

Mk. 3:13-19 ESV (modified) – Jesus Appoints the Twelve Apostles

¹³ And He went up on the mountain
and called to Him those
whom He desired,
and they came to Him.

¹⁴ And He appointed twelve
(whom He also named apostles)
so that they might be with Him
and He might send them out to preach
¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons.

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve:

Simon

(to whom He gave the name Peter);

¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James

(to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);

¹⁸ Andrew,

and Philip,

and Bartholomew,

and Matthew,

and Thomas,

and James the son of Alphaeus,

and Thaddaeus,

and Simon the Zealot,

¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot,

who betrayed Him.

He went up on the mountain – The Greek would allow this to also mean “into the hills.” At the very least, Mark doesn’t specify a location. There are hills around the Sea of Galilee, but there also hills further west in central Palestine/Israel. Mountains have often had theological significance in the Old Testament as stories where God meets His people. Mt. Sinai is the ultimate mountain of the Old Testament where God first called Moses as prophet and then later the location where God constituted the Israelites as His people through the covenant He made with them.

called to him those whom he desired, – Jesus remains the instigator of His story. The path of discipleship begins not with the disciples themselves, but with Jesus who calls them to follow Him. This particular sentence likely refers to Jesus calling from the crowd disciples to follow Him, and from that group of disciples, He will further call a smaller subset to be His disciples. While we have a strong notion of the Twelve as Jesus’ disciples, we should not think that the disciples only total 12 people.

Jn. 6:70 ESV Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil."

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Jn. 15:16 ESV You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Acts 1:21-23 ESV So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-- one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

they came to Him – Just as previously when Jesus issued the call to follow Him, here He calls these twelve out from the crowd of disciples to fill a special role and they leave the crowd behind to be with Jesus.

He appointed twelve – The number twelve is of Jesus' own choosing. Almost everyone agrees that the number is based on the twelve tribes of Israel, so that by call twelve disciples to follow Him, Jesus Himself is restoring or reconstituting Israel from a remnant of the whole people of Israel. Jesus specifically connects them with their role in leading/judging the whole people of God.

Matt. 19:28 ESV Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Lk. 22:30 ESV that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

That Jesus Himself is not one of the Twelve, but instead the one who creates them, is placing Himself in the role of Yahweh who formally constituted Israel from the twelve tribes at Mt. Sinai.

whom he also named apostles – Mark has called followers of Jesus disciples, but this is the first time he calls them apostles. Luke in his Gospel often refers to the Twelve as apostles, but Mark only uses the term here and at Mark 6:30, which is technically correct. The apostles authority was limited in extent. It is only later at Pentecost that their role and identity as apostles who are eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus that their role changes, but they are still apostles.

Mk. 6:30 ESV The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

To be an apostle is to have the power and authority of the one who sent him. In modern politics, the close comparison is that of an ambassador, who is often sent to foreign countries with a certain commission and so has authority to be able to make deals or do business on behalf of the higher power who gave him that authority. In our case, the roles are clearly defined: Jesus is the sender, the Twelve are the ones sent

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with a commission/special authority, the extent of their authority is given in the following verses (Mark 3:14b-15), and the ones to whom they are sent will be explained later (Mark 6:10-11).

Jesus not only gives the Twelve a new name, as they are now functioning as “apostles,” but several of them also do have actual name changes or other names listed with them. Going back to Abram/Sarai who are given new names (Abraham/Sarah) when God comes to them with the promise of future blessings, or when Jacob is renamed Israel after struggling with God and receiving a blessing, the name changes here reflect a change in the person’s position/status.

Gen. 17:5 ESV No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

Gen. 17:15 ESV And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

Gen. 32:28 ESV Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

so that they might be with him – The first and most important purpose of the calling the Twelve to be Jesus’ apostles is so that they might be with Him. If they are to be His representatives, they absolutely must know Him and the way to know Jesus is to be with Him, to spend time, hearing, watching, observing, and conversing with Him. The disciples (and especially the Twelve) will be special recipients of some of Jesus’ teaching that is not publicly available to those who form the crowds or the Pharisees. Though the apostles are given some rather impressive things to do, they could do none of it nor understand its true purpose apart from Jesus. The job of being with Jesus also looks ahead past this specific commission to the greater task they will have later to be eye-witnesses of His resurrection.

Acts 1:21-22 ESV So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-- one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

and he might send them out to preach – Preaching so far has been the task of John the Baptizer (Mark 1:7) and Jesus (Mark 1:38-39; 2:2), but now it is given to the apostles that they also will preach. The word preach is more than simply tell others about Jesus, it is to proclaim with God-given authority the arrival of the kingdom of God, which itself comes through the preached Word of God. The apostles here would look a lot like prophets of the Old Testament. The main prophetic task was to speak God’s Word as it had been given to them. In doing so, their speech isn’t mere speaking, but comes with the full authority of God.

and have authority to cast out demons. – This definitely has the “wow” factor, for as we will find out, to have authority over demons is a public demonstration to people of one’s own authority over them. In this case, the authority of the apostles will not be their own, but rather it is Jesus’ own authority that has been shared with them. They can do these things because Jesus can and now has given them the same authority for this limited purpose. The fact that Jesus gave them authority to cast out demons is probably less about giving the apostles “showy” things that they can do to validate their teaching, but is a reminder that Jesus’ ministry is not one where other people are seen as the enemy of Jesus (contrary to some of the Pharisees who view Him as the enemy). Rather the ultimate battle Jesus is waging is on a spiritual plane hidden from our view. Satan opposed Jesus in the time of His temptation, and unclean spirits have also spoken against Him, but it is now Jesus’ time to confront them. The spiritual world in which Satan inhabits has damaged the physical world, and Jesus repairs both, but He sees that it is the spiritual problems that are in fact the primary problems.

to whom he gave the name Peter – Peter’s role among the apostles is almost without question as the lead. He often functions as the spokesman for the rest. Peter in Greek is related to the word *petra*, which means “crag,” like a steep rocky cliff of a mountain (as opposed to a moveable object, like a boulder or stone). It would be a foundational rock which is secure. In the Old Testament, Abraham is described as such a rock for the people of Israel, and in Matthew’s Gospel Peter and his confession are the foundation of the church.

Isa. 51:1-2 ESV "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.

Matt. 16:18 ESV And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We know that while Peter sometimes leads with great vision, he is a fallible man and will have his own low points in Jesus’ ministry and even after. Peter is not a second Abraham, to whom special promises are given and from whom all other apostles (and Christians) would be characterized as his offspring or heirs, however. Peter’s foundational role is more in his witness and his life and conduct. Peter provides us with someone to listen to and imitate. We can build upon his own witness and example, but Jesus alone is the chief cornerstone of our faith.

Eph. 2:20 ESV built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone

to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder – Other than noting the name itself, no other explanation is given why Jesus gave these two this name. No

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rationale is perfect, but given their actions during Jesus' ministry as described in the Gospels, perhaps it is because their own personalities showed up in a certain forcefulness or violence.

Mk. 9:38 ESV John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

Mk. 10:35-45 ESV And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"³⁹ And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them."⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Lk. 9:54-55 ESV And when his disciples James and John saw [that a Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus], they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them.

Andrew – So far, Simon, James, and John have all been given new names by Jesus, but beginning with Andrew, a new trend of no nicknames will largely follow. The effect of not giving Andrew and the rest new names puts Peter, James, and John in a separate class, which does play out with the Gospels. Those three form an inner circle even among the Twelve (Mark 5:37, 9:2, 14:33).

Mk. 5:37 ESV And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James.

Mk. 9:2 ESV And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

Mk. 14:33 ESV And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

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Perhaps one reason why the three are set apart is because according to the Law, two or three witnesses were necessary to establish truth.

Deut. 19:15 ESV "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

Mk. 9:2 ESV And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

Though Andrew was with Simon from the beginning when Jesus called both brothers, Andrew is separated from Simon, while James and John are mentioned together. This too seems to be based on a reduction of Andrew's role within the Twelve.

Philip, and Bartholomew, – Other than their names, Matthew, Mark and Luke give no additional information about these apostles. John's Gospel includes Philip among the disciples from the time of John the Baptist (John 1:44-48). Philip also talks with Jesus about where food for 5,000 men could be purchased (John 6:5-7). He shows up again during Holy Week when comes Greeks are looking to speak to Jesus (John 12:21-22). There we learn he was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and likely was a Greek-speaker (which is why some Greeks sought him out rather than one of the other disciples). Philip also asks Jesus to show the other disciples the Father after Jesus tells them He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6-9).

Bartholomew, on the other hand, is mentioned in the list of apostles, but no other information or stories are connected with him. The name "Bartholomew" itself is a rather odd one. In Aramaic it means "Son of Ptolemy," and so does not seem like it would be someone's given name, but rather describes his relationship to his father. Some of hypothesized if this is Nathanael about whom we do not know much, but Philip was connected with Nathanael in John's Gospel (see John 1:45-49) and here their names are together. Nathanael is also described as being from Cana in Galilee, which would put him in proximity to Philip too.

and Matthew, – Other than listing his name here, Mark records no other information about Matthew. In Matthew's list of the apostles, Matthew is described as a tax collector (Matt. 10:3). Matthew's narrative about Matthew being called as a disciple of Jesus (Matt. 9:9ff). is remarkably similar to the story of Levi (Mark 2:14ff. and Luke 5:27ff.). All three Synoptic Gospels contain an account of a tax collector called to be Jesus' disciple within the same basic storyline, but two of them call the man Levi, while one calls him Matthew. This is one of the main reasons why Levi, a tax collector whom Jesus calls to follow Him, is often connected with Matthew as being the same person.

and Thomas – Thomas is a Greek proper name that was sometimes associated with the Aramaic word for “twin,” which would have sounded similar in both languages. In John’s Gospel, it is said that Thomas was also called Didymus, which in Greek means “the twin.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas, but once again John includes a few key stories, the most famous one being Jesus’ resurrection appearance to Thomas (John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24-28; 21:2).

Jn. 11:16 ESV So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

and James the son of Alphaeus, – Given that there are two men named James among the apostles, it is good to have something to distinguish them. James, the brother of Zebedee, is one of the Boanarges, while this James is the son of Alphaeus. Previously in Mark’s Gospel, Levi was named as a son of Alphaeus. It is possible (though not definite) that this James would be the brother of Levi (whom we have also identified as Matthew the tax collector). Some have also identified this James with James the younger, but there’s no way to know for certain and nothing else is mentioned about either James.

Mk. 15:40 ESV There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

and Thaddaeus, – Matt. 10:3 and Mark 3:18 both list Thaddaeus as one of the apostles, but Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 give the name as Judas, the son of James. In all likelihood, the two are the same person. No other stories are connected with either Thaddaeus or Judas, the son of James.

and Simon the Zealot, – To differentiate from Simon Peter, this Simon also has a further description/nickname attached to him. In Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18, Simon is called “the Cananaean/Canaanite,” in Greek, while in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13, he is called “the Zealot” in Greek. Some English translations lose this distinction. One reason why they are connected is because the Greek Cananaean could be connected with Aramaic word “kanna,” which means “zealous.” There were among the Jews some who identified themselves as “Zealots,” a political force that was working to fight Roman oppression of the Jews. This Simon may or may not be connected to that. Even Jews that were not “Zealots” were largely uncomfortable with the Roman influence over their affairs.

Acts 5:35-37 ESV And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some

of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

and Judas Iscariot, – Iscariot is often thought to derive from the Hebrew words “*ish kerioth*” which mean “man from Kerioth,” a village about twelve miles south of Hebron. If Thaddaeus also had the name Judas, there would be a need to differentiate the two men.

who betrayed him. – The Greek word translated “betrayed” here is “to hand over” (*paradidomi*) has a very broad range of meaning which can be translated in the proper context as “to arrest,” “to betray,” “to transmit,” or even “to entrust.” Mark is either very boldly foreshadowing the ultimate end of Jesus’ earthly life, or else he knows that the readers already know something of Jesus’ story. There is no blame or excessive emotion to Mark’s description of Judas. He simply states the facts that it is Judas who will hand Jesus over to others. The foreboding is palpable though because the last person who was handed over to authorities was John the Baptizer (Mark 1:14). The word is going to play a very large role in the narrative of Jesus’ passion, but it has roots in Greek Septuagint’s translation of Old Testament prophecy about Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

Mk. 9:31 ESV for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be **delivered into** the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”

Mk. 10:33-34 ESV saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be **delivered over** to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

Isa. 53:6 ESV All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has **laid on him** the iniquity of us all. [In Greek, “the Lord gave him over for our sins”]

Isa. 53:12 ESV Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death [in Greek his life **was given over** unto death] and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many [In Greek, on account of their sins **he was given over**], and makes intercession for the transgressors.