

Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles?

(Most of the following is from an article by *Christian History Institute*. Additions by Dennis Rupert are highlighted in blue.)

THEY WERE NOT the kind of group you might have expected Jesus to send forth on his mission to reach the world. There was nothing special or spectacular about them. They were just ordinary working men. But Jesus formed them into the backbone of the church and gave them the most extraordinary task imaginable: calling the entire world, including the mightiest empire ever known, to repentance and faith in the risen Christ. You can be sure that any educated, first-century Roman citizen would have laughed at any prediction that within three centuries the Christian faith would be the official faith of the empire.



The calling of the disciples

The New Testament tells of the fate of only two of the apostles: Judas, who betrayed Jesus and then went out and hanged himself, and James the son of Zebedee (John's brother, also called James the Greater), who was beheaded by Herod about AD 44 (see Acts 12:2).

Into All the World

Reports and legends abound and they are not always reliable, but it is safe to say that the apostles went far and wide as heralds of the message of the risen Christ. An early legend says they cast lots and divided up the world to determine who would go where, so all could hear about Jesus. They suffered greatly for their faith and in most cases met violent deaths on account of their bold witness.

PETER was martyred in Rome about AD 64, during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Peter was crucified, upside down at his request, since he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. (The apostle Paul was also executed in Rome, but we believe at a later date about AD 67/68.)

ANDREW went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what is now the Soviet Union. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified. While on the cross, he preached to his persecutors until he died.

"Doubting" THOMAS was probably most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as far east as India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

PHILIP possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

MATTHEW the tax collector and writer of a Gospel, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

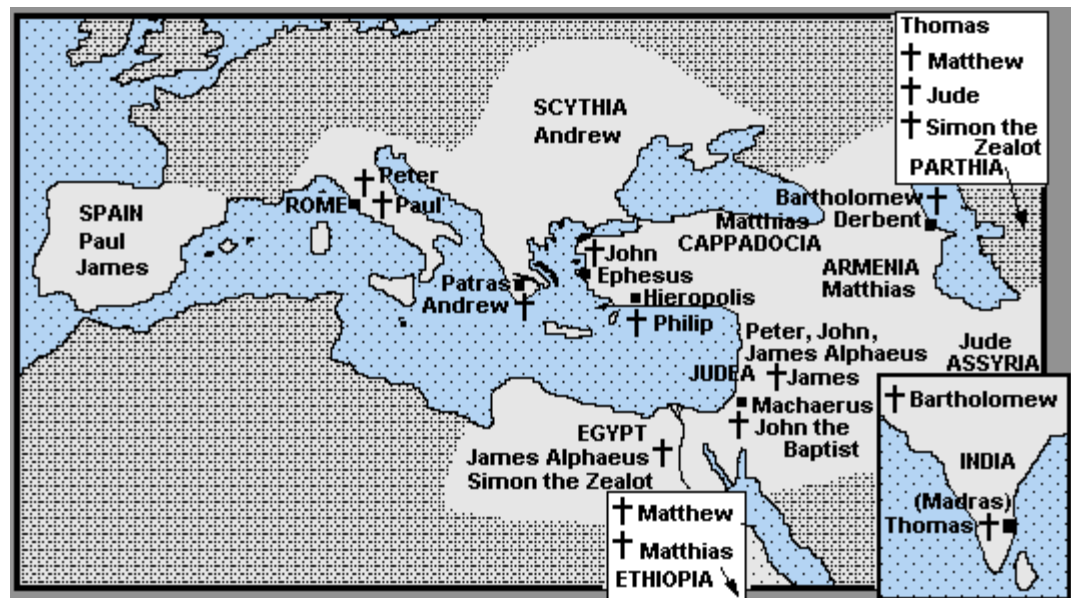
BARTHOLOMEW had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

JAMES the son of Alphaeus was also known as James the Less to distinguish him from the other apostle of the same name who was the brother of John. James the Less is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. One tradition says that he was thrown from a lofty pinnacle of the temple and then clubbed to death. Another tradition says that his body was sawed in pieces.

SIMON THE ZEALOT, so the story goes, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

JUDE/THADDAEUS preached the gospel in Judea, Samaria, and Mesopotamia. Tradition says that he was shot to death with arrows in Persia with his fellow apostle Simon the Zealot.

MATTHIAS was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning. Another tradition has him dying by stoning and then beheading.



Places where the apostles evangelized and the traditional locations of where they died (†). Sometimes there is more than one tradition about their death.

JOHN is the only one of the company generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the church in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary the mother of Jesus in his home. During Domitian's persecution in the middle 90's, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he is credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil.