

## Jesus Sends 12 Apostles

**Matthew 10:1-16, Mark 6:7-13, Luke 9:1-6**

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (English Standard Version – ESV)

### **Background:**

- Israel had twelve tribes, and groups that chose twelve leaders (as in the Dead Sea Scrolls) did so because they believed that their own group was the true, obedient remnant of Israel.
- The lists in Luke and Acts replace Mark and Matthew’s “Thaddeus” with “Judas son of James” (also John 14:22). Ancient documents show that it was common for people to go by more than one name, so the different lists of apostles probably refer to the same people. Nicknames were common, even appearing on tomb inscriptions.
- “Cananaean” is Aramaic for “zealot” (Luke 6:15); thus, some translations simply read “Simon the Zealot” here. In Jesus’ day, this word could just mean “zealous one.”
- “Apostles” means “sent ones,” or commissioned representatives. The analogous Hebrew term was used for business agents, but the general concept is broader than that. A “sent one” acted on the full authority of the sender to the extent that he accurately represented the sender’s mission.
- “Way of the Gentiles” probably means a road leading only to one of the pagan, Greek cities in Palestine. Jewish people normally avoided roads that led into such cities anyway. Galilee was surrounded by Gentile regions except in the south, where it shared borders with Samaria.
- A common Jewish belief was that ten tribes of Israel had been lost and would be found in the time of the end, but here Jesus uses “lost sheep of Israel” in the more common Old Testament sense: they have gone astray from the Lord (Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 50:6; Ezekiel 34:5). The idea that a message was first to Israel did not preclude it later coming to others (Amos 3:2).

- The apostles are to travel light, like other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak; (2) some traveling philosophers, called Cynics (probably represented as nearby as Tyre and the Decapolis, Gentile cities surrounding Galilee); (3) some prophets (Elijah and John the Baptist). They must be fully committed to their mission, and not bound by worldly concerns. The “bag” could have been used for begging. It is said that Essenes received such hospitality from fellow Essenes in various cities that they did not need to take provisions when they traveled.

- Showing hospitality by taking in travelers was one of the greatest virtues in Mediterranean antiquity, especially in Judaism. Jesus could have drawn on Old Testament precedent for traveling ministers depending on such hospitality (2 Kings 4:8-11).

- Pious Jewish people returning to holy ground would not want even the dust of pagan territory clinging to their sandals. Jesus’ representatives here treat unresponsive regions as unholy or pagan. Sodom is set forth as the epitome of sinfulness both in the prophets and in subsequent Jewish tradition. The point here is probably that they rejected God’s messengers.

### **Questions:**

- + The “12 disciples” are also called “12 apostles.” How are these terms similar and different?  
Why did Jesus pick these particular men? How were they similar? How were they different?  
Why must they go to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” but not the Gentiles or Samaritans?  
Why are they empowered to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons?  
Why are they sent out with nothing (no money, clothes or food) to meet their physical needs?  
How might these directives of Jesus apply to Christians today? How might they apply to you?
  
- + Why would Jesus send the 12 out as “sheep in the midst of wolves?” Who were the wolves?  
When sharing the gospel today, who are the wolves, and how should you deal with them?  
What does “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” mean? How does it apply to you?