



When we think about the Apostles, we usually imagine them with the names we have heard all our lives: Peter, John, James, Matthew, Thomas... familiar names that are part of Christian tradition.

But there is a fascinating detail that many Christians do not know: **several of those names were not exactly their original ones**. Some are translations, others are nicknames, and others were transformed through the passage of languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin.

Understanding **the real names of the Apostles** is not merely a historical curiosity. In the biblical mindset, **a name reveals identity, mission, and vocation**. That is why studying these names allows us to understand more deeply **who the men Jesus chose to change the world really were**.

Because Christ did not choose perfect heroes.

He chose real men.

With real names.

With real stories.

And that says something about us too.

The Biblical Meaning of a Name: Identity and Mission

In biblical culture, a name was not just an identifier. It was **a spiritual revelation**.

In Sacred Scripture, changing someone's name means **changing their mission**.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham, Jacob's name to Israel... and Christ also changed the name of one of His apostles.

The Gospel says:

| *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church."*



| — *Matthew 16:18*

Here we see something fundamental: **Jesus not only calls people, He also redefines who they are.**

That is why understanding the names of the Apostles allows us to see **how God transforms ordinary lives into extraordinary instruments.**

The Language of the Apostles: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek

Before examining each name, we need to understand an important historical detail.

The Apostles lived in a world where three main languages coexisted:

- **Aramaic** → the everyday language of the Jews in Palestine
- **Hebrew** → the religious and biblical language
- **Greek** → the international language of the eastern Roman Empire

When the Gospels were written in Greek, many names **were adapted phonetically.**

That is why the names we know today **do not always match the originals exactly.**

The Real Names of the Twelve Apostles

Simon — Called Peter

Simon's original name was **Shimón (שמעון)**.

Meaning: *God has heard.*



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Jesus gave him a nickname:

Kepha (כִּיפָא) in Aramaic → “rock” or “stone”.

That name passed into Greek as **Petros**, from which we get **Peter**.

So his full name would be something like:

Shimón Kepha

Simon the Rock.

Christ chose him as the visible foundation of the Church.

Andrew

Interestingly, his name is not Hebrew.

Andreas is Greek and means:

“**manly**” or “**brave man.**”

This shows that some Jewish families were already using Greek names, a sign of the multicultural environment of Galilee.

Andrew was also **the first disciple called by Jesus**.

James the Greater

His original name was **Ya’akov (יעקב)**.

It is the same name as the patriarch Jacob.

Over time it passed through several forms:

Ya’akov → Iacobus → Iago → **Santiago / James**



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Its meaning is traditionally interpreted as:

“the one protected by God” or “supplanter,” according to Hebrew tradition.

He was one of the three disciples closest to Christ.

John

His original name was **Yohanan (יוחנן)**.

It means:

“God has been merciful.”

John is the beloved disciple, the witness at the Cross, and the author of the fourth Gospel.

His name already contains a message:

the mercy of God revealed in Christ.

Philip

His name is Greek: **Philippos**.

Meaning:

“lover of horses.”

It was a common name in the Hellenistic world.

Philip appears several times in the Gospel as **the disciple who invites others to meet Christ.**



Bartholomew

His real name was probably **Nathanael**.

Bartholomew is actually not a personal name.

It is **a surname**.

Bar-Tolmai means:

“son of Tolmai.”

That is why many scholars believe he was:

Nathanael bar Tolmai.

He is the same disciple about whom Jesus said:

“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.”
— John 1:47

Thomas

His Aramaic name was **Ta’oma**.

It means:

“twin.”

The Gospel even translates it:

“Thomas, called Didymus” (which in Greek also means twin).

Thomas represents all believers who **struggle with doubt but sincerely seek the truth**.



Matthew

His original name was **Mattityahu**.

Meaning:

“gift of God.”

Before becoming an apostle, he was a **tax collector**, a profession widely despised.

His name reminds us that **grace can transform any life**.

James the Less

He was also called:

Ya’akov.

He is called “the Less” to distinguish him from James the Greater.

Some Church Fathers identify him with **James, the relative of the Lord**, leader of the Church of Jerusalem.

Jude Thaddeus

His original name was **Yehuda**.

It means:

“praise to God.”

“Thaddeus” was likely a nickname meaning:



“brave” or “large-hearted.”

Today he is widely known as **the patron saint of impossible or desperate causes.**

Simon the Zealot

His original name was:

Shimón.

“Zealot” indicates that he belonged to, or sympathized with, the **Zealot movement**, which sought to free Israel from Roman rule.

It is remarkable that Jesus gathered within His group **people with very different ideological backgrounds.**

Judas Iscariot

His original name was likely:

Yehuda Ish-Qeriot.

It probably means:

“Judas, man from Qeriot,” a town in Judea.

He is the apostle who betrayed Jesus for **thirty pieces of silver.**

But his story also reminds us of something profound:

being close to Christ does not guarantee fidelity if the heart is not converted.



Why Did Jesus Change Some Names?

Jesus changed names for a spiritual reason.

In the Bible, changing a name means **transforming identity**.

Peter went from being:

an impulsive fisherman
to becoming **the rock of the Church**.

The same happens spiritually with every Christian.

Baptism gives us **a new name before God**.

What the Names of the Apostles Teach Us Today

These names are not just history.

They are **spiritual lessons for our time**.

1. God Calls Real People

The Apostles were not perfect.

- one doubted
- another denied
- one betrayed
- many fled

Yet God **works with what we are**.



2. Holiness Begins With a Call

Jesus said:

“*You did not choose me, but I chose you.*”
— *John 15:16*

Faith does not begin with our effort.

It begins with **God’s initiative**.

3. Christ Transforms Our Identity

Simon became Peter.

Matthew went from tax collector to evangelist.

Thomas moved from doubt to proclaiming:

“*My Lord and my God!*”
— *John 20:28*

God can do the same with us.



Practical Applications for Spiritual Life

How can we apply all this today?

1. Discover Your Spiritual Name

This does not mean literally changing your name.

It means asking yourself:

What mission has God given me?

2. Accept That God Calls Imperfect People

Holiness does not begin with perfection.

It begins with **availability**.

3. Live Your Vocation With Courage

The Apostles changed the world because they said **yes**.

Despite fear.

Despite persecution.

Despite doubt.



A Final Reflection

The names of the Apostles remind us of something deeply Christian:

God writes His story **with concrete people**.

Not with mythical heroes.

With fishermen.

With tax collectors.

With fragile men.

And yet the Gospel reached us.

That is why the real question is not only what the Apostles were called.

The real question is this:

What name will God give you when you respond to His call?

Because the same Christ who called **Shimón, Yohanan, Ya'akov, and Mattityahu...**

is still calling today.

And perhaps, without realizing it,

He is also speaking your name.