

LESSON 7

The Apostles

Bible References: Selected passages from the Gospels

Followers

While many rabbis had followers or disciples, the pupils usually chose their master. The fact that Jesus, as a rabbi, personally selected his own disciples was surprising and nontraditional. Jesus chose his 12 disciples during his second year of public ministry. Over time they became known as “apostles” because of the work they had been called to do—to bring the message of the Gospel to the ends of the Earth.

The original band of disciples included four fishermen, one tax collector, at least one Zealot, and Judas, who later betrayed Jesus, the very rabbi he had followed. Jesus melded and molded this motley, uncompromising group of men into bearers of the good news. He empowered them with the Holy Spirit and endowed them with authority to preach and heal. Traditional accounts of the disciples tell us where they went, to whom they brought the gospel, and how some of them were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Disciples

Leader: Jesus called them one by one—

Students: Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Leader: Next came Philip, Thomas, too,

Students: Matthew and Bartholomew.

Leader: James, the one they called the Less,

Students: Simon, also Thaddeus.

Leader: The twelfth disciple Judas made,

Students: Jesus was by him betrayed.

Leader: Sound off,

Students: One, two.

Leader: Sound off,

Students: Three, four.

Leader: Sound off,

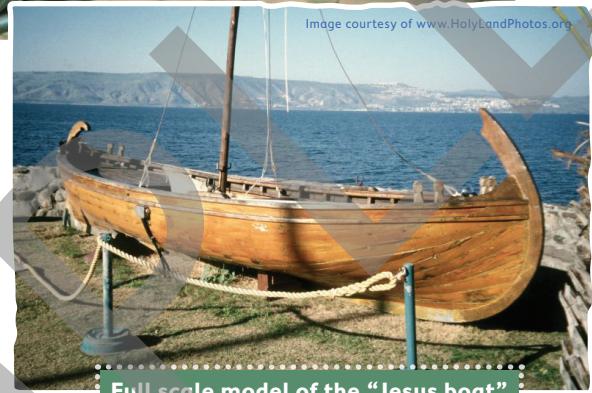
Students: One, two, three, four.

All: One, two

All: Three, four!



The group of apostles grew larger following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Matthias, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Barnabas, and many others also dedicated their lives to spreading the news of the saving grace of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Across the ages since that time, the message has spanned oceans and continents to reach billions of people around the globe. The number of people sharing the good news with other nations and people groups has grown exponentially.



LESSON 8

Jesus the Teacher

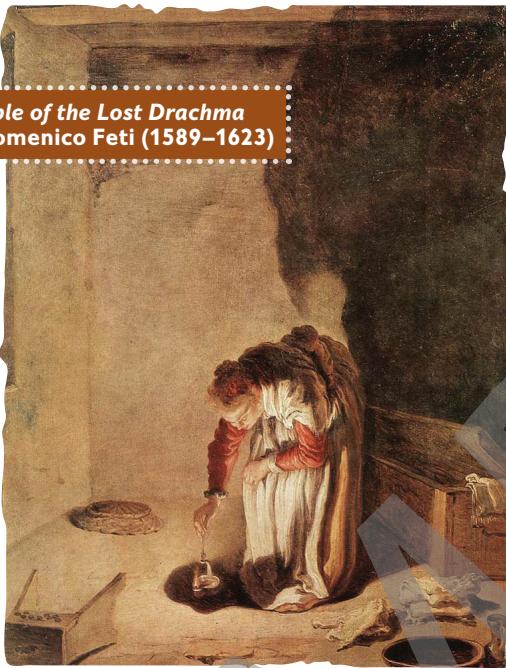
Bible References:

Selected passages from the Gospels

How Jesus Taught

Jesus' work of preaching, teaching, and healing was different from that of any other rabbi. He taught neither as the Jewish authorities nor as the prophets. In order to underscore the authority (his own!) and

authenticity of his messages, Jesus would often say “I tell you the truth” as he preached the gospel of God, his Father. Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the Mount” portrays his power and authority as he called upon his followers to be different, set apart from both the pagans and the Pharisees.



Parable of the Lost Drachma
by Domenico Fetti (1589–1623)

Moreover, Jesus enforced his teaching, just as the psalmist had prophesied: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old” (Psalm 78:2). Jesus taught in parables to help his listeners connect familiar objects and examples with unfamiliar ideas and circumstances pertaining to God’s kingdom. Lost sheep, a pearl, a wedding banquet, oil lamps, and a mustard seed are a few of the homespun examples

Jesus used. His parables opened the eyes of those around him to the blessings and responsibilities of citizenship within the kingdom of God.

Similarly, Jesus’ miracles served to usher in the kingdom and bring wholeness to broken lives, while demonstrating God’s life-changing power. After encountering the Teacher, the lame could walk, the blind could see, and the deaf could hear. Thousands of people were fed, not just in body but also in their souls.

By expressing his authority over them and restoring order in people’s lives, Jesus exposed the hypocrisy that lurked in the shadows. He forgave the sins of the people’s contrite hearts. He spoke out when he encountered injustice. When those in authority abused their positions, Jesus came to the aid of the oppressed and downtrodden.

Jesus even taught with silence. Can you think of instances in which Jesus’ silence spoke volumes? Jesus the Teacher taught his disciples what they needed to know in order to carry on the work of kingdom

expansion. Jesus' teachings continue to be relevant for us today. We, too, are citizens of that kingdom that will never end. The Master is instructing us, too, through the words, works, and wonders recorded for us in the Bible.

LESSON 9

The Kingdom of God

Bible References: Selected passages

**from the Book of Matthew; Mark 4:3–8, 26–32; 9:42–47;
Luke 8:5–8; 9:57–60; 12:16–34**

God Reigns

The kingdom of God is God's reign over his universal realm. Covenant, prophets, priests, human kings, and the church are all tools, or instruments, of the kingdom of God. God's kingdom is eternal and will thus outlast all earthly kingdoms. Accordingly, the kingdom of God was a frequent topic of Jesus' parables. He described the hallmarks of the kingdom, such as forgiveness, preparedness, kindness, compassion, justice, mercy, obedience, rejoicing, community, and healings. Still today, these attributes seem "upside-down" to people who are not members of Christ's kingdom. Yet the kingdom of God continues to grow and expand. Like a mustard seed, the kingdom, while starting out small and unspectacular, has grown into a magnificent tree, affording refuge and shade to all who seek it (Mark 4:26–32). Kingdom members tell others, who in turn tell others, and so on. For this reason, God wants his kingdom citizens to strengthen their faith and encourage others to do the same. All are welcomed into this kingdom—a realm where justice replaces oppression and joy and healing displace grief and suffering.

