

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TWELVE APOSTLES? HOW DO THEIR DEATHS PROVE EASTER?

There are conflicting legends about the deaths of the twelve apostles, making the historical evidence difficult to interpret. This is partly because early Christians wanted their homes to be known as the final resting place of an apostle. While this may make finding the truth more of an “adventure”, every Christian should investigate the historical record for themselves.

Who Was Martyred and When?



- [James](#) (Martyred: 44–45 A.D.)
- [Peter](#) (Martyred: ca. 64 A.D.)
- [Andrew](#) (Martyred: 70 A.D.)
- [Thomas](#) (Martyred: 70 A.D.)
- [Philip](#) (Martyred: 54 A.D.)
- [Matthew](#) (Martyred: 60–70 A.D.)
- [Nathanael \(Bartholomew\)](#) (Martyred: 70 A.D.)
- [James the Lesser](#) (Martyred: 63 A.D.)
- [Simon the Zealot](#) (Martyred: 74 A.D.)
- [Judas Thaddeus](#) (Martyred: 72 A.D.)
- [Matthias](#) (Martyred: 70 A.D.)
- [John](#) (Martyred: 95 A.D.)
- [Paul](#) (Martyred: 67 A.D.)

The martyrdom of some of the apostles is more certain than others. For instance, historians don't dispute the martyrdom of Peter, Paul, or James. Many of the other accounts have decent historic validity as well, but some raise the eyebrow and prompt agnosticism.

However, when boiled down to their least common denominator, it is feasible to believe that **all but one of the apostles suffered a martyr's death**, even if we can't be sure of the exact details.

Why Were They Martyred?

Amidst some uncertainty, one thing is clear—the reason given for their deaths was the same. They were killed because they claimed to be eyewitnesses of Christ's death and resurrection. They all died because of an unwavering, unrelenting claim that Christ rose from the grave. **They died for Easter.** This article doesn't cover all the evidence so you might want to check out [14 Evidences for the Resurrection of Jesus and 14 References](#).

The gruesome death of the apostles, as recorded below, is one of the greatest gifts God ever gave to the Church. It contributes much to Christian apologetics by answering the question **“How can you be sure of the resurrection of Christ?”**

After looking at all the best sources, the most likely scenarios for each apostle's death are detailed below. At the risk of spoiling some of the “legends”, I've graded each account:

- A = Highest Probability
- B = High Probability
- C = Low Probability
- D = Lowest Probability

1. James (Martyred: 44–45 A.D.)

Probability Grade: A – James’ martyrdom, C – executioner’s martyrdom

James, the apostle of the Lord, was the second recorded martyr after Christ’s death (Stephen was the first). His death is recorded in Acts 12:2. Where it says of Herod Agrippa:

He killed James the brother of John with the sword

Both Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History II.2) report that after seeing the courage and unrecanting spirit of James, the executioner was so convinced of Christ’s resurrection, that he was executed with him.

2. Peter (Martyred: ca. 64 A.D.)

Probability Grade: A

Although Peter denied Christ three times just before the crucifixion, after the resurrection, he was willing to be martyred for his belief. In John 21:18–19 Jesus even told Peter how he would die:

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.”

According to Eusebius, Peter thought himself unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Master, and asked to be crucified “head downward.”

3. Andrew (Martyred: 70 A.D.)

Probability Grade: B

Andrew, who introduced his brother Peter to Christ, was martyred six years after Peter. After preaching Christ’s resurrection to the Scythians and Thracians, he too was crucified for his faith. As Hippolytus tells us, Andrew was hanged on an olive tree at Patrae, a town in Achaia.



4. Thomas (Martyred: 70 A.D.)

Probability Grade: B – Thomas’ martyrdom, D – the method of execution.

Thomas was known as “doubting Thomas” because of his reluctance to believe the other apostles’ witness of the resurrection. In John 20:25 Thomas states:

“Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

After this, Christ appeared to Thomas and he believed unto death. Thomas sealed his testimony as he was thrust through with pine spears, tormented with red-hot plates, and burned alive.

5. Philip (Martyred: 54 A.D.)

Probability Grade: C

Christ corrected Philip when, in John 14:8-9, he asked:

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Philip saw the glory of Christ after the resurrection and was undoubtedly amazed at Christ's response to his request. Philip evangelized in Phrygia, where hostile Jews had him tortured and then crucified.

6. Matthew (Martyred: 60-70 A.D.)

Probability Grade: B

Matthew, the tax collector, desperately wanted the Jews to accept Christ. He wrote *The Gospel According to Matthew* about ten years before his death. Within its pages one can see the faith for which he spilled his blood. In Matthew 28:20 the resurrected Christ says:

"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

These comforting words likely sustained Matthew when he was beheaded at Nad-Davar:

7. Nathanael (Bartholomew) (Martyred: 70 A.D.)

Probability Grade: C

Nathanael, whose name means "gift of God", was truly given as a gift to the Church through his martyrdom. In John 1:49, Nathanael was the first to profess Christ:

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

He later paid for this profession through a hideous death. Unwilling to recant his proclamation of a risen Christ, he was flayed and then crucified.

8. James the Lesser (Martyred: 63 A.D.)

Probability Grade: B - that he was cast down from the temple, D - that he was being beaten to death with fuller's club after the fall.

James was the appointed head of the Jerusalem church for many years after Christ's death. He undoubtedly came in contact with many hostile Jews who in Matthew 27:25 said:

And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

To force James to deny Christ's resurrection, these men positioned him at the top of the Temple in Jerusalem. Unwilling to deny what he knew to be true, James was cast down from the Temple and finally beaten to death with a fuller's club to the head.

9. Simon the Zealot (Martyred: 74 A.D.)

Probability Grade: B

Simon was a Jewish zealot who strived to set his people free from Roman oppression. After he saw with his own eyes that Christ had been resurrected, he became a zealot of the Gospel.

Historians tell of the many places Simon proclaimed the good news of Christ's resurrection: Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Mauritania, Britain, Lybia, and Persia.

His martyrdom, brought about by a governor in Syria, verified his testimony for Christ.

10. Judas Thaddeus (Martyred: 72 A.D.)

Probability Grade: C

In John 14:22, Judas asked Jesus:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

After he witnessed Christ's resurrection, Judas knew the answer. He preached the risen Christ in the midst of pagan priests in Mesopotamia. He was eventually beaten to death with sticks, showing to the world that Christ was indeed Lord and God.

11. Matthias (Martyred: 70 A.D.)

Probability Grade: D

Acts 1:26 recorded how Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot (the betrayer of Christ who hanged himself) as the twelfth apostle of Christ:

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Matthias is believed to have been one of the seventy Christ sent out during his earthly ministry, as Luke 10:1 records:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

This qualifies him to be an apostle. Matthias, of which the least is known, is said by Eusebius to have preached in Ethiopia. He was later stoned while hanging upon a cross.

12. John (Martyred: 95 A.D.)

Probability Grade: A – that he was not martyred, C – that he was thrown into boiling oil.

John is the only one of the twelve apostles who died a natural death. Although he did not die a martyr's death, he did live a martyr's life. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos during the reign of Emperor Domitian for his proclamation of the risen Christ.

It was there that he wrote the last book in the Bible, Revelation. Some traditions say he was thrown into boiling oil before the Latin Gate. While this didn't kill him, it likely scarred him for life.

13. Paul (Martyred: 67 A.D.)

Probability Grade: A

Paul, was a self confessed persecutor of the Christian faith as he states in Galatians 1:13

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

Paul was brought to repentance as he traveled to Damascus. Ironically, he was on his way to arrest those who held to Jesus' resurrection. Paul started as the greatest skeptic, but spent the rest of his life proclaiming the Christ he once persecuted.

Writing in 2 Corinthians 11:23–27, defending his ministry, Paul tells of his sufferings for the name of Christ:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Finally, Paul met his death at the hands of Emperor Nero when he was beheaded in Rome.

Those "whom he also named apostles" were:

Gospel of Matthew ^[Mt 10:1-4]	Gospel of Mark ^[Mk 3:13-19]	Gospel of Luke ^[Lk 6:12-16]	Gospel of John	The Book of Acts	Greek Transliteration
Simon ("who is called Peter")	Simon ("to whom he gave the name Peter")	Simon ("whom he named Peter")	Simon Peter / Cephas	Peter	Sim(e)on Petros
Andrew ("his [Peter's] brother")	Andrew	Andrew ("his brother")	Andrew ("brother of Simon Peter")	Andrew	Andreas
James ("son of Zebedee ")	James ("son of Zebedee") / one of the " Boanerges "	James	one of the "sons of Zebedee"	James	Iakōbos
John ("his [James's] brother")	John ("brother of James") / one of the "Boanerges"	John	one of the "sons of Zebedee" / thought to be the " disciple whom Jesus loved "	John	Ioannes
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philippos
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael	Bartholomew	Bartholomaíos
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas ("also called Didymus")	Thomas	Thomas Didymos
Matthew ("the tax collector")	Matthew	Matthew	not mentioned	Matthew	Matthaios (Levi?)
James ("son of Alphaeus ")	James ("son of Alphaeus")	James ("son of Alphaeus")	not mentioned	James son of Alphaeus	Iakōbos
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Jude ("son of James")	Jude ("not Iscariot") ^[14:22]	Judas son of James	Ioudas Thaddaios
Simon ("the Cananean ")	Simon ("the Cananean")	Simon ("who was called the Zealot ")	not mentioned	Simon the Zealot	Simon o Zelotos
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas ("son of Simon Iscariot")	(Judas replaced by Matthias)	Ioudas Iskarion