trip to Spain. Eusebius also wrote that "rumor has it" that Paul went to Spain.

The dismissal of Paul's case and his release from custody is quite possible. Josephus recounts a personal story of when he traveled to Rome to secure the release of "certain priests of my acquaintance, and very excellent persons they were, whom on a small and trifling occasion he [Felix] had put into bonds, and sent to Rome to plead their cause before Caesar." In Rome Josephus met Aliturus, a Jewish actor favored by Nero, who connected him with Nero's wife, Poppaea. She used her influence to secure the release of these religious leaders. Since Paul was a religious leader, was held by Felix, and was sent to Rome to have his case



BLIND BEGINNING, MILKY MIRACLE On the road to Damascus, Paul saw Jesus and was temporarily blinded (*above*)—an event that began his new life in Christ. One legend claims his life ended when he was beheaded, and milk poured from his neck instead of blood (*above right*).

adjudicated, it is entirely possible that he was released at the same time as Josephus's priestly friends.

After his release Paul could have traveled to Spain as he intended. Tortosa, Spain, formerly a Roman colony, has a tradition that Paul founded a church there and consecrated Rufus, the son of Simon of Cyrene, as bishop.



The Great Fire in Rome broke out on July 18/19, 64. When suspicion turned to Nero as the fire's cause, he deflected suspicion to the Christian community and persecution broke out. Paul was rearrested along with Peter. In 65 Paul was beheaded at the *Aquae Salviae* (now *Tre Fontane*). He was buried in the *Ostian Way* where he was first held in house arrest. The site is outside the first-century city walls, close to the Jewish community, and a focal point for the Christian population. The Church of *San Paolo alla Regola* now sits on the site. Later renovations discovered a marble slab at the spot where Paul was supposed to be buried, with *PAVLO APOSTOLO MART* (To Paul, apostle and martyr) written on it. **CH**

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Acts of Paul

At this Paul turned to face the east. Lifting up his hands to heaven, he prayed for a long time. After he had communed prayerfully with the fathers in Hebrew, he offered his neck without another word. And as the executioner struck off his head, milk spurted onto the soldier's tunic. When the soldiers and all the bystanders saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given Paul such honor. Then they departed to give an account of these events to Caesar.

So when Nero heard the news, he was utterly astonished and didn't know what to say. And while many philosophers and the centurion were standing

around with Caesar, Paul appeared to them around the ninth hour. Facing them all, he said, "Caesar, behold me here—Paul, the soldier of God! I am not dead but alive in my God. But for you, O wretched man, there will be many troubles and great punishments, because only a few days ago you unjustly spilled the blood of the righteous!" After Paul said this, he departed. Then Nero was so terribly upset by what he had heard that he ordered the release of the Christian prisoners, including Patroclus and Barsabbas Justus and his friends.

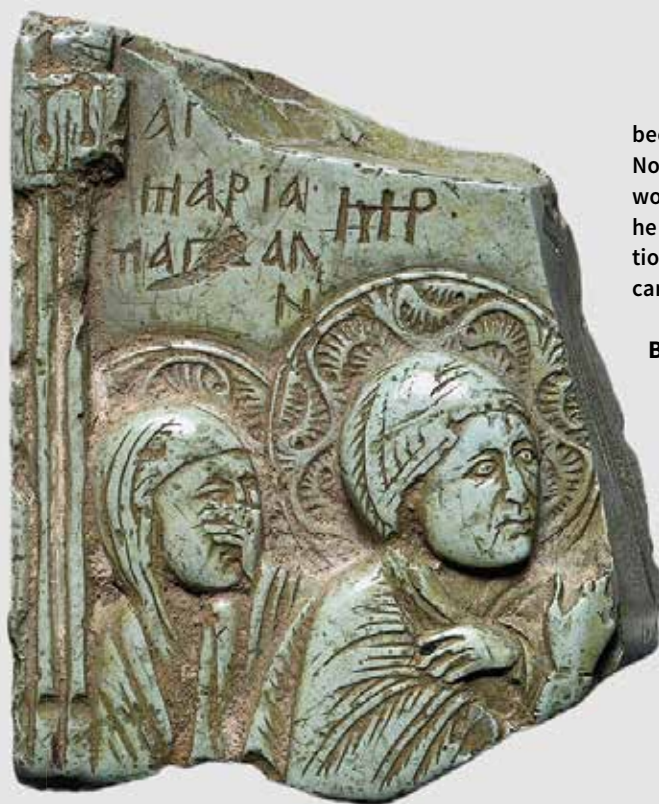
Just as Paul had directed, Longus and the centurion Cestus came at dawn and approached Paul's tomb in trepidation. As they drew near they saw two men praying—and there was Paul in between

them! At the sight of this incredible miracle, they were overwhelmed. Yet when Titus and Luke noticed Longus and Cestus approaching, they were seized with human fear and turned to run away.

Longus and Cestus followed them. "Blessed men of God, we're not chasing you for death as you might think!" they said. "No, it's for life! We want you to give us what Paul promised—he whom we just saw standing between you praying!"

So when Titus and Luke heard this, they gave them the seal in the Lord with great joy. And they exalted God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

—*Acts of Paul*, translated by Bryan M. Litfin, from *Early Christian Martyr Stories* (2014)



Women of the Way

Who were the women who followed Jesus, and what roles did they play in the fledgling church?

As Jesus traveled about with the Twelve, women disciples also accompanied them. Jesus healed many of these women and freed them from evil spirits. Luke named three: “Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward; and Susanna.” He added that there were “many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means” (Luke 8:1–3). Mark mentioned two others: “Mary, the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and Salome” (Mark 15:40).

The Gospels do not state how others may have regarded the sight of a Jewish rabbi being followed by a group of both men and women, but presumably it scandalized their society. It was unheard of for any woman, respectable or otherwise, to leave home and

PRESENT TO THE END A Byzantine icon (*above*) shows Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Jesus, sorrowfully witnessing the Crucifixion. Mary Magdalene, among the first to see the risen Lord, has been called the “apostle of the Resurrection.”

become a traveling companion for an itinerant teacher. Nonetheless it is clear from the biblical account that women were among Jesus’s circle of followers and that he accepted them as learners and disciples. In his relationships with these women, Jesus departed significantly from the norm of his culture.

BOLD AND FAITHFUL

These women also played a special role in the Crucifixion, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. Women were the last at the cross, the first at the empty tomb, and the first to see the risen Christ (see *CH #17: Women in the early church*). They showed themselves to be bolder than the men, and because of their faithfulness, women were entrusted with the task of announcing the Resurrection message: “He is risen from the dead!” Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned in all four Gospel accounts, has been called throughout history “the apostle of the Resurrection” or even “apostle to the apostles.”

Jesus, however, did not appoint women among his 12 apostles, whom he called for a special purpose. The pattern of 12 male apostles followed the structure of the 12 tribes of Israel. But after Jesus’s Ascension, a gathering of 120 disciples assembled in the Upper Room, including “the women and Mary the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14). These women were present at the choosing of the apostle Matthias to take the place of the betrayer Judas. Presumably these women again were part of the group who were all together on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended and the church was born. Women, though not named among the 12 apostles, participated in the founding of the church.

About two decades later, Paul wrote a letter to the Roman church and sent greetings to “Andronicus and Junias...who are outstanding among the apostles” (Rom. 16:7). The name translated “Junias” could be a masculine or feminine form of a name, so these two could be men who traveled together or a husband-and-wife team. The early church fathers believed Junias to be a female, and John Chrysostom (347–407) said of her: “Oh! How great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!”

By the third century, the term “apostle,” rather than implying a church office such as Paul held, instead meant that this man and woman served as itinerant evangelists and church planters whose work had become known for its fruitfulness. By his simple greeting, Paul implied that his female friend, Junias, served the church in an outstanding way, following in the tradition set by Jesus’s women disciples.—Rex D. Butler



Lives and legends of the apostles

Use these questions to guide you in discussion or personal reflection on the stories of the apostles and others close to Jesus.

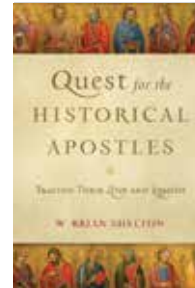
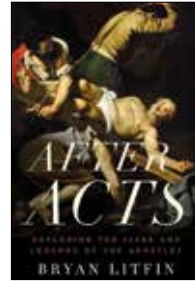
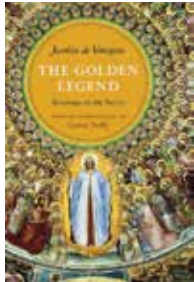
1. Note the differences in the disciples' behaviors and boldness before and after Pentecost (pp. 6–9). How has the Holy Spirit made a difference in your own attitude and actions?
2. Consider the brief overview of the identities of the 12 disciples on pp. 11–13. What did you find clarifying or confusing?
3. What is the difference between first-century apocryphal writings and the biblical canon (pp. 14–16)? How might the apocryphal acts of the apostles be useful to the church? In what ways are these writings problematic?
4. Do you believe Peter suffered martyrdom by crucifixion or by burning (pp. 18–22)? Why?
5. What did you learn about Andrew, James, and John (pp. 24–26)? What stories of their lives and deaths do you find plausible? Why?
6. In what ways did the apostles prove the truth of the gospel and the authority given them by Jesus (pp. 30–33)? How did the early church show their respect for their ministries?
7. What is the “cult of the saints” and how did devotion to saints begin (p. 34)? How do you feel about venerating saints, and why?
8. Based on the evidence provided on pp. 35–37, do you think Philip the Apostle is also Philip the Evangelist? Why or why not?

PICTURING THE APOSTLES Symbols of the apostles' deaths or ministries are often used to identify them in iconography and church art. Who can you identify by the implements of their martyrdoms in the image above?

9. Why is James son of Alphaeus called “James the Lesser” (pp. 38–40)? How might James and Matthew have been related to Jesus, and do you find the given evidence compelling?
10. How did “doubting” Thomas become “daring” Thomas (pp. 41–43)? What evidence exists to show that Thomas evangelized India? What about China (p. 44)?
11. Why are Judas Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot often paired together in the church's imagination (pp. 46–48)?
12. Why did the disciples choose Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot? Do you think Matthias became the twelfth apostle (p. 49)? Why or why not?
13. Out of the other notable followers of Jesus (pp. 50–53; p. 54), whose story do you find most interesting or encouraging? Why?
14. Explain the church's historical positions concerning how James and Jude were “brothers” of Jesus. Which do you think is most likely and why?
15. What roles did the women closest to Jesus serve in the church (p. 54)? Do you think Junias was a female apostle? Why or why not?
16. Consider the legends of various apocryphal texts shared in this issue (see p. 17; 23; 27; 45). Which stories stick out to you and why? **CH**

Recommended resources

INVESTIGATE WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES WITH THESE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CH'S AUTHORS AND EDITORS.



BOOKS

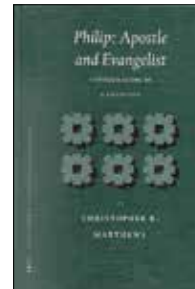
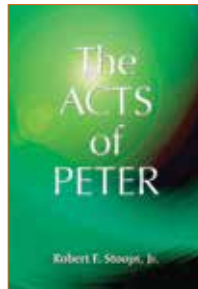
For accessible overviews on **the lives, legends, and martyrdoms of the apostles**, refer to Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (2015). McDowell defends the faith by examining how the apostles were impacted so greatly by the life, death, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that they were willing to die for their faith. Each of the chapters follows an apostle, including Jesus's brother, James, as well as Paul and Matthias; presents their stories found in ancient sources; and discusses the credibility that all the apostles (except John) suffered martyrdom.

Also see Bryan Litfin, *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (2015). Among the apostles Litfin explores in this book are also Mark, Luke, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. One unique and helpful feature of Litfin's book is a report card at the end of each chapter, in which the author grades conclusions by the church fathers and apocryphal acts.

Finally, read W. Brian Shelton, *Quest for the Historical Apostles: Tracing Their Lives and Legacies* (2018). This elegantly written exploration of the apostles' lives begins with the biblical accounts and then moves through the early church fathers' accounts and the apocryphal acts. The author concludes his chapters with discussions of symbolism and imagery connected to the apostles plus their possible burial sites.

On **specific apostles** you may find Christopher Matthews, *Philip: An Apostle and Evangelist* (2002) helpful. On **Peter** read Dennis Buchholz, *Your Eyes Will Be Opened: A Study on the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (1988). On **John** refer to Alan Bandy and Alexander Stewart (eds.), *The Apocalypse of John Among Its Critics: Questions and Controversies* (2023). Study **Paul** with Alan Bandy, *An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul* (2021) and Glen Thompson, *In This Way We Came to Rome: With Paul on the Appian Way* (2024).

Much of what the church knew or understood about the apostles comes from **ancient historical accounts of the church**, such as the writings of Papias of Hierapolis (95–110); Tertullian, *Against Heresies* (second century); Hippolytus, *On the Apostles and Disciples* (third century); Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* (c. 324); Jerome, *The Lives of Illustrious Men* (c. 392); Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Letter of Clement to James* (fourth century); Aphrahat, *Demonstration XXI: Of Persecution* (early fourth century); and Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* (fifth century). You may also study the reliability of Scripture with Craig Keener, *Miracles Volumes I & II: The Credibility of New Testament Accounts* (2011) and *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (2009).

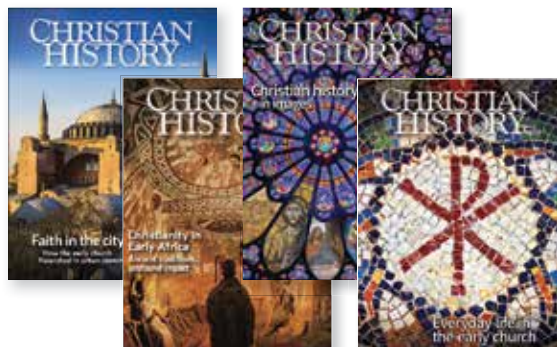


For a look at **early church identity and history**, read Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (2005); Stefana Dan Laing, *Retrieving History: Memory and Identity Formation in the Early Church* (2017); and Glen Thompson, *Jingjiao: The Earliest Christian Church in China* (2024).

Apocryphal acts of the apostles share legends and stories that, though possibly rooted in fact, are questionable as historical sources. Apocryphal texts referenced or quoted in this issue include: *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of Peter and Paul*, *Acts of Philip*, *Martyrdom of Andrew*, *Pseudo-Abdias*, *Acts of the Holy Apostle John*, *Acts and Martyrdom of Matthew*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Acts of Simon and Jude*, *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, and *Acts of Paul*.

The best-known **medieval hagiography of the apostles** is Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings of the Saints* (c. 1260). For more on their medieval veneration, see Peter Brown, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Western Christianity* (1982).

PAST CH ISSUES



These past issues of *Christian History* share content relevant to this issue—all are available online; some are available for purchase as hard copies.

- 17 – *Women in the Early Church*
- 27 – *Persecution in the Early Church*
- 37 – *Worship in the Early Church*
- 43 – *How We Got Our Bible*
- 47 – *Paul and His Times*
- 51 – *Heresy in the Early Church*
- 57 – *Converting the Empire*
- 59 – *The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*
- 72 – *How We Got Our History*
- 96 – *The Gnostics*
- 105 – *Christianity in Early Africa*
- 124 – *Faith in the City*
- 144 – *Christian History in Images*
- 147 – *Everyday Life in the Early Church*

VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO



Vision Video carries a number of films about the apostles, the early church, and the ancient world, including *Barnabas and Paul*, *The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church*, *Exploring Ephesus: City of Apostles*, *Lives of the Apostles Paul and Peter*, *Story of the Twelve Apostles*, *Paul the Apostle*, *The Apocalypse*, *The Week that Changed the World*, *Paul's Road to Damascus*, *Ancient Bible Destinations of Greece*, *In the Footsteps of St. Peter*, *The Seven Churches of Revelation Rediscovered*, and *Fragments of Truth*. You may also find the animated films *The Messengers* and *To Every Nation* helpful for children. Some of these titles are only available via digital download; you may access more content by streaming on Redeem TV.

WEBSITES



Public-domain primary source documents mentioned in this issue can be found in the usual collections—most useful are the Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, and Project Gutenberg.



Specifically, writings by Tertullian can be found at the Tertullian Project. The Internet Medieval Sourcebook on Saints' Lives shares hagiographical accounts of the apostles and apostolic-age saints. You can also find a fairly complete list of all New Testament apocryphal texts at Comparative-Religion.com. **CH**



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