

and placed **after** Simon the Zealot), Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, always last and always described as the traitor. Changes of position might suggest changes in relative importance of the individuals over time e.g. John is cited before his brother James twice in Luke (ch.8, when only Peter, John and James are allowed in to see the body of Jairus' daughter, and ch.9 at the Transfiguration) and also in Acts 1, but it is difficult to define this precisely.



The position of seniority amongst the Twelve is historically given to Peter. However, the famous passage where Jesus gives Peter his name and the 'keys to the kingdom' occurs only in Matthew (ch.16), and is presented as a supplement to Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi. The other Gospels omit it. This is curious, as such a text would have been extremely important in giving support for a church leader after Jesus' death. It is especially unusual to find the text in Matthew, given that his gospel is for Jews, because Acts indicates that the early church leader in Jerusalem was James, Jesus' brother or cousin. Matthew repeats the 'keys' passage in his community section (ch.18), so its attribution to Peter may not be original. Speculation might suggest some kind of power struggle for leadership of the Jerusalem church, with Matthew unsuccessfully supporting Peter.

However, there are other passages that lend support for Peter's role as head: in Luke 22, Jesus' foretelling of Peter's denial is accompanied by a sentence that states once Peter has recovered he must strengthen his brothers, and in John's Gospel (ch.21) where Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, and three times instructs Peter to 'feed my sheep'

## Judas

Much has been written in recent times about Judas. There has been an attempt to exonerate him of blame for betraying Jesus by expressing the view that he was just doing Jesus' bidding. However, the strength of written evidence against him across all four gospels (and Acts) is too extensive and consistent to ignore, particularly where Jesus himself is pictured as administering condemnation.

# Jesus in the Gospels

## 5. Jesus Chooses His Close Disciples



## Questions For Reflection

1. Why does John's account of the calling of the first four disciples differ from that in the other Gospels?
2. Why should Peter be thought of as the most senior disciple?
3. Is the negative judgement on Judas Iscariot justified?

## The Calling of the First Four Disciples

In the Synoptic Gospels the first four disciples are Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and then the sons of Zebedee, James and John. These are **called by Jesus** as he passes them by the Sea of Galilee (Mtt.4, Mk.1, Lk.5), although in Luke's Gospel Andrew is not mentioned and the story includes the additional information that Jesus also asked Peter to put his boat back to sea to net a huge haul. This can be understood as a device by Luke to show how Peter will be influential in bringing a great number to believe in Jesus, and may be a way of indicating the special position of Peter as a leader.



In St John's Gospel, however, there is a very different basis for the first disciples joining Jesus. Here Andrew has the prime role and he, with another, unnamed person, are presented as disciples of John the Baptist. They are **urged by the Baptist** to follow Jesus. Further, it is Andrew who then seeks out his brother, Simon Peter, so that he may also become a disciple. John also states that it was at this point that Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter/Cephas, not after his profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi as in Matthew's Gospel (ch.16). The differences are compounded because in John the next disciples to be called are Philip and Nathanael not James and John.

The account in John's gospel has more of an eyewitness feel to it than that in the other Gospels. It may well be that the second disciple with Andrew was John himself, so he would know precisely how the first disciples came to follow Jesus whilst the other Gospels came to record a more general telling of that event.

## The Calling Of Matthew

Matthews calling and the subsequent banquet 'of tax collectors and sinners' is described in detail in Matthew (ch.9), Mark (ch.2) and Luke (ch.5). There are extremely close parallels in their accounts and wording, suggesting a common source for all three. However, there is one important difference; only in Matthew's Gospel is he named so,

the other two call him Levi. This is very unexpected given that Matthew's Gospel is addressed to the Jewish community (only he gives the OT quotation from Hosea with which they would have been familiar) and it might be expected that he rather than they would have retained the Jewish name Levi. Perhaps it is an indication of Matthew's sorrow for having pursued such a disreputable career that he wished to emphasise his new name alongside his former profession as a sign of his changed life.



## The Twelve Apostles

It is interesting to study how the twelve apostles were selected (as opposed to the first disciples). In Mark (ch.3) and Luke (ch.6) Jesus is shown as having many disciples around him, but goes up to a mountain and summons twelve in particular to him. In Luke Jesus only does this after spending a night in prayer, to emphasise the importance of this selection process. The process of going up a mountain always has the connotation of Sinai, and therefore is of special significance and closeness to God. Matthew, however, only states that Jesus summoned the twelve to him. The number twelve is naturally significant as representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The names of the twelve are usually given in three groups of four each (Mtt.10, Mk.3, Lk.6). The first group always includes Simon Peter, Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. However, Mark alone places Andrew fourth in the list, as occurs in Acts. This is unusual given that Luke is also meant to be the author of Acts. In Mark's Gospel, Simon is depicted as being given the name Peter when he was chosen as one of the Twelve (refer also to John's gospel, above), not after his profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi as presented in Matthew ch.16.

The second group of four are Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas. Only in Matthew's Gospel is Matthew described as a tax collector and placed last of the four (but in Acts too), perhaps another indicator of Matthew's sorrow and humility. The final group contains James son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (called Judas son of James in Luke