

How Old Were the Disciples?

- Neither the Bible nor any other source specifies the ages of any of Jesus' initial twelve apostles.
- Jesus was about 30 years old when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23).
- In Jewish culture, disciples (or students) were generally younger than their teacher. Therefore, it is likely the disciples were under 30 years of age.
- Jesus referred to his disciples often as "little children". In Matthew 11:25, Mark 10:24, Luke 10:21, and John 13:33,
- Many of the disciples worked as fishermen. James and John specifically left their father in the boat to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:21–22). This means they were old enough to work full-time.
- They were old enough to leave home to follow a Rabbi.
- Peter was already married when he began following Jesus. His sick mother-in-law is mentioned in Matthew 8:14. This means Peter was at least old enough to be married. Peter perhaps one of the oldest since he was already married.
- John lived the longest, passing away in the last decade of the first century, according to church history. This was 60 years after walking with Jesus. Even if John were in his 90s when he died, he would have been no more than 30 years old at the time he was with Jesus.
- John was old enough to care for the mother of Jesus (John 19:26–27)
- Peter referred to himself as an old man when he was in his 60s, about 30 years after walking with Jesus. This may mean Peter was in his 20s or 30s at the time he was with Jesus.
- The Gospel of Matthew was written 30–40 years after Jesus' resurrection, indicating that Matthew was perhaps in his 20s when following Jesus on earth.
- Jewish culture made it customary for a child to begin his religious training at the age of 5 and to continue to age 12 or 13. If a boy was intelligent and interested in continuing his religious studies, he would then seek a rabbi to disciple him and would follow and pattern his life after the rabbi until age 30.
- At age 30 a disciple could take on disciples of his own.
- A young man's discipleship training under a rabbi would usually begin between the ages of 13 and 15. If this pattern was consistent with the followers of Jesus, some of them may have joined Jesus as early as age 13 and would have still been teenagers at the time of His death, resurrection, and ascension.
- John likely the youngest (He dies last anyway)
- Life spans were relatively shorter at Bible times.
- The Mishnah, the oral interpretations of Torah (law) at the time of Jesus. It shows a very regimented educational/life path for young boys in Judaism: "At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah (oral Torah, interpretations) at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud (making Rabbinic interpretations), at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (able to teach others)."
- In the time of Jesus, almost all Jewish young men were married, and usually by age 18. But in the Gospels, Peter is the only disciple known to have been married (Matthew 8:14-15). No other disciples' wives are ever mentioned.
- Education for the Jewish child concluded at the age of 15. But just as every parent today would be proud to have a son or daughter do much more education to become a high-status medical doctor or professor, Jewish parents would desire their boys to be selected for Rabbinic training. If you were 15 and done with your basic training in Torah, a boy who was bright enough, (or whose parents were rich enough) would find a rabbi to take them on as a student. You'd have to show proficiency and it's assumed many students had very large portions of the Law and Prophets committed to memory. If your son didn't merit this honor, they would enter the workforce by their mid-teens, and in almost every case, apprentice under their fathers in the family trade.
- It seems most of the disciples are apprenticing at their trades when called, as in the case of James and John working in the family fishing business, they must have been older than 15 but, because they are also unmarried.
- Peter is married but his brother Andrew is not married, and they're working with James and John (Luke 5:10 – perhaps their two families have a joint business venture), it stands to reason they are roughly the same age. It would be odd at this time to have a brother twice as old as you..
- Two, because we find them working in trades at the time Jesus calls them, none of the disciples likely were "star students". After their formal education was complete, they were not taken for mentorship by any local Rabbi. And so, being passed over as teenagers, they are perhaps shocked to be considered worthy of apprenticeship with a traveling Rabbi who was beginning to gain a reputation at that time.
- Peter is painted as the spokesman for the disciples – he's the only one married, so therefore probably the oldest.
- The Mishnah explains why Jesus didn't start his ministry until age 30 even though his mission of redemption by death could have been accomplished at any age. Why not go through with it sooner? Well, no Rabbi would take disciples until age 30, and no disciples would seek out a Rabbi younger than that. Jesus begins at the very moment it was possible to begin – when it was culturally appropriate to assume authority and take on disciples.
- Matthew likely needed to be an established adult to be an independent contractor with the Roman government as a tax collector.
- John and James' mother Salome wanted to arrange where her boys would sit with Jesus at the Kingdom table. Imagine this scene if the brothers were grown men (Matthew 20:20-24)! Jesus nicknamed them "Sons of Thunder" because they were probably either loud or bold, both characteristics of youth.

- In Exodus 30:14-15, we read that every male over the age of 20 was to pay a tax to maintain the “Sanctuary” or Temple. In Matthew 17:24-27, we read that when questioned about this tax, Jesus instructs Peter to pay this tax – but only for “me and you”. But all the disciples are present (“they came to Capernaum” vs 24).
- They had to be young enough to still be around to write about the Gospel in the 60’s – 90’s. As the sense is they were old when writing them.
- Young John, perhaps 15 during the life of Jesus, would be only 85 if he wrote his gospel, letters and Revelation in the year 100 AD.
- According to Matthew 4:21–22, James and John intentionally abandoned their father in the boat in order to follow Jesus. (Old enough to work but still apprentices maybe?)

Matthew 10:2-4

Simon, who is called Peter,

and Andrew Peter's brother; and

James the son of Zebedee,

and John James' brother;

Philip and

Bartholomew (Nathanael);

Thomas and

Matthew the tax collector;

James the son of Alphaeus (James the Less), and

Thaddaeus (Judas, son of James);

Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

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