

Quest *for the*
HISTORICAL
APOSTLES



TRACING THEIR *Lives* AND *Legacies*

W. BRIAN SHELTON

B
Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2018 by W. Brian Shelton

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-0-8010-9855-0

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Control Number: 2017052479

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

All maps are copyright © Baker Publishing Group.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



To Bill Shelton,
whose paternal love and faith in Christ
have blazed a path for my own faith journey.

His influence and support have ranged from rearing his children
in church to an appreciation for my theological career.

He positioned me to complete confirmation at a young age,
where the pastor realized a coincidence that day:
“Twelve confirmed. Like the twelve apostles.
Perhaps this is no coincidence.”

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction: The Quest	1
1. The Path	17
2. Peter: The Rooster	61
3. Andrew: The Saltire	95
4. James: The Scallop Shell	113
5. John: The Eagle	125
6. Philip: The Bread	145
7. Bartholomew: The Knife	159
8. Thomas: The Builder	173
9. Matthew: The Publican	187
10. James: The Lesser	201
11. Jude: The Exorcist	211
12. Simon: The Zealot	223
13. Matthias: The Elected	231
14. Paul: The Sword	243
15. The Discovery	269
Works Cited	281
Index of Modern Authors	295
Index of Scripture and Other Ancient and Medieval Sources	299
Index of Subjects	309

Acknowledgments

Just as the apostolic college was an assembly of individuals with a common cause, this book had its own writing college that deserves mention. The fellowship of Clarkesville United Methodist Church provided the initial impetus for this work when they reached for insight beyond what a book on the apostles could offer. Thanks are due to David Nelson, Wells Turner, and the Baker editorial and production professionals for their generous support. Thanks to Torri Beck and the Seby Jones Library staff at Toccoa Falls College for endless research support. President Robert Myers and five school deans offered understanding to their provost to pursue a meaningful outlet amid numerous other administrative responsibilities. Special thanks to Kent Rothwell for laboring through a draft from a layman's perspective simply out of a love for learning and a contribution to friendship. Finally, the work would not have been possible without initial recommendations by Drs. Robert Yarbrough, Joel Green, Bryan Litfin, and Kenneth Steinhauser, as well as their influence on me.

Particular thanks go to Sally Shelton, whose interest in biblical studies continues to mature alongside my own. Her dedication to dialoguing about apostolic journeys, tying together pieces of the New Testament, and sacrificial supporting of writing projects is invaluable. It is my hope that Annie, Katie, and Maggie Shelton will follow in her footsteps and someday profit from the journeys of the apostles presented here.

While it seems idealistic, expressing acknowledgment to thirteen apostles long gone seems fitting. My respect for these fellow believers deepened as their journeys and sacrifices slowly unfolded to me. I realized the profound inspiration that they continue to offer those who journey and sacrifice for the same

kingdom cause generations later. Although the church is regularly criticized, I think the apostles would be proud that the message instrumental to their own lives continues to be perpetuated among Christians around the world.

Rome, Lent 2017

Abbreviations

General and Bibliographic

†	death (at a place or date)
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325</i> . Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Revised by A. Cleveland Coxe. 10 vols. New York: Christian Literature, 1885–87. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
AT	author's translation
ca.	<i>circa</i> , about
Cain	Jerome. <i>Commentary on Galatians</i> . Translated by Andrew Cain. FC 121. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
CE	Common Era
chap(s).	chapter(s)
d.	died
Elliott	J. K. Elliott. <i>The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
fl.	flourished
FC	Fathers of the Church
Hills	Julian V. Hills, trans. <i>The Epistle of the Apostles</i> . Early Christian Apocrypha 2. Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2009.
Holmes	<i>The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations</i> . Edited and translated by Michael W. Holmes. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
James	<i>The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses</i> . Translated by Montague Rhodes James. Oxford: Clarendon, 1924. Reprint, 1972.
KJV	King James Version
Lienhard	Origen. <i>Homilies on Luke</i> . Translated by Joseph T. Lienhard. FC 94. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996.

Malan	Abdias. <i>The Conflicts of the Holy Apostles</i> . Translated by Solomon Caesar Malan. London: BiblioLife, 2015.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
n.p.	no page number available
NPNF ¹	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . First series. Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature, 1886–89. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
NPNF ²	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . Second series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature, 1890–1900. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
r.	reigned
Robinson	James M. Robinson, ed. <i>The Nag Hammadi Library in English: The Definitive Translation of the Gnostic Scriptures Complete in One Volume</i> . San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.
Schneemelcher	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> . Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher. Translated by R. M. Wilson. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963–66.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
trans.	translated by
v(v).	verse(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)
Williams	Epiphanius. <i>Against Heresies</i> . In <i>The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis</i> , book 1. Translated by Frank Williams. Boston: Brill, 2009.

Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalms(s)	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Luke	Luke	Acts	Acts
Mark	Mark	John	John	Rom.	Romans

1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	1 John	1 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Titus	Titus	2 John	2 John
Phil.	Philippians	Philem.	Philemon	3 John	3 John
Col.	Colossians	Heb.	Hebrews	Jude	Jude
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	James	James	Rev.	Revelation

Old Testament Apocrypha

2 Esd.	2 Esdras
4 Macc.	4 Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

Other Ancient Works

<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Conflicts</i>	Abdias, <i>Conflicts of the Holy Apostles</i>
<i>Ep. Apos.</i>	Epistle of the Apostles
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	Gospel of Thomas
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Life</i>	Josephus, <i>Life of Flavius Josephus</i>
<i>Ps.-Abd.</i>	Apostolic History of Pseudo-Abdias
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Miscellanies</i>
<i>Twelve</i>	Hippolytus, <i>On the Twelve Apostles</i>
<i>Vir. ill.</i>	Jerome, <i>Illustrious Men</i>

Introduction

The Quest

Turning to the disciples, He [Jesus] said privately, “Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.”

Luke 10:23–24

While Jesus was saying this, Thomas, Andrew, James and Simon the Canaanite were in the west, with their faces turned east, but Philip and Bartholomew were in the south turned towards the north, but the other disciples and the women disciples stood behind Jesus. But Jesus stood beside the altar.

Pistis Sophia¹

late third century, Egypt

The lives of the apostles deeply intrigue us. For Christianity’s faithful, these historic figures are pioneers, heroes, and saints. They are models for the faith and sources of firsthand knowledge of the Christ. They walked with Jesus, beheld his marvels, wondered at his conversations, and reflected deeply on his teaching. They sat at the Last Supper table, grew weary

1. Schneemelcher, 1:258.

at Gethsemane, witnessed the crucifixion, and marveled at the resurrection. Not knowing what their individual futures held, they were shaken at Pentecost, grew into church leaders, and watched the church rise to a level of indelible competition with religions in the Roman Empire. Most apostles passed into obscurity, but all died without any thought that generations to follow would herald them as icons of the faith and personifications of religious ideals. In their time these figures were stones in the historic foundation of early, expanding Christianity, and now their stories are inspirational and interesting to us. Even atheist Tom Bissell, writing about the history of the apostles, declares, “I have long believed that anyone who does not find Christianity interesting has only his or her unfamiliarity with the topic to blame.”²

Interest in the apostles extends to some of the greatest believers in church history. Seven years before her death, Corrie ten Boom shared a story with the congregation at McLean Presbyterian Church in Virginia. Her account was imaginary, but it provides a powerful perspective on the contribution of the apostles. She described how angels gathered around Jesus at his ascension into heaven, and these guardians inquired how the world would know about the redemption he had accomplished. “I have trained my men,” he explained to his heavenly audience. “To evangelize the whole world?” the angels asked. “Every corner of it,” he responded. “How many men did you train for such a mammoth task?” they inquired. “Twelve men,” he asserted. “Just a handful? But what if they fail?” “If they fail,” said Jesus, “I have no other plans.” Puzzled, the angels insisted, “But is that not a great risk to take?” “No,” said the Lord, “because they will not fail.”³ Ten Boom’s being a Holocaust survivor makes the illustration more profound: both she and the apostles embody a profound sense of overcoming.

In the immediate generations after the apostles, their legacy was enhanced through oral tradition and fabled writings. Unbeknownst to Corrie ten Boom when she told her story, a parallel legacy existed from a second-century writing that underscored her picture of the apostles’ success. In the Epistle of the Apostles, Jesus says of Paul, one of the apostles: “Upon him will be the perfection of my testimony.”⁴ Yet no early church scholar believes that the twelve apostles wrote this second-century epistle bearing their name. With uncertainty about what information concerning the apostles is historical and what is fictional, historians are now left to apply critical skills to make these determinations. While any embellishment always represents an effort to honor

2. Bissell, *Apostle*, xx.

3. Ruffin, *The Twelve*, 175.

4. Ep. Apos. 31 (Hills, 60).

the apostles, the calculation of authenticity is more challenging for scholars who research from a position of faith. Such a task is intimidating since an objective scholar desires to graciously permit the voices of early Christian history to speak for themselves yet is compelled to weigh and filter their stories. A comprehensive collection of reliable information about the twelve apostles is not easily available, but such a collection as this book offers can benefit the church in understanding its early history.

For those who are familiar with the New Testament, knowledge of the lives of the apostles beyond Acts is likely limited to the epistles that bear apostolic names. Those familiar with early church history may comprehend the influence of the apostles across the empire and in the formative structure of the church without knowing their historical lives and the unique contributions they made. Graduate students who construct bridges between the New Testament and early Christian studies likely discern the collective influence of the apostles without knowing the individual paths of mission that the Twelve took. The apostles dispersed geographically in Acts before legends about their ministry and martyrdoms emerged in the annals of church history. Even then, the legends are sometimes treated as apocryphal literature and thus ignored without considering the possibility of a historical core or are viewed as Catholic saint stories with unsubstantiated sites of miracles and burials.

The stories and contributions of the apostles provide an important entrée to church history and thus *should* be available to a wider audience. The episodes of their lives and legacies are curious and valuable to many Christians. But books about the apostles are commonly written for a popular audience, focusing on personality analysis and quick summaries of their final ministry and death places, while analyses of their legacies are often limited to background information in biblical commentaries solely related to epistles bearing their name. Historically sound books on the topic are often obscure, produced by minor or confessional publishers. A recent, single, comprehensive work is not available as a historical assessment of both the lives and the legacies of the apostles in church history.

This work takes on the legends and legacies of the apostles from the New Testament, extant primary source material, contemporary veneration practices remaining from lost information, and secondary research theories. At the same time, our historical knowledge of the apostles is limited to a dispersed set of sources, so the contemporary images of the apostles are as significant as the discernment of their ancient stories. This book combines the historical data with iconic and theological developments concerning the apostles in the immediate and the distant generations that followed.

The Character of a Quest

This book employs the theme of “quest” to search for the apostles on two levels. The reader and the author travel through the annals of time and ancient sources in search of the historical apostles. Like the quest theme that figures prominently in literature across many cultures, we inquire through a process termed *historia* for the paths of the eleven original disciples and two additional disciples.⁵ The legends of the apostles seem only to whisper from the shadows of the pages of early church texts, originally scattered across the ancient world. We struggle to hear them clearly as we seek to overcome the obstacles of competing traditions, unbelievable legends, and missing data that compete with our objective efforts toward veracity. While seeking the apostles, we wish not only to discover their journeys but also to enhance our faith, hoping for evidence at one turn while cringing at the loss of evidence at another. In this sense, the quest shapes us.

On another level, the apostles themselves were on a quest to deliver the message of Christ through travel and encounters in lands foreign to them. Like the heroes of journey fables of various cultures, these men were driven by belief and characterized by their own human passion. Vladimir Propp suggests that quests stem from either an external act that creates an insufficiency or an internal act that reveals an insufficiency. In both instances, a quest is provoked to address a situation of insufficiency.⁶ In the case of the apostles, an external event such as the final commission of Jesus at his ascension (Matt. 28:19–20) or the empowering of the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) clearly identified evangelism as a task that needed to be undertaken, externally provided by God. At the same time, the psyches of this circle of twelve who witnessed miracles and struggled to make sense of their perceptions had undergone a transformation. The apostles came to recognize their own potential contribution to the furthering of the kingdom introduced by Christ, realizing that they could not keep silent about the gospel (Acts 5:40–42). Motivated externally by Christ’s command and internally by their own love for the message of Christ, the apostles embarked on a quest. Through their struggles, encounters, successes, failures, and even supernatural acts, they advanced the cause of the kingdom by their preaching and teaching. Their quest shaped them. This book is thus a quest for a quest.

The title of this work deserves further qualification. While *Quest for the Historical Apostles* captures the intent of the work, for biblical scholars the cadence of the title echoes the 1906 work of Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest*

5. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, 17–18.

6. Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, 35.

of *the Historical Jesus*. Schweitzer's work is recognized as more than a mere historical evaluation of Jesus, as it seeks also to penetrate the identity of the historical Messiah figure through a complex theological analysis of the figure and a higher-critical biblical assessment of the authenticity of the Gospel texts shaping his image. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* participated in a movement in response to nineteenth-century German Protestant liberalism, whose influences Schweitzer claims had "marked out the ground which is now occupied by modern critical study. And they filled in the death-certificates of a whole series of explanations which, at first sight, have all the air of being alive, but are not really so."⁷ From the influence of liberal theology as well the response of Schweitzer and others, biblical studies lost sight of the ability of Scripture to foster faith. Eta Linnemann describes the situation: "This ideology was at first intermixed with the Christian faith; but in the course of its refinement it rejected the Christian faith as essentially incompatible."⁸ Schweitzer himself was a French-German scholar and alumnus of the University of Tübingen, the symbolic seat of critical studies of the New Testament. He articulated a highly idealized but higher-critical portrait of Jesus, attributing psychological and political qualities to him that extended beyond the Gospel histories in order to posit a Christ redeemed from modernism but still different from the one the premodern church had offered.

This quest is akin to Schweitzer's quest, but with a different approach. This expedition limits attempts at discovering answers to identity questions about the apostles themselves and focuses on their journeys. These men were confident in the resurrection and focused on transforming unbelievers into Christians. Although the title of this book evokes the higher-critical biblical quest, it does not represent a critical reading that calls into question the basic existence of the apostles or the veracity of the biblical accounts. From the biblical accounts it builds a profile of each apostle and his legacy. Similarities to the First Quest of the Historical Jesus, characteristic of Schweitzer's efforts, may be seen here in my filtering and weighing the claims of gnostic or pseudepigraphical writings rather than of the biblical writings. Any reader who expects a reconstruction of the basic apostle stories in the spirit of Schweitzer will be disappointed since this work is not critical in this way but assumes a positive motive behind the apostolic mission.

Furthermore, this present work constructs in faith the historicity and legacy of the apostles in the spirit of Augustine's instruction for study, "Except ye

7. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 84.

8. Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible*, 39.

believe, ye shall not understand,” leading to the dictum *crede, ut intelligas*.⁹ Augustine meant that faith guides a quest, providing a foundation of belief that extends into new realms of reason and understanding. Ryan Topping explains, “Faith is never something Augustine sets *against reason*; indeed, insofar as there is a contrast to be made it is not between reason and faith, but between *reason and authority*.”¹⁰ Authority is the primary challenge in the approach of this quest, as it weighs the veracity of numerous works among the early church testimonies of the journeys of the apostles. Primacy is given to Scripture, while extrabiblical works are bridled for analysis before automatically ascribing historicity to their claims. This is a work of pursuit, a quest to discover and explain the roads of these traveling individuals according to church history. I hope this work is not only insightful and interesting but will also strengthen readers in their Christian faith, not necessarily by reinforcing dogmatic expectations of miracles and myths but by clarifying, complementing, and critiquing the confusing legacy of the apostles.

Layout

This book shares and analyzes the background stories and legacies of the apostles as they advanced from the New Testament into early church history. Each chapter presents the biblical data on an apostle; explores and weighs the relevant extrabiblical material; identifies theological, geographical, and symbolic significance; and combines these into a structured image that the church permanently inherits. This examination includes Matthias and Paul. Matthias is treated because of his replacement of an original disciple, that “one of these *must* become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22). Paul is treated because of his significance in the New Testament and early Christianity, although he described himself as “the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9). The chapters also occasionally consider medieval and modern reports of the apostles. An overall conclusion on the evidence discovered will close the quest.

The research approach to the chapters is fivefold. First, (1) biblical sources, with brief interpretation, will provide information on each apostle. Next, (2) extrabiblical early Christian sources will reveal a range of meritorious or legendary material about the biography of an apostle. Here, judicious treatment of legends includes assessing each source, determining the viability of its claims through correspondence with biblical and extrabiblical sources,

9. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 29.6 (NPNF¹ 7:184).

10. Topping, *Happiness and Wisdom*, 177.

and measuring the permanent influence of the stories. (3) A synthesis of the overall image of each apostle will be established, more or less congruent with the impression of him perpetuated through time in the life of the church, but hopefully more expansive. (4) Symbolic analysis will explain the permanent representations of the life or contribution of the apostle. Finally, (5) a report on the possible sites of the apostle's tomb will be provided.

The biblical material for each apostle ranges from significant attention to mere mention in lists. Peter receives the most attention of all the disciples in the Gospels and second most in Acts; he can serve as an illustration for how the material will be presented. Occasionally in apocryphal teaching literature, Peter dialogues with Jesus, yet usually the text provides neither bibliographical data nor particular insight into the disciple. The Acts of Peter gives narrative attention to Peter, while also providing attention to Paul as background, which will inform the chapter on that apostle. Church historian Eusebius reports that Peter came to Rome, and the testimony of other early church writers is marshaled to confirm his presence there. An early medieval writer describes how he came to the house of Peter in Capernaum during the late sixth century, while a modern scholar ties together two strands of Peter's journey through archaeological and literary evidence.

The extrabiblical material on the apostles chronologically follows their journeys from the book of Acts. This material is generally grouped into two types here: historical and apocryphal. The historical data include passing comments by early fathers such as Clement of Alexandria or Tertullian about an individual apostle, as well as specific biographical paragraphs such as those of Hippolytus or Eusebius in dedicated works that summarize the apostles' lives and ministries. On the other hand, apocryphal works are less verifiable sources, coming in the form of acts and teachings. The Acts of Peter reports Peter healing his daughter and then returning her to disabled status, while the Acts of John affirms the apostle's ability to command bedbugs. The Acts read as historical biographies, but the fable-like content and the mysterious teaching almost disqualify them from serving as credible sources of information for our quest. Each source must be weighed independently. Likewise, teaching books, such as the gospel of Thomas and the book of Thomas the Contender, often augment the canonical Gospel teachings of Jesus with mysterious sayings that range from incomprehensible to ascetic exhortations to suffer as part of the gnostic worldview of salvation. Just as the early church did, this book treats these teaching manuscripts as not particularly helpful in providing insight into apostolic biographies. But unlike the heresiological treatises of the early church, these works are examined for a historical core that might help guide our quest.

Finally, all of this historical material is accompanied by the developed image of each apostle, which leads to the church's perspective on the figure today. Each apostle's various symbols, the legends around his possible resting places, and his use in ritual practices are analyzed to conclude the treatment. Thus, this book will provide a comprehensive, historically centered, and critical evaluation of the stories and early Christian literature on all of the apostles, as well as our inherited contemporary understanding of these men. It could also function as the centerpiece to a literature set that resourcefully employs the apostolic figures as models for the faith.

Purpose and Style

When one contemplates how the successful promotion of Christ's original mission was dependent on the first generations of disciples, one begins to grasp how the message of the gospel must have been immensely convincing. The achievement of advancing the teaching of one Galilean prophet to become the official religion of the Roman Empire and the cornerstone of Western civilization indicates how miraculously impressive and powerful that subject matter was and still is. Philip Schaff puts it this way: "The rapid success of Christianity under the most unfavorable circumstances is surprising and its own best vindication."¹¹ As people of faith, entertaining a supernatural history, we recognize the Holy Spirit in action; as people of earth, recognizing a natural history, we realize that the disciples were the sacrificial and transformed agents responsible for the expansion of Christianity. Our purpose is to explore the transformative power of this message that drove thirteen disciples across the ancient world on a quest to share the hope that this message offers.

This book's characteristic style will be to provide content that is not too critical but addresses the most critical issues, not densely scholarly but is still historically insightful, not overtly evangelical but is still respectful of the figures, and readable but is also a resource for research. I hope the audience will be broad; I aim to appeal to evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox alike, seeking neutrality on perspectives of the apostles that place these traditions in conflict. Pedagogical aids in the form of maps are plentiful and necessary.

This study of the apostles could be interesting to any Christian, but students are particularly in view for this book. The work is designed to link New Testament studies with church history, imagined in an undergraduate or a graduate setting, bridging from the New Testament to a study of early Christianity.

11. Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church*, 1:197.

Church history, early Christianity and patristics courses, and New Testament courses focusing on Acts could employ this work. Secondly, the work can function for individual research in part or whole when an apostolic legacy needs elaboration. It can function as a contextual aid in studies of martyrs, cultic reverence, or historical influence. Examination of the lives and contributions of the twelve apostles through the combination of historical and literary scholarship aims to provide a foundation that is intelligent, informed, and useful. Third, the work can function to inform the nonstudent about the narrative story of each apostle, perhaps answering questions of curiosity as well as of the veracity and meaningfulness of the Christian faith.

Biases should be conceded up front. I write as an orthodox Christian, maintaining a faith in the canonical Scriptures and the potential historical usefulness of the Apocrypha but rejecting the gnostic writings as generally not informative for the Christian faith. Yet all provide insights into the early church's perspective on Christ and salvation in varying degrees. This position is a combination of faith presupposition and analytical evaluation of the writings of the early church; the foundational position of the book stems from a faith in Scripture that has been reinforced by decades of evaluative consideration of the differences between canonical, apocryphal, and gnostic sources. I seek to hold in tension (1) a belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures that does not necessarily extend to the Apocrypha and certainly not to the gnostic writings and (2) a willingness to evaluate the meaning and shape of Scripture through early extrabiblical sources. While the extrabiblical sources are not treated as Scripture, the historical information they provide has a profound potential for the faith.

In this approach, Augustine is again marshaled as cited above. His words *crede, ut intelligas*, "believe that thou mayest understand,"¹² find fulfillment in Anselm's *credo ut intelligam* when he appeals to God to think well, "I believe so that I may understand."¹³ This principle is at work here for this author and potentially for the reader: we study the lives of the apostles with an admitted bias toward the Scriptures in the hopes that we may strengthen our faith and find merit in the historicity of early church records. Anselm's maxim *fides quaerens intellectum*, "faith seeking understanding," will also be adopted as a posture to possible belief in legends in congruence with known faith.

This faith-based approach to apostolic history finds its methodology further reinforced by R. G. Collingwood in his influential *The Idea of History*, in which he describes how the second great crisis of European historiography

12. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 29.6 (NPNF¹ 7:184).

13. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 1, in Davies and Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury*, 87.

occurred when Christianity began expressing itself through historical writing in the fourth and fifth centuries. Accordingly, “It is inevitable that man should act in the dark without knowing what will come of his action. . . . From this follows that the achievements of man are due not to his own proper forces of will and intellect, but to something other than himself, causing him to desire ends that are worth pursuing.”¹⁴ This statement is as true for the boldness of the apostles as it is for the approach to confronting the dubious historical sources that will be encountered in this book. This is the core of Christian historiography: recognizing divine providence in the actions and the recording of history as well as in our own assessment of that history.

I expect some to read this work in its entirety, while for others it will serve as a resource for historical and literary information on one apostle of particular interest. It is set apart from other books in its expanse of history, its use of lesser-known primary literature of the early church, and in its synthetic focus on the image of each apostle.

Challenges

The challenges to such a task are many. Since the decline of the premodern era, few contemporary writers indiscriminately accept early church historical writings as fact. More notably, in the decline of the modern era, premodern historiography is treated dismissively by biblical scholars such as Bart Ehrman and early church scholars such as Candida Moss. Ehrman insists, “The New Testament is a historical construct, not a ‘given.’ . . . It is not fully representative of the views and writings of early Christians.”¹⁵ Moss insists that the martyrdom accounts from the first two hundred years of the faith mostly “aren’t historical accounts; they are religious romances written and intended to be read for moral instruction and entertainment.”¹⁶ The postmodern attitude (if the moniker is permitted) is a critical outlook extending beyond skepticism to distrust and uncertainty of sources that must be overcome to learn about the apostles. While scholars such as Ehrman and Moss have made important contributions to the study of the early church, their approach at best establishes equity between various sources and at worst risks dismissing the sources altogether. Several challenges in the contemporary era are

14. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 46–47. He elaborates: “Thus the plans which are realized by human actions come about not because men have conceived them, decided on their goodness, and devised means to execute them, but because men, doing from time to time what at the moment they wanted to do, have executed the purposes of God” (47).

15. Ehrman, *New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings*, 4.

16. Moss, *Myth of Persecution*, 88.

explained here to help the reader recognize the obstacles to a study of the apostles such as this one.

As a first challenge, ancient sources by their very nature come from a period of *different historical standards*. Writers of early church history often championed their own agenda, used unreliable sources, stated uncertainties with certainty, and reported material in the hopes of its veracity. For example, critical historian Walter Bauer remarks of Eusebius, known as the father of church history, “We cannot establish any firm foothold on the basis of what Eusebius himself contributes,” mainly because he champions the cause of the church.¹⁷ Yet Collingwood has already made clear that a Christian historiography will ascribe providential causes to human agency as part of its ethos.¹⁸ At the same time, the ancient writings are still full of valuable material that can be discerned and mined for authenticity. In a work dedicated to confronting historian Walter Bauer’s dismissal of the heresiological writings of the church fathers, I write, “The question of reliability and legitimacy is a real one, but not an insurmountable one nor a disqualifying one.”¹⁹ Still, one needs to treat early church writing cautiously because of its tendency to report its own perspective.

In the case of the apostles, there is a second challenge in that the *stories are limited* and information is lost. Access to sources is limited, assuming there ever were written sources available on certain apostles. This makes us prone to embrace any story that fills the gap, making apocryphal works appealing, even if we reject the ridiculous and provide a historical opportunity for the normal. For example, there are several possibilities concerning the imprisonment(s) and release(s) of Paul in Rome. Two sites claim his imprisonment, which suggests two imprisonments. Descriptions of his captivity experiences range from a liberal house arrest to a miserable dungeon. Legends exist that he traveled to Spain, leading historians to entertain a period of freedom after his arrival in Rome in the book of Acts and before his execution in Rome. We are right to explore the possibilities, but those options sometimes must remain tentative when the full story of even Paul has been lost. As another example, accompanying the difficulty of establishing the apostles’ resting places is the seeming fact that the bones of the apostles are fragmented and scattered across churches. Eckhard Schnabel notes the residual effect of the incomplete histories of the apostles: “It is a fact that no early Christian text that reports or claims to report historical events attempts to provide a complete

17. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 192.

18. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 50.

19. Shelton, “Patristic Heresiology,” 202.

historical account. It is precisely the missing ‘coherence’ that may indicate that Christian authors of the second and third centuries had information about the ministry of the apostles. Since they did not write a comprehensive history of the early church, they passed on information that they had in a selective and uncoordinated manner.”²⁰

By the time these biographies were written, they came *steeped in religious myth*, a third challenge for this task. Their function was to testify to both the natural and the supernatural work of the men whom the faith championed. Thus arose a sort of apostle historiography, writings intended to promote the ministry of the apostles and perpetuate the signs and wonders of the New Testament. For example, on one hand Bartholomew is recorded as ministering in India in natural fashion in the Apostolic History of Pseudo-Abdias. On the other hand he is also recorded as healing the demonized daughter of the Indian King Polymius, which created opportunity to preach the gospel. Peter Berger explains how religions try to impose order and purpose on wicked and destructive human experience, particularly the phenomena of evil, suffering, and death. Religious explanations legitimize these confusing events, or to use John Milton’s words, give a “justification of the ways of God to man.” By giving the chaos a higher meaning, religion brings life events under a “sacred canopy” of understanding.²¹ This means that claims to historicity are constantly up against a newly established tradition in which claims to the miraculous are suspiciously untenable, potentially exaggeration to justify a religious position. The Bartholomew exorcism story illustrates that one must discern whether the ancients were constructing religious myth through fantastic stories to impose supernatural power on the apostles. Sometimes the writings are so fantastical that they are simply absurd.

Studying religion in an age of a *distrust of sources* is both an asset and a liability, making a fourth challenge. The current period after the modern era is characterized by scrutiny and suspicion of sources. German theologian Walter Schmithals denied that the twelve apostles ever existed, viewing them as the fabrication of the author Luke to discredit the apostle Paul as part of a larger explanation of the development of doctrine.²² Research on the ancient world as a whole, particularly on subjects of religion with claims to the supernatural, poses these same types of challenges. Michael Licona says: “It is especially true that historians interested in antiquity are never epistemically justified in having absolute certainty that an event occurred.”²³ It is trendy in

20. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:531.

21. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 53–80.

22. Schmithals, *Office of the Apostle in the Early Church*, 266, cited in Ruffin, *The Twelve*, 172.

23. Licona, *Resurrection of Jesus*, 69.

scholarship to deconstruct and dismiss sources by deeming them unworthy, but it is a worthy challenge to identify and defend components of a source that might stem from historical truth.

Finally, studying religion in an age of *religious diversity* makes theological truth claims problematic. This is a fifth challenge. Explorations into the justification of one exclusive faith in an age of diversity are considered narrow-minded. The insight of Collingwood that early Christian historiography represents a universalism beyond Greco-Roman or Jewish historiographies feels ironic. Yet from its inception, Christianity represented a diversification in which “all men are equal in the sight of God: there is no chosen people, no privileged race or class, no one community whose fortunes are more important than those of another. All persons and all peoples are involved in the working out of God’s purpose.”²⁴ Such an image of Christianity is lost to the critical historian who views it as merely a religion of Western imperialism rather than recognizing the human need that universally welcomes the gospel. Religious sociologist Philip Jenkins predicts the global potential of the message of the apostles: “Christianity should enjoy a worldwide boom in the next century, but the vast majority of believers will be neither white nor European, nor Euro-American.”²⁵

Methodology

These challenges bring us to the analytical methodology to be applied with histories and legends in written records. The greatest challenge to a study of the apostles is discerning the quality of a source or part of a source as historical, questionably historical, or ahistorical. There will be numerous occasions for expressions of uncertainty. Early church historical or homiletic voices that make truth claims about the apostles provide the best source for accuracy. Next, passing comments or hesitant conjectures by an ancient author about a detail of the apostles’ lives will be weighed tentatively. Apostolic journeys come chronicled in legendary form, moving in and out of our reconstructed maps of the ancient world to challenge our quest. Unfortunately, these apocryphal Acts are considered comprehensively suspicious on theological grounds, sometimes so contrary to orthodoxy that they reveal a likely intention to be religious myth or so bizarre that historical elements are suspect. Even more historically dubious are the apocryphal revelations. However, an apocryphal work can include historically accurate material, just as legends frequently have a historical basis to their myths. As a general rule, the more unorthodox or the more fanciful the work, the less its facts are trusted here. We gravitate toward

24. Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 49.

25. Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2.

historical anchors in these works in our effort to reconstruct the path of the apostles. In the end, this methodology brings us in line with Calvin Roetzel's comment on his own exploration of the life of Paul: "All such reconstructions are acts of historical imagination, and the reader will have to decide if the reconstruction presented here is credible."²⁶

Dates and Maps

A quest for the apostles requires a foundational understanding of the chronological and geographical settings of their ministries. While all the apostles are thought to have continued the kingdom work inaugurated by Christ, their paths became as divergent as the legends of their experiences.

The apostolic era ranged from Pentecost of 30 CE to the death of the apostle John by the year 98. Even within this window of time we encounter the need for clarifying tentativeness. The year of the crucifixion, resurrection, and subsequent Pentecost has been speculatively based on the landing of Passover (14 Nisan) on Friday during the years 30 and 33 to match the calendar of Christ's experiences in the Gospels. Either year is plausible, but this book will use the former in accord with D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris.²⁷ The passing of John typically marks the end of the apostolic era; he appears to have been the youngest among the disciples, and his legends record his old age during the reign of Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96) or Trajan (r. 98–117).

The maps of the apostolic era range eastward to India with the possible ministries of Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew; westward to Spain with the possible ministries of Paul and James the Greater; and northward to Britain for the possible ministry of Simon the Zealot. Each chapter contains a map to represent the geographic ministry of that apostle. The ancient terms for regional areas are used in this work, with identifying correlations to modern countries. Achaea is assigned for southern Greece, Anatolia for Asia Minor or modern Turkey across Syria, Phrygia for the landlocked center of Asia Minor, Parthia for the southern Caspian Sea region from Arabia across Iran to India, and Scythia for the northern Caspian Sea region from the Ukraine across Kazakhstan. Both Parthia and Scythia guided the ancients to the border of India.

Movement toward Image

Along with reconstructing biographical details from the lives of the apostles, each chapter inspects the religious images, symbols, and other legends that shape

26. Roetzel, *Paul*, 1.

27. Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 55–56.



Regions Mentioned in This Book

the history of an apostle. These reconstructions are based largely on early church histories and geographical references from apocryphal material. Yet the historical apostle is sometimes linked to a certain image or perception, a picture or a legend, so that apostle's image is shaped by symbols, art, oral traditions, and cultic sites. Caravaggio's painting of the crucifixion of Peter, the rooster atop the church where Peter denied Christ, and the Roman church statues of Peter holding the keys to the kingdom are just some of the images that perpetuate his legend. Relics, tombs, or sites of an apostle's life also complement the art that preserves and promotes their legends, as tourists and pilgrims view the sacred spots with curiosity. All these elements have led to cultural images foundational for how generations prior and contemporary view the apostles.

This realm of consideration in the quest for the apostles is particularly rooted in the life of the medieval church. For example, François Bovon mentions how the ninth-century Byzantine period was highly curious about the lives of the apostles "for hagiographic, liturgical, homiletic, historiographic, and artistic purposes."²⁸ Viewed by the church as media to enhance the faith, concepts from apocryphal material filled in gaps about the lives of the apostles. Across the eras these activities shaped the image of the apostles. While much of their lives and the accuracy of these works are still uncertain, some components of apostolic images need pruning, and some need nurturing. The more important elements will be mentioned to close out each chapter.

28. Bovon, "Byzantine Witness," 87.

The Launch of a Quest

The quest for the historic apostles takes us along a path with various historic features that warrant definition and explanation in order to proceed with perception and meaning in a background unfamiliar to us. Chapter 1 will lay out the path of this quest. The subjects we call the apostles lived in the world of antiquity, with its complex worldview, landscape, and lifestyles that no longer are part of our natural perception. Greek philosophy had shaped thinking along dualistic lines, enabling ancient citizens to take for granted the familiarity of a story that disdained the earthly while affirming the heavenly. Jewish religion had positioned itself as passionately monotheistic, rejecting the notion that a new religion like Christianity could be a legitimately modified Judaism. International cultures meant that disciples might bear two names, while sometimes employing both for clarity. The natural environment of the lands around the Mediterranean Sea meant that the term “living water” immediately brought to mind a refreshing oasis effect, and a lion might be encountered by a wandering Paul.

This next chapter, titled “The Path,” provides background to the sources and illustrates the filtering of their contents necessary for tracking the quest of the historical apostles. The analysis of each apostle will build on the background and assumptions treated in this chapter. The thirteen apostles are then the subject of our study in the chapters that follow, completing the story of how fledgling believers become pillars of the faith. Here is the heart of the book. The apostles began as disciples, serving to reveal further, to accentuate, and to emulate the person and work of Jesus. Richard Taylor remarks, “In a literary sense, the disciple as a group acts as a chorus in the Gospels, asking the questions that elicit vital answers from Jesus, or standing dazed and baffled by Jesus’ message or miracles.”²⁹ This principle continues in the gnostic gospels and apocalypses. After the ascension and Pentecost, these twelve acted like traditional apostles. Although the Gospels make the disciples secondary to the overall and primary ministry of Jesus, in Acts these apostles perpetuate this same ministry at a higher level of discipleship.

With the provision of this background, we embark on a quest for the historical apostles. The quest starts not with the first apostle but with preparation for the expedition, which includes familiarization with the identities, sources, and geography that we will encounter on the path to uncover the apostolic legacies. Then, with the lists of their names, the quest for each begins.

29. Taylor, *How to Read a Church*, 103–4.