



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Apostle:

- Those who had witnessed the resurrected Christ.
- Those who were commissioned by Him to spread the gospel into the world.
- Those who had the Holy Spirit work miraculous power through them.

Apostles, symbols of

In Christian art, symbols assigned to each of the apostles:

- **Andrew:** X-shaped cross because was crucified on one;
- **Bartholomew:** knife because he was flayed alive with one;
- **James the Greater:** scallop shell, pilgrim staff, or a gourd bottle because he is the patron saint of pilgrims;
- James the Less: fuller's pole because he was killed with one;
- **John:** cup with a winged serpent because he drank poison after making a sign of the cross;
- Judas Iscariot: bag because he kept money in it;
- Jude: club because he was martyred with it;
- **Matthew:** hatchet or halberd because he was killed with it;
- Matthias: battleaxe because he was beheaded with it;
- Paul: sword because he was beheaded with one;
- Peter: bunch of keys because Christ gave him the keys of the kingdom;
- Simon: a saw because he was sawn to death;
- **Phillip:** long staff surmounted with a cross because he suffered death by being suspended by the neck from a pillar;
- **Thomas:** lance with which he was pierced through at Mylapore, India.¹

Andrew bar-Jonas

Peter (Simon bar-Jonas)

James bar-Zebedee ("James the Greater")

John bar-Zebedee ("the Beloved Disciple")

Philip

Nathanael or **Bartholomew**

Thomas

Matthew or **Levi** (Son of Alphaeus. James the Less brother?)

James bar-Alphaeus (James the Less)

Thaddaeus or **Lebbaeus** or **Judas** bar-James (Jude)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

The order of the list is significant. All the lists of the twelve break them into three groups of four (John does not list them, but tells of their calling in the same groupings). This is clearly consistent with their status within the group.

PATRONAGE:

- A patron was a person who, by their wealth and/or political power, was in a position to bestow favors, protection, and an umbrella of benevolence upon their clients.
- A client was one who received this benevolence and in return owed an obligation of service and loyalty to the patron.

¹ Kurian, G. T. (2001). In *Nelson's new Christian dictionary: the authoritative resource on the Christian world*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



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Matthew 10:2-4

² The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and **Bartholomew**; **Thomas** and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:16-19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,^[a] ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 6:13-16

¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Acts 1:13-14

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and **Thomas**, **Bartholomew** and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

John 21:1-3 Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), **Nathanael of Cana in Galilee**, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- Nathanael means Name means "God has given" or "gift from God."
- Nathanael Bartholomew
 - Name: The name Bartholomew is an Aramaic patronym meaning "son of Tolmai/Talmi" or "son of Ptolemy" ("bar" is Aramaic for "son of").
 - Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was connected with the Ptolemies, the ruling family of Egypt; this theory is based upon Jerome's statement that Bartholomew was the only apostle of noble birth.
- From the village of Cana (Where Jesus performed the Water/Wine miracle
 - According to John 21:2, Nathanael came from the small town of Cana in Galilee, the place where Jesus did His first miracle, changing water into wine (John 2:11).
- The expression "under the fig tree" was a common metaphor for rabbinical study, implying that Nathanael was literate and a student of the Scriptures.
- The call happened shortly after Jesus' baptism.

John 1:43-51 Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "**Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."



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- According to verse 45, “Philip found Nathanael.” They were obviously friends. Whether this was a business relationship, a family relationship, or just a social relationship, Scripture does not say. But Philip obviously was close to Nathanael, and he knew Nathanael would be interested in the news that the long-awaited Messiah had finally been identified. In fact, he couldn’t wait to share the news with him. So, he **immediately** pursued him and brought him to Jesus.

The brief description of how Nathanael came to Jesus is full of insight into his character. From it, we learn quite a lot about what kind of person Nathanael was:

- Truth of Scripture was something that mattered to Nathanael.
 - Philip knew Nathanael. Therefore, he told Nathanael about the Messiah whom he had found, he did so from **the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy**.
 - That means Philip and **Nathanael knew the Old Testament prophecies**.
 - In all likelihood, they had come to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist together.

“Incidentally, it appears that all the apostles, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were to some degree already true seekers after divine truth before they met Jesus.”

“And the fact that they were so well trained in Scripture no doubt explains why they were so quick to respond to Jesus.” John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*

- In Nathanael’s case, this would become especially evident. He was able to recognize Jesus clearly and instantly because he had a clear understanding of what the Scripture said about Him. Nathanael knew what the promises said, so he recognized the fulfillment when he saw it. He knew Him of whom Moses and the prophets had written, and he recognized Jesus as that One after the briefest of conversations with Him. Nathanael sized Him up quickly and received Him on the spot. The reason that was possible was because Nathanael had been such a diligent student of Scripture.
- Was Nathanael/Bartholomew prejudice?
 - Was there a prejudice between Cana and Nazareth?
 - Despite his doubts, Nathanael followed Philip and met Jesus.
 - **Verse 46:** “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
He *might* have said, “As I read the Old Testament, Micah the prophet says Messiah comes out of Bethlehem [Micah 5:2], not Nazareth.”
He could have said, “But Philip, Messiah is identified with Jerusalem, because He’s going to reign in Jerusalem.”
Does the depth of his prejudice comes through in the words he chose: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
- Nazareth was a rough town.
 - Culture was largely unrefined and uneducated.
 - Not picturesque place. Although it has a nice setting on the slopes of the hills in Galilee, it is not a very memorable town, and it was even less so in Jesus’ time.



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- The Judaeans looked down on all Galileans, but even the Galileans looked down on the Nazarenes. Was Nathanael simply echoing the Galileans' general contempt for Nazareth? (Note: Cana was consider even less reputable than Nazareth so where did Nathanael's opinion get formed/come from?)
- It was **inconceivable** to Nathanael that the Messiah would come out of a tacky place like Nazareth. It was an uncultured place, full of evil, corrupt, and populated with sinful people. Nathanael simply did not anticipate that anything good could come from there. And he was oblivious to the rather obvious fact that he himself had come from an equally contemptible community. NOT SEEING HIS OWN PREJUDICE.

SMALL GROUP

FACTS OF PREJUDICE (define prejudice):

Prejudice is ugly.

Generalizations based on feelings of superiority, not on fact, can be spiritually debilitating.

Prejudice cuts a lot of people off from the truth.

As a matter of fact, much of the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah because of prejudice. **They did not believe their Messiah should come out of Nazareth, either. It was inconceivable to them that the Messiah and all His apostles would come from Galilee.** They mocked the apostles as **uneducated** Galileans. The Pharisees taunted Nicodemus by saying, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (**John 7:52**).

Prejudice cannot process disagreement.

They did not like the fact that **Jesus spoke against (strongly disagree)** the religious establishment from Jerusalem.

They derided Jesus as Joseph's son (**Luke 4:22**). He was without honor even in His own country, because he was nothing but a carpenter's son (v. 24).

And the entire synagogue in Nazareth—His own synagogue, where He had grown up—were so filled with prejudice against Him that after He preached a single message to them, they tried to take Him to a cliff on the edge of town and throw Him off to kill Him (vv. 28–29).

Prejudice skewed their view of the Messiah. The people of Israel were prejudiced against Him as a Galilean and a Nazarene. They were prejudiced against Him as an uneducated person outside the religious establishment. They were particularly prejudiced against His message. And their prejudice against Him shut them off from the gospel. They refused to hear Him because they were cultural and religious bigots.

"came to His own, ... His own did not receive Him" (**John 1:11**).

Paul used the metaphor of blindness: "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (**2 Corinthians 4:3–4**)

- What is – A man with no deceit/guile:



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- **47.** *Jesus sees Nathanael coming and addresses him as an **Israelite indeed in whom is no guile**. This is a compliment to the honesty and sincerity of Nathanael.*²
- **GUILE** — craftiness, cunning, deceit, or deception. Jesus commended Nathanael as a true Israelite, a man in whom there was “no guile” (John 1:47; nothing false, NIV). The opposite of guile is truth, honesty, and sincerity.³

John 2:25 *and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

- Jesus refers to him as “an Israelite indeed.” The word in the Greek text is *alethos*, meaning “truly, genuinely.” He was an authentic Israelite. His faith was authentic.
- In effect, Jesus was saying, “I know the state of your heart because I saw you under the fig tree. I knew what you were doing. That was your private chamber. That is where you would go to study and pray. That’s where you would go to meditate. And I saw you in that secret place. I knew what you were doing.” It was not only that Jesus saw his *location*, but that He saw his *heart* as well. He knew the sincerity of Nathanael’s character because He saw right into him when he was under the fig tree.
- Nathanael addressed Jesus as “Teacher” (“Rabbi”) and applied two messianic titles to Him.
- Although John will later use “Son of God” to reflect the unique relationship between Jesus and God the Father, it is unlikely that Nathanael understood this at the time.
- Based on passages like 2 Sam 7:14 and Psa 2:7, Nathanael likely used “Son of God” as another name for the Messiah (Carson, *John*, 161–162).
 - **2 Samuel 7:14** *I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*
 - **Psalm 2:7** *I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.*

Here again we see that God takes pleasure in using the common, weak, and lowly things of this world to confound the wise and powerful (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27). He even calls people from the most despised locations. He can also take a flawed person who is blinded by prejudice, and He can change that person into someone used to transform the world. In the end the only explanation is the power of God, so all the glory goes to Him.

End of his life:

- Tradition says Nathanael served as a missionary in India.
 - Eusebius (d. AD 340?), an early church historian, recorded an early tradition that Pantaeus, the first head of the catechetical school in Alexandria (AD 180?), went to India and there found Christians who knew of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew letters. According to Eusebius, Bartholomew had preached to them and had left the Gospel of Matthew with them.
- The Venerable Bede [St. Bede is best known for his “Ecclesiastical History of the English People”, a source vital to the history of the conversion to Christianity of the Anglo-Saxon tribes] said that Nathanael was beheaded by King Astriagis.

² Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (p. 2079). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.



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- **“Martyrdom of Bartholomew”(5th century):**
Beheaded in Citerior, India by order of King Astriagis. Most likely Bombay(modern day Mumbai) area.
History and legend reports Bartholomew ‘flayed’
Also from religious history and legend, but unconfirmed from the Bible, it is said that Bartholomew traveled and preached in Armenia and India along with the Apostle Philip and the Apostle Thomas. He was reported to have been “flayed” (i.e. skinned alive) and later beheaded by King Astriagis.
- Other traditions say that Nathanael was crucified head-down.
- He survives as a symbol of a Jew who was dedicated to God and who saw beyond mere intellectual pursuits to the need for the spiritual salvation offered by Jesus.

NOTES:

NATHANAEL/BARTHOLOMEW



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NATHANAEL (Ναθαναήλ, *Nathanaēl*). An early disciple of Jesus. Initially doubted that the Messiah could come from Nazareth (John 1:46), but he was convinced by Jesus' words. ~~Name means "God has given" or "gift from God."~~

Biblical References

Nathanael's name appears in only two passages in the New Testament: John 1:45–49 and John 21:2. In John 1:45–49, when Philip tells Nathanael that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (John 1:45), Nathanael expresses doubt that the Messiah could come from Nazareth—an unimportant village in Galilee from which no one expected the Messiah would come. Nathanael himself was from Cana (John 21:2), and Philip was from Bethsaida (John 1:44), two other villages in Galilee.

Despite his doubts, Nathanael followed Philip and met Jesus. As they approached, Jesus said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:47 ESV). When Nathanael asked how Jesus knew him, Jesus responded, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48 ESV). John does not reveal what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, but Jesus' statement convinced Nathanael, who exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel" (John 1:49 ESV).

Nathanael addressed Jesus as "Teacher" ("Rabbi") and applied two messianic titles to Him. Although John will later use "Son of God" to reflect the unique relationship between Jesus and God the Father, it is unlikely that Nathanael understood this at the time. Based on passages like 2 Sam 7:14 and Psa 2:7, Nathanael likely used "Son of God" as another name for the Messiah (Carson, *John*, 161–162).

In John 21:2, Nathanael was one of seven disciples who joined Peter in an unsuccessful fishing trip. After Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat the next day, they caught 153 fish (John 21:3–14).

Identification

The name Nathanael is not found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. This has raised two possibilities for identifying him:

1. The same individual may be found in these Gospels with a different name.
2. He is merely symbolic.

Since Nathanael is closely related to the apostles in both passages, many have assumed that he was also an apostle. He could be identified with Bartholomew, whose name means "son of Tholomaeus" based on the Aramaic word for "son" (בַּר, *bar*; Carson, *John*, 159). The personal name of this son of Tholomaeus could have been Nathanael. Further support for this theory includes:

- Bartholomew is linked with Philip in the lists of the 12 apostles in Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14 (in Acts 1:13, Thomas' name intervenes); Nathanael is linked with Philip in John.
- The name Bartholomew does not appear in John's Gospel.

Other possible identifications for Nathanael include:

- Matthew (Ματθαῖος, *Maththaios*)—Nathanael could be another name for Matthew, as the names have similar meanings: Nathanael means "God has given," and Matthew means "gift of Yahweh" (Harnhart, "Structure," 24).
- Simon the Cananean—Since Nathanael was from Cana, he has been identified as Simon the Cananean (Matt 10:4; Mark 3:18). However, Brown argues that this is a misunderstanding of "Cananean" (Brown, *John*, 82). Cananean (Καναναῖος, *Kananaios*) comes from the Aramaic term for "zealot" (קַנְאָן, *qan'an*). In Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13, this Simon is called "the Zealot" (ζηλωτής, *zēlōtēs*). A person from Cana would be called Κανανίτης (*Kananitēs*) instead (Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *Lexicon*, 507).

Nathanael may also serve as a symbol representing all the disciples whom "God has given" to Jesus (John 6:37). However, if John had wished to attach any significance to the meaning of the Hebrew name, he likely would have translated it for his readers, as he does elsewhere (e.g., John 1:38, 31; 9:7). The other disciples mentioned in John 1:40–45 are known historical characters, so it is likely that Nathanael was as well (Carson, *John*, 159). Also, the Old Testament shows that the name Nathanael was used among the Jews.⁴

Nathanael

⁴ Tresham, A. K. (2016). [Nathanael](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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Nathanael was listed by **John** as one of the twelve apostles, although he is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. Because he is linked with **Philip** and the Synoptics link **Bartholomew** with Philip, tradition has identified Nathanael with Bartholomew. Most scholars today, however, believe that they are separate individuals.

Nathanael appears only twice in the Bible. In the first incident, Philip, who was apparently his friend, told him that he had found the Messiah, **Jesus** of Nazareth. Nathanael's comment has become a classic derision of a community: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). As he approached Jesus, he was hailed as a true son of Israel. Jesus said he had seen him studying under the fig tree before Philip came to him. Because of this premonition, Nathanael believed Jesus and followed him. The expression "under the fig tree" was a common metaphor for rabbinical study, implying that Nathanael was literate and a student of the Scriptures.

Nothing more is known about Nathanael until after the Resurrection, when he is listed among those who saw Jesus approaching them by the Sea of Galilee. He survives as a symbol of a Jew who was dedicated to God and who saw beyond mere intellectual pursuits to the need for the spiritual salvation offered by Jesus.⁵

II. Bartholomew (Nathanael?). We lack information about the identity of the apostle named Bartholomew. He is mentioned only in the lists of apostles. Moreover, while the synoptic Gospels agree that his name was Bartholomew, John gives it as Nathanael (John 1:45). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was the surname of Nathanael.

The Aramaic word *bar* means "son," so the name *Bartholomew* literally meant "son of Thalmi." The Bible does not identify Thalmi for us, but he may have been named after the King Thalmi of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was connected with the Ptolemies, the ruling family of Egypt; **this theory is based upon Jerome's statement that Bartholomew was the only apostle of noble birth.**

Assuming that Bartholomew is the same person as Nathanael, we learn a bit more about his personality from the Gospel of John. Jesus called Nathanael "an Israelite ... in whom is no guile" (John 1:47).

Tradition says Nathanael served as a missionary in India. The Venerable Bede said that Nathanael was beheaded by King Astriagis. Other traditions say that Nathanael was crucified head-down.

GOSPEL OF BARTHOLOMEW A noncanonical, pseudonymous work associated with the apostle Bartholomew. This work was never widely authoritative in the early church period and is directly rejected in the sixth-century church document *Decretum Gelasianum*. No copies of the work exist, although some scholars identify it with the extant *Questions of Bartholomew*.

Overview

Although the *Gospel of Bartholomew* is a lost text—no known copies of the work exist—Jerome (AD 347–420) mentions it and several other noncanonical writings in his preface to his *Commentary on Matthew*. It is unclear whether Jerome is drawing from Origen in this text. Additional mentions of the *Gospel of Bartholomew* include:

- The *Decretum Gelasianum*, attributed to Pope Gelasius I in AD 492–96, who includes it in a list of books not accepted by the church (von Dobschütz, "Decretum").
- It may be referenced by pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita and Epiphanius the monk.
- The *Book of Hierotheos* contains a short quotation from it.
- The Venerable Bede mentions the text from Jerome's writing.

Related Texts and Dating

Although there are no extant copies of the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, there are several existing texts associated with Bartholomew's name, including the *Questions of Bartholomew* and the *Book of the Resurrection*. It is possible that the *Gospel of Bartholomew* is connected to one or both of these works. Some scholars identify the *Gospel of Bartholomew* with *Questions of Bartholomew*, while others believe the *Gospel of Bartholomew* may even be part of the *Book of the Resurrection*. The Bartholomew tradition likely goes back to the third or fourth century AD (Schneemelcher, "Coptic").

Related Articles

For further details on pseudepigraphy, see this article: [Pseudepigraphy in the Early Christian Period](#). For information on the process of canonization, see this article: [Canon, New Testament](#).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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⁵ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (p. 313). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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DRAKE WILLIAMS⁶

BARTHOLOMEW THE APOSTLE (Βαρθολομαῖος, *Bartholomaios*). One of Jesus' 12 disciples.

The Name *Bartholomew*

The name *Bartholomew* is an Aramaic patronym meaning "son of Tolmai/Talmi" or "son of Ptolemy" ("bar" is Aramaic for "son of"). A patronym could function as a person's proper name; other biblical examples are Barnabas and Barabbas. However, patronyms more often served as surnames that specified people by using the name of their father (e.g., Peter is called Simon Barjona in Matt 16:17).

The New Testament mentions Bartholomew's name only four times—once in each of the four lists of Jesus' apostles (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). The Synoptic Gospels list him immediately after Philip, perhaps suggesting that the two were somehow affiliated. His name also follows Philip's in the book of Acts, though not immediately.

Bartholomew and Nathanael

As early as the ninth century, Christians identified the disciple named Bartholomew in the Synoptic Gospels as the disciple named Nathanael in John's Gospel, since John does not mention Bartholomew and the Synoptic Gospels do not mention Nathanael. Support for identifying Bartholomew with Nathanael includes:

- John 1 records Philip introducing Nathanael to Jesus and portrays the two as friends. Philip and Bartholomew's names appear next to one another in the Synoptic Gospels' lists of apostles, suggesting an affiliation.
- Because patronyms like Bartholomew were more commonly used as surnames, this view suggests the disciple's full name is Nathanael Bartholomew.

If Bartholomew is not Nathanael, we have no other biblical information regarding Bartholomew. However, if he is Nathanael, then the Gospel of John provides further information about him. The name Nathanael means "given by God" and occurs six times in the New Testament, restricted to the first and last chapters of the Gospel of John. According to John 21:2, Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee. He became a follower of Jesus after Philip announced that he had found the one written about in the Law and the Prophets. When Nathanael expressed hesitation that the Messiah would originate from Nazareth, Philip invited him to "come and see" (John 1:43–46). Upon seeing Nathanael, Jesus pronounced him a genuine Israelite characterized by sincerity. When Nathanael inquired how Jesus might know anything about him, Jesus replied that he had seen Nathanael beneath a fig tree. In response to Jesus' knowledge of his solitary whereabouts, Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel," and became a disciple of Jesus (John 1:47–51).

Bartholomew in Tradition

The 13th-century Syrian Christian Bar Hebraeus identified Bartholomew as Jesus Bartholomew rather than Nathanael. According to the church historian Eusebius (AD 260–340), Bartholomew eventually took the gospel to India (others report that he took the gospel as far as Armenia). Eusebius also records that Bartholomew was responsible for the Gospel of Matthew, originally written in Hebrew. According to the noncanonical *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, he was killed by drowning (though another tradition has him crucified). JEFFREY E. MILLER⁷

MARTYRDOM OF BARTHOLOMEW Also known as the *The Passion of Bartholomew*. A noncanonical text that claims to contain an account of the Apostle Bartholomew's work in India and subsequent death by beheading at the command of a king. This work was never widely authoritative in the early church period, but may parallel some early church tradition.

The India in view by the text, according to its introduction, stretches from Ethiopia in the west to Media in the north to the ocean (presumably the Indian Ocean). According to church father Eusebius, Bartholomew preached the gospel in India and left with them the Gospel of Matthew in the Hebrew language (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.10.3).

⁶ Williams, D. (2016). [Gospel of Bartholomew](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁷ Miller, J. E. (2016). [Bartholomew the Apostle](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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In addition to the *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, there are also other traditions of Bartholomew's martyrdom suggesting he died by crucifixion (Lipsius, *Acts*, 27) or by being skinned alive (Litfin, *After Acts*, n.p.).

The extant Greek text of *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, first published by Tischendorf, is from a Venetian manuscript of the 13th century (Roberts, "Martyrdom," 357). The *Martyrdom of Bartholomew* shares much in common with the account of Bartholomew in the *Pseudo-Abdias*, from which it may or may not be translated (Roberts, *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, 357). It also shares some similarities with the "Consummation of Thomas the Apostle" in the *Acts of Thomas*.

Related Article

For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

Selected Resources for Further Study

Litfin, Bryan. *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles*. Chicago: Moody, 2015.

Lipsius, Richard Adelbert. "Acts of the Apostles, Apocryphal." Pages 17–32 in vol. 1 of *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines*. Edited by William Smith and Henry Wace. London: John Murray, 1877–1887.

Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. "Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew." Pages 553–57 in vol. 8 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Translated by Alexander Walker. Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Company, 1886.

Tischendorf, C. von. *Evangelia Apocrypha*. Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1853.

JOHN D. BARRY WITH CARRIE SINCLAIR WOLCOTT⁸

Bartholomew, The Apostle. Disciple of Jesus included in all four lists of the 12 apostles (~~Mt 10:2–4; Mk 3:16–19; Lk 6:14–16; Acts 1:13~~), though not otherwise mentioned in the NT. Nothing is told about him in any of the lists. Because the name means "Son of Tolmai," it has been speculated that he was known by another name in addition to his "patronymic" name. In the lists in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the synoptic Gospels), Bartholomew is named immediately after Philip, suggesting the possibility that the Nathanael brought by Philip to Jesus (Jn 1:45–50), who seems to be linked with some of the disciples (Jn 21:2), was Bartholomew. It thus seems possible that the apostle Bartholomew is referred to in the fourth Gospel by another name; it is not certain, however, that John's references to Nathanael were intended to identify him as one of the twelve.

Eusebius (d. AD 340?), an early church historian, recorded an early tradition that Pantaenus, the first head of the catechetical school in Alexandria (AD 180?), went to India and there found Christians who knew of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew letters. According to Eusebius, Bartholomew had preached to them and had left the Gospel of Matthew with them. In other traditions, Bartholomew was an evangelistic partner of Philip and Thomas and suffered martyrdom in Armenia.

A number of spurious and apocryphal writings have been ascribed to Bartholomew, though certainly none of them is genuine. In the fourth century Jerome mentioned a *Gospel of Bartholomew* which is also noted by a few other writers. There are also references to the so-called *Questions of Bartholomew* (extant in Greek, Latin, and Slavonic fragments) and to a *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew* (extant in Coptic). Other references were made to *Acts of Bartholomew* and *Apocalypse of Bartholomew*, both otherwise unknown.

ROBERT W. LYON⁹

7

NATHANAEL—THE GUILILESS ONE

Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

—JOHN 1:49

Philip's closest companion, Nathanael, is listed as Bartholomew in all four lists of the Twelve. In the Gospel of John he is always called Nathanael. *Bartholomew* is a Hebrew surname meaning "son of Tolmai." *Nathanael* means "God has given." So he is Nathanael, son of Tolmai, or Nathanael Bar-Tolmai.

The synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts contain no details about Nathanael's background, character, or personality. In fact, they each mention him only once—**when they list all twelve disciples. John's Gospel features Nathanael in just two passages: in John 1, where his call is recorded, and in John 21:2, where he is named as one of those who returned to Galilee and went fishing with Peter after Jesus' resurrection and before the ascension.**

According to John 21:2, Nathanael came from the small town of Cana in Galilee, the place where Jesus did His first miracle, changing water into wine (John 2:11). Cana was very close to Jesus' own hometown, Nazareth.

⁸ Barry, J. D., & Wolcott, C. S. (2016). [Martyrdom of Bartholomew](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁹ Lyon, R. W. (1988). [Bartholomew, The Apostle](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 265). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.



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As we saw in the previous chapter, Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip immediately after Philip was sought and called by Christ. Philip and Nathanael were apparently close friends, because in each of the synoptic Gospels' lists of the twelve apostles, the names of Philip and Bartholomew are linked. In the earliest church histories and many of the early legends about the apostles, their names are often linked as well. Apparently, they were friends throughout the years of their journey with Christ. Not unlike Peter and Andrew (who were so often named together as brothers) and James and John (who likewise were brothers), we find these two always side by side, not as brothers, but as close companions.

Virtually everything we know about Nathanael Bar-Tolmai comes from John's account of his call to discipleship. Remember, that event took place in the wilderness, shortly after Jesus' baptism, when John the Baptist pointed to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Andrew, John, and Peter (and possibly James as well) were the first to be called (vv. 35–42). The next day, having purposed to go to Galilee, Jesus sought out Philip and called him, too (v. 43).

According to verse 45, "Philip found Nathanael." They were obviously friends. Whether this was a business relationship, a family relationship, or just a social relationship, Scripture does not say. But Philip obviously was close to Nathanael, and he knew Nathanael would be interested in the news that the long-awaited Messiah had finally been identified. In fact, he couldn't wait to share the news with him. So he immediately pursued him and brought him to Jesus.

Apparently Nathanael was found by Philip in or near the same place where Philip was found by the Lord Himself. The brief description of how Nathanael came to Jesus is full of insight into his character. From it, we learn quite a lot about what kind of person Nathanael was.

HIS LOVE OF SCRIPTURE

One striking fact about Nathanael is obvious from how Philip announced to him that he had found the Messiah: "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote'" (John 1:45). Obviously, the truth of Scripture was something that mattered to Nathanael. Philip knew Nathanael, so he knew Nathanael would be intrigued by the news that Jesus was the One prophesied by Moses and the prophets in Scripture. Therefore, when Philip told Nathanael about the Messiah whom he had found, he did so from the standpoint of Old Testament prophecy. The fact that Philip introduced Jesus this way suggests that Nathanael *knew* the Old Testament prophecies.

This probably indicates that Nathanael and Philip were students of the Old Testament together. In all likelihood, they had come to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist together. They had a shared interest in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Philip obviously knew the news of Jesus would excite Nathanael.

Notice that he didn't say to him, "I found a man who has a wonderful plan for your life." He didn't say, "I found a man who will fix your marriage and your personal problems and give your life meaning." He didn't appeal to Nathanael on the basis of how Jesus might make *Nathanael's* life better. Philip spoke of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, because he knew that would pique Nathanael's interest. Nathanael, as an eager student of the Old Testament, was already a seeker after divine truth.

Incidentally, it appears that all the apostles, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were to some degree already true seekers after divine truth before they met Jesus. They were already being drawn by the Spirit of God. Their hearts were open to the truth and hungry to know it. They were sincere in their love for God and their desire to know the truth and receive the Messiah. In that sense they were very different from the religious establishment, which was dominated by hypocrisy and false piety. The disciples were the real thing.

Most likely, Philip and Andrew had pored long hours over the Scripture together, searching the Law and the Prophets to discern the truth about the coming of the Messiah. **And the fact that they were so well trained in Scripture no doubt explains why they were so quick to respond to Jesus.** In Nathanael's case, this would become especially evident. He was able to recognize Jesus clearly and instantly because he had a clear understanding of what the Scripture said about Him. Nathanael knew what the promises said, so he recognized the fulfillment when he saw it. He knew Him of whom Moses and the prophets had written, and he recognized Jesus as that One after the briefest of conversations with Him. Nathanael sized Him up quickly and received Him on the spot. The reason that was possible was because Nathanael had been such a diligent student of Scripture.

Philip told him, "[It is] Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Jesus" was a common name-*Y'shua* in its Aramaic form. It is the same name rendered "Joshua" in the Old Testament. It meant, significantly, "Yahweh is salvation"



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“for He will save His people from their sins”—Matthew 1:21). Philip was using the expression “son of Joseph” as a kind of surname—“Jesus Bar-Joseph,” just as his friend was “Nathanael Bar-Tolmai.” That is how people were commonly identified. (It was the Hebrew equivalent of modern surnames like Josephson or Johnson. People throughout history have been identified this way—with surnames derived from their fathers.)

There must have been a certain amount of surprise in the voice of Philip. It was as if he were saying, “You’ll never believe this, but Jesus, son of Joseph, the carpenter’s son from Nazareth is the Messiah!”

HIS PREJUDICE

Verse 46 then gives us a further insight into Nathanael’s character. Although he was as a student of Scripture and a searcher for the true knowledge of God; although he had strong spiritual interests and had been faithful, diligent, and honest in his devotion to the Word of God; he was human. He had certain prejudices. Here is his response: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

He *might* have said, “As I read the Old Testament, Micah the prophet says Messiah comes out of Bethlehem [Micah 5:2], not Nazareth.” He could have said, “But Philip, Messiah is identified with Jerusalem, because He’s going to reign in Jerusalem.” But the depth of his prejudice comes through in the words he chose: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

That was not a rational or biblical objection; it was based on sheer emotion and bigotry. It reveals what contempt Nathanael had for the whole town of Nazareth. Frankly, Cana wasn’t such a prestigious town, either. To this day it is utterly unexceptional. Unless you are looking for the shrine built on the supposed location where Jesus turned water to wine, you probably won’t want to go there. Cana was off the beaten track, while Nazareth was at least at a crossroads. To travel from the Mediterranean to Galilee, people traveled through Nazareth. One of the main routes going north and south between Jerusalem and Lebanon passed through Nazareth. **No one ever “passed through” Cana; Cana was a side trip from everything.** So the lack of anything attractive in Nazareth doesn’t fully explain Nathanael’s prejudice. His remark probably reflects some kind of civic rivalry between Nazareth and Cana.

Nazareth was a rough town. Its culture was largely unrefined and uneducated. (It is still much the same today.) It isn’t a particularly picturesque place. Although it has a nice setting on the slopes of the hills in Galilee, it is not a very memorable town, and it was even less so in Jesus’ time. The Judaeans looked down on all Galileans, but even the Galileans looked down on the Nazarenes. Nathanael, though he came from an even more lowly village, was simply echoing the Galileans’ general contempt for Nazareth. This was the same kind of regional pride that might cause someone from, say, Cleveland, to speak with disdain about Buffalo.

Here again we see that God takes pleasure in using the common, weak, and lowly things of this world to confound the wise and powerful (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27). He even calls people from the most despised locations. He can also take a flawed person who is blinded by prejudice, and He can change that person into someone used to transform the world. In the end the only explanation is the power of God, so all the glory goes to Him.

It was inconceivable to Nathanael that the Messiah would come out of a tacky place like Nazareth. It was an uncultured place, full of evil, corrupt, and populated with sinful people. Nathanael simply did not anticipate that anything good could come from there. And he was oblivious to the rather obvious fact that he himself had come from an equally contemptible community.

Prejudice is ugly. Generalizations based on feelings of superiority, not on fact, can be spiritually debilitating. Prejudice cuts a lot of people off from the truth. As a matter of fact, much of the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah because of prejudice. They did not believe their Messiah should come out of Nazareth, either. It was inconceivable to them that the Messiah and all His apostles would come from Galilee. They mocked the apostles as uneducated Galileans. The Pharisees taunted Nicodemus by saying, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52). They did not like the fact that Jesus spoke against the religious establishment from Jerusalem. And from the religious leaders down to the people sitting in the synagogues, it was to some degree their prejudice that caused them to reject Him. This happened even in Jesus’ own hometown. They derided Jesus as Joseph’s son (Luke 4:22). He was without honor even in His own country, because he was nothing but a carpenter’s son (v. 24). And the entire synagogue in Nazareth—His own synagogue, where He had grown up—were so filled with prejudice against Him that after He preached a single message to them, they tried to take Him to a cliff on the edge of town and throw Him off to kill Him (vv. 28–29).



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Prejudice skewed their view of the Messiah. The people of Israel were prejudiced against Him as a Galilean and a Nazarene. **They were prejudiced against Him as an uneducated person outside the religious establishment.** They were particularly prejudiced against His message. And their prejudice against Him shut them off from the gospel. They refused to hear Him because they were cultural and religious bigots.

John Bunyan understood the danger of prejudice. In his famous allegory *The Holy War*, he pictures the forces of Immanuel coming to bring the gospel to the town of Mansoul. They directed their assault on Mansoul at the Ear-gate, because faith comes by hearing. But Diabolus, the enemy of Immanuel and His forces, wanted to hold Mansoul captive to hell. So Diabolus decided to meet the attack by stationing a special guard at Ear-gate. The guard he chose was “one old Mr. Prejudice, an angry and ill-conditioned fellow.” According to Bunyan, they made Mr. Prejudice “captain of the ward at that gate, and put under his power sixty men, called deaf men; men advantageous for that service, forasmuch as they mattered no words of the captains, nor of the soldiers.” That is a very vivid description of precisely how many people are rendered impervious to the truth of the gospel. Their own prejudice renders them deaf to the truth.

Men’s ears are closed to the gospel by many kinds of prejudice—racial prejudice, social prejudice, religious prejudice, and intellectual prejudice. Prejudice effectively caused the majority of the Jewish nation to remain deaf to the Messiah. Satan had stationed at the Ear-gate of Israel Mr. Prejudice and his band of deaf men. That is why when Jesus “came to His own, ... His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).

John Bunyan used the imagery of deafness. The apostle Paul used the metaphor of blindness: “If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). Rendered deaf and blind by prejudice against the truth, they missed the message. It’s still that way today.

Nathanael lived in a society that was prejudicial by temperament. In reality, all sinful people are. We make prejudicial statements. We draw prejudiced conclusions about individuals, classes of people, and whole societies. Nathanael, like the rest of us, had that sinful tendency. And his prejudice caused him at first to be skeptical when Philip told him the Messiah was a Nazarene.

Fortunately, his prejudice wasn’t strong enough to keep him from Christ. “Philip said to him, ‘Come and see’ ” (v. 46). That is the right way to deal with prejudice: Confront it with the facts. Prejudice is feeling-based. It is subjective. It does not necessarily reflect the reality of the matter. So the remedy for prejudice is an honest look at objective reality—“come and see.”

And Nathanael went. Fortunately, his prejudiced mind was not as powerful as his seeking heart.

HIS SINCERITY OF HEART

The most important aspect of Nathanael’s character is expressed from the lips of Jesus. Jesus knew Nathanael already. He “had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:25). So His first words upon seeing Nathanael were a powerful commendation of Nathanael’s character. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” (John 1:47).

Can you imagine a more wonderful thing than to have words of approval like that come out of the mouth of Jesus? It would be one thing to hear that at the end of your life, along with, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (cf. Matthew 25:21, 23). We often hear eulogies at funerals that extol the virtues of the deceased. But how would you like Jesus to say that about you from the very start?

This speaks volumes about Nathanael’s character. He was pure-hearted from the beginning. Certainly, he was human. He had sinful faults. His mind was tainted by a degree of prejudice. But His heart was not poisoned by deceit. He was no hypocrite. His love for God, and His desire to see the Messiah, were genuine. His heart was sincere and without guile.

Jesus refers to him as “an Israelite indeed.” The word in the Greek text is *alethos*, meaning “truly, genuinely.” He was an authentic Israelite.

This is not a reference to his physical descent from Abraham. Jesus was not talking about genetics. He was linking Nathanael’s status as a true Israelite to the fact that he was without deceit. His guilelessness is what defined him as a true Israelite. For the most part, the Israelites of Jesus’ day were not real, because they were hypocrites. They were



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phonies. They lived life with a veneer of spirituality, but it was not real, and therefore they were not genuine spiritual children of Abraham. Nathanael, however, was real.

In Romans 9:6–7, the apostle Paul says, “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham.” In Romans 2:28–29, he writes, “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

Here was an authentic Jew, one of the true spiritual offspring of Abraham. Here was one who worshiped the true and living God without deceit and without hypocrisy. Nathanael was the authentic item. Jesus would later say, in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.” The Greek word is the same—*alethos*.

Nathanael was a true disciple from the start. There was no hypocrisy in him. This is very unusual, and it was particularly rare in first-century Israel. Remember, Jesus indicted the entire religious establishment of His day as hypocrites. Matthew 23:13–33 records an amazing diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees in which Jesus calls them hypocrites from every possible angle. The synagogues were full of hypocrites, too. From the highest leaders to the people on the street, hypocrisy was a plague on that culture. But here was a true, nonhypocritical Jew. Here was a man whose heart was circumcised, cleansed of defilement. His faith was authentic. His devotion to God was real. He was without guile, not like the scribes and Pharisees. He was a truly righteous man—flawed by sin as we all are—but justified before God through a true and living faith.

HIS EAGER FAITH

Because his heart was sincere and his faith was real, Nathanael overcame his prejudice. His response to Jesus and the narrative that follows reveal his true character. At first, he was simply amazed that Jesus seemed to know anything about him. “Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ ” (John 1:48).

We have to assume that Nathanael was still questioning whether this Man could truly be the Messiah. It was not that he questioned Philip’s judgment; Philip was his friend, so he surely knew enough about Philip to know that Philip—the indecisive process-person—wouldn’t have made any hasty judgment. It was certainly not that he questioned Scripture or that he was prone to skepticism. It was just that this man from Nazareth did not seem to fit the picture of the Messiah in Nathanael’s mind. Jesus was the son of a carpenter, a no-name, non-descript man from a town that had no connection to any prophecy. (Nazareth did not even exist in the Old Testament.) And now Jesus had spoken to him as if he knew all about him and could even see inside his heart. Nathanael was just trying to come to grips with it all.

“How do You know me?” He might have meant, “Are You just flattering me? Are You trying to make me one of Your followers by paying me compliments? How could You possibly know what is in my heart?”

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ ” (v. 48). This put a whole different spin on things. This was not flattery; it was omniscience! Jesus wasn’t physically present to see Nathanael under the fig tree; Nathanael knew that. Suddenly he realized he was standing in the presence of Someone who could see into his very heart with an omniscient eye.

What was the significance of the fig tree? It was most likely the place where Nathanael went to study and meditate on Scripture. Houses in that culture were mostly small, one-room affairs. Most of the cooking was done inside, so a fire was kept burning even in the summer. The house could get full of smoke and stuffy. Trees were planted around houses to keep them cool and shaded. One of the best trees to plant near a house was a fig tree, because it bore wonderful fruit and gave good shade. Fig trees grow to a height of only about fifteen feet. They have a fairly short, gnarled trunk, and their branches are low and spread as far as twenty-five or thirty feet. A fig tree near a house provided a large, shady, protected place outdoors. If you wanted to escape the noise and stifling atmosphere of the house, you could go outside and rest under its shade. It was a kind of private outdoor place, perfect for meditation, reflection, and solitude. No doubt that is where Nathanael went to study Scripture and pray.

In effect, Jesus was saying, “I know the state of your heart because I saw you under the fig tree. I knew what you were doing. That was your private chamber. That is where you would go to study and pray. That’s where you would go to meditate. And I saw you in that secret place. I knew what you were doing.” It was not only that Jesus saw his *location*, but that He saw his *heart* as well. He knew the sincerity of Nathanael’s character because He saw right into him when he was under the fig tree.



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That was enough for Nathanael. He “answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ ” (v. 49).

John’s whole Gospel was written to prove that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). John’s first words are a powerful declaration of Jesus’ deity (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”) Every point in his Gospel is designed to prove that Jesus is the Son of God—sharing the same essence as God—by highlighting His miracles, His sinless character, the divine wisdom of His teaching, and His attributes, which are the very attributes of God. John is writing to show the many ways in which Jesus manifested Himself as God. And here in the first chapter he gives the testimony of Nathanael that this Jesus is the omniscient Son of God. He is of the very same essence as God.

Remember, this is the very same truth Nathanael’s friend Philip still hadn’t quite grasped two years later, because he said to Jesus in the Upper Room, “Show us the Father” (John 14:8–9). What Philip didn’t get until the end, his friend Nathanael understood at the very start.

Nathanael knew the Old Testament. He was familiar with what the prophets had said. He knew whom to look for. And now, regardless of the fact that Jesus came from Nazareth, His omniscience, His spiritual insight, His ability to read the heart of Nathanael was enough to convince Nathanael that He was indeed the true Messiah.

Nathanael’s familiarity with the Old Testament messianic prophecies is clearly seen in his reply to Jesus (“You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”). Psalm 2 clearly indicated that the Messiah would be the Son of God. Many Old Testament prophecies spoke of Him as “King of Israel,” including Zephaniah 3:15 (“The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more”) and Zechariah 9:9 (“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”). Micah 5:2, the same verse that predicted His birth in Bethlehem, referred to him as “The One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”—identifying Him not only as King but also as the Eternal One. So when Nathanael saw proof of Jesus’ omniscience, he instantly recognized Him as the promised Messiah, the Son of God and King of Israel.

Nathanael was like Simeon, who lifted up the infant Jesus and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32). He recognized Jesus instantly as the One he had been waiting for. Nathanael, a careful student of Scripture, was a true Jew who waited for the Messiah and knew that when He came He would be Son of God and King. He was never one of the half-committed. He came to full understanding and total commitment on day one.

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you, “I saw you under the fig tree,” do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’ ” (John 1:51). He affirmed Nathanael’s faith and promised that he would see even greater things than a simple show of Jesus’ omniscience. If one simple statement about the fig tree was enough to convince Nathanael that this was the Son of God and the King of Israel, he had not seen anything yet. From here on out, everything he would see would enrich and enlarge his faith.

Most of the disciples struggled just to come to the place where Nathanael stood after his first meeting with Christ. But for Nathanael, the ministry of Christ only affirmed what he already knew to be true. How wonderful to see someone so trustworthy and trusting from the very beginning, so that for him the whole three years with Jesus was just an unfolding panorama of supernatural reality!

In the Old Testament, Jacob had a dream in which “a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12). Jesus’ words to Nathanael were a reference to that Old Testament account. *He* was the ladder. And Nathanael would see the angels of God ascending and descending upon Him. In other words, Jesus *is* the ladder that connects heaven and earth.



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That's all we know about Nathanael from Scripture. Early church records suggest that he ministered in Persia and India and took the gospel as far as Armenia. There is no reliable record of how he died. One tradition says he was tied up in a sack and cast into the sea. Another tradition says he was crucified. By all accounts, he was martyred like all the apostles except John.

What we *do* know is that Nathanael was faithful to the end because he was faithful from the start. Everything he experienced with Christ and whatever he experienced after the birth of the New Testament church ultimately only made his faith stronger. And Nathanael, like the other apostles, stands as proof that God can take the most common people, from the most insignificant places, and use them to His glory.¹⁰

¹⁰ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *Twelve ordinary men: how the Master shaped his disciples for greatness, and what He wants to do with you* (pp. 135–148). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

THOMAS

Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15

Matthew 10:2-4

² The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and **Bartholomew**; **Thomas** and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:16-19

¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,^[a] ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Luke 6:13-16

¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and **Bartholomew**, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and **Thomas**, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Acts 1:13-14

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and **Thomas**, **Bartholomew** and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

John 21:1-3

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- End of the 2nd Triad
- Thomas is part of the Galilee Seven

Meeting Thomas in Three Stages:

Stage #1:

John 11:16

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus^[a] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.”¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Who is Thomas here:

- Committed believer
- Life without Christ is no life.
- Thomas exemplifies both love and loyalty. **He was willing to go with Christ to Jerusalem because he could not face the prospect of life without Him.** Christ needs this kind of follower today, too.

Stage #2:

John 14:5

I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life

***14** “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”⁹ 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’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me^[e] anything in my name, I will do it.

Who is Thomas here:

Uncertain

Confused

Feeling lack - Ignorant

- Thomas **exemplifies an inquiring spirit.** When puzzled by Christ’s reference to “the way,” Thomas spoke up with his question. Today truly honest Christians question matters of faith, not because they doubt, but because they yearn to know what God’s Word means.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Stage #3:

John 20:24-29

Jesus and Thomas

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.”

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” ²⁸ **Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”** ²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Who is Thomas here:

- Thomas **exemplifies the right kind of skepticism**. Thomas wanted what the disciples reported to be true, but at the same time he was afraid of further disappointment. As soon as Thomas saw Jesus, his doubts dissolved and he acknowledged Christ as Lord and God. When we have doubts, we need to remain open to belief so that when Christ’s Spirit speaks to us we will be as ready as Thomas to respond with faith.

The doubt Thomas experienced in the face of the heartbreaking loss of the One he loved is not unlike our own when facing a massive loss: despair, heartbreak, and exceeding sorrow, all of which Christ sympathizes with (Hebrews 4:15). But, although Thomas did in fact doubt the Lord’s resurrection appearance, once he saw the risen Christ, he proclaimed in faith, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Jesus commended him for his faith, although that faith was based on sight. As an extra encouraging note to future Christians, Jesus goes on to say, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, emphasis added). He meant that once He ascended to heaven, He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would live within believers from then on, enabling us to believe that which we do not see with our eyes. This same thought is echoed by Peter, who said of Christ, “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8–9).

JESUS APPEARS TO THOMAS

What does grief do?

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/>

The 5 stages of grief and loss are: 1. Denial and isolation; 2. Anger; 3. Bargaining; 4. Depression; 5. Acceptance. People who are grieving do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order or experience all of them.

1. Denial & Isolation

The first reaction to learning about the terminal illness, loss, or death of a cherished loved one is to deny the reality of the situation. “This isn’t happening, this can’t be happening,” people often think. It is a normal reaction to rationalize our overwhelming emotions.

Denial is a [common defense mechanism](#) that buffers the immediate shock of the loss, numbing us to our emotions. We block out the words and hide from the facts. We start to believe that life is meaningless, and nothing is of any value any longer. For most people experiencing grief, this stage is a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of pain.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

2. Anger

As the masking effects of denial and isolation begin to wear, reality and its pain re-emerge. We are not ready. The intense emotion is deflected from our vulnerable core, redirected and expressed instead as anger. The anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family.

[Anger](#) may be directed at our dying or deceased loved one. Rationally, we know the person is not to be blamed. Emotionally, however, we may resent the person for causing us pain or for leaving us. We feel guilty for being angry, and this makes us more angry.

The doctor who diagnosed the illness and was unable to cure the disease might become a convenient target. Health professionals deal with death and dying every day. That does not make them immune to the suffering of their patients or to those who grieve for them.

Do not hesitate to ask your doctor to give you extra time or to explain just once more the details of your loved one's illness. Arrange a special appointment or ask that he telephone you at the end of his day. Ask for clear answers to your questions regarding medical diagnosis and treatment. Understand the options available to you. Take your time.

3. Bargaining

The normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control through a series of "If only" statements, such as:

- If only we had sought medical attention sooner...
- If only we got a second opinion from another doctor...
- If only we had tried to be a better person toward them...

This is an attempt to bargain. Secretly, we may make a deal with God or our higher power in an attempt to postpone the inevitable, and the accompanying pain. This is a weaker line of defense to protect us from the painful reality.

Guilt often accompanies bargaining. We start to believe there was something we could have done differently to have helped save our loved one.

4. Depression

There are [two types of depression](#) that are associated with mourning. The first one is a reaction to practical implications relating to the loss. Sadness and regret predominate this type of [depression](#). We worry about the costs and burial. We worry that, in our grief, we have spent less time with others that depend on us. This phase may be eased by simple clarification and reassurance. We may need a bit of helpful cooperation and a few kind words.

The second type of [depression](#) is more subtle and, in a sense, perhaps more private. It is our quiet preparation to separate and to bid our loved one farewell. Sometimes all we really need is a hug.

Learn About: [Depression Symptoms](#)

5. Acceptance

Reaching this stage of grieving is a gift not afforded to everyone. Death may be sudden and unexpected or we may never see beyond our anger or denial. It is not necessarily a mark of bravery to resist the inevitable and to deny ourselves the opportunity to make our peace. This phase is marked by withdrawal and calm. This is not a period of happiness and must be distinguished from depression.

Loved ones that are terminally ill or aging appear to go through a final period of withdrawal. This is by no means a suggestion that they are aware of their own impending death or such, only that physical decline may be sufficient to produce a similar response. Their behavior implies that it is natural to reach a stage at which social interaction is limited. The dignity and grace shown by our dying loved ones may well be their last gift to us.

Remedies to Greif:

A network of supportive people

Allowing the feelings to be

Being able to talk with those in your network when needed

Grieving is very personal: No two people do it exactly alike. No two experiences are exactly alike.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Remedies to Doubt:

Although we have the Spirit within us, we can still experience doubt. This, however, does not affect our eternal standing with God. True saving faith always perseveres to the end just as Thomas's did, and just as Peter's did after he had a monumental moment of weakness by denying the very Lord he loved and believed in (Matthew 26:69–75). This is because, "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Faith is the gift of God to His children (Ephesians 2:8–9), and He will mature and perfect it until He returns.

So how do we keep from doubting as Thomas did? First, we must go to God in prayer when experiencing doubt. That may be the very reason God is allowing a Christian to doubt—so that we will depend on Him through prayer. Sanctification is the process of growing in Him, which includes times of doubt and times of great faith. Like the man who brought his demon-possessed child to Jesus but was unsure whether Jesus could help him, we go to God because we believe in Him and ask Him for more and greater faith to overcome our doubts, crying, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:17–27).

END OF LIFE:

- According to tradition, Thomas spread the gospel in Parthia and Persia, where he died.
- Later tradition places Thomas in India, where he was martyred.
- The Mar Thoma church in India traces its origins to Thomas.

NOTES:



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

THOMAS [TAHM uhs] (*twin*) — one of the twelve apostles of Jesus; also called *Didymus*, the Greek word for “twin” (**Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15**). Thomas is probably best known for his inability to believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. For that inability to believe, he forever earned the name “doubting Thomas.”

Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. Upon hearing of the appearance, Thomas said, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). Eight days later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, including Thomas. When Jesus invited him to touch the nail prints and put his hand into His side, Thomas’ response was, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Of that incident the great church father Augustine remarked, “He doubted so that we might believe.”

Thomas appears three other times in the Gospel of John. (Except for the listing of the disciples, Thomas does not appear in the other three gospels.) When Jesus made known his intention to go into Judea, Thomas urged his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (John 11:16). Knowing that His earthly life would soon end, Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His followers and that they knew the way. Thomas asked, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5). To that Jesus gave his well-known answer: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

After the resurrection, Thomas was on the Sea of Galilee with six other disciples when Jesus signaled to them from the shore and told them where to cast their net (John 21:2). Thomas was also with the other disciples in the Jerusalem upper room after the Ascension of Jesus.

According to tradition, Thomas spread the gospel in Parthia and Persia, where he died. Later tradition places Thomas in India, where he was martyred. The Mar Thoma church in India traces its origins to Thomas.¹¹

The New Testament Apocrypha. The New Testament Apocrypha contains several writings that were similar to New Testament books but were not included as a part of the New Testament. These writings were greatly influenced by the philosophies and religions — of the cities or nations out of which they came. Some of the apocryphal gospels were written to replace the gospels of the New Testament but were declared false writings by officials of the early church.

Often the apocryphal books from the early history of the church present stories and legends meant to fill in information about the apostles and Jesus that is lacking in the New Testament. For example, some New Testament apocryphal works claim to give details on the childhood of Jesus (Protevangelium of James, The Gospel of Thomas) as well as a description of how Jesus was raised from the dead (The Gospel of Peter). These writings expand on the accounts found in the New Testament.

Other apocryphal writings that expand or explain the gospel stories include The Gospel of the Egyptians, The Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of the Twelve, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Judas, The Gospel of Bartholomew, The Gospel According to Mary, The Gospel of Nicodemus, and The Questions of Bartholomew. These are only a few of the 59 fragments and gospel-related writings in the New Testament Apocrypha.

The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament is also paralleled by several apocryphal books. These include stories about the apostles themselves written in the second and third century. Titles of some of these books are The Acts of John, The Acts of Peter, The Acts of Paul, The Acts of Andrew and The Acts of Thomas.

The Acts of John, for example, tells the story of the disciple, John, his journey from Jerusalem to Rome, and his imprisonment on an island off the coast of modern-day Turkey called Patmos (see Rev. 1:9). Other travels of this apostle appear in the book, and he finally dies in Ephesus. Some scholars believe these second-century books may be based on some historical facts. They do give Bible researchers a better understanding of the origin of the early church.

The last group of New Testament apocryphal writings consists of APOCALYPTIC books. The New Testament Book of Revelation inspired the early Christians to write their own books that were similar in content and style. Probably the most popular of the apocryphal apocalypses are the Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocalypse of Paul, and the

¹¹ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In [Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary](#). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Apocalypse of Thomas. These apocalypses give Bible scholars a clear picture of the early Christian's view of heaven and hell, since they emphasize the state of sinners after death.

While these apocryphal New Testament books are interesting and informative, none are considered authoritative like the books of the New Testament. For various reasons, these books were judged unworthy and were not accepted as authoritative when the New Testament took its final form in the third century A.D. Thus, God has worked throughout history not only to inspire the Bible but also to preserve its authenticity and integrity so it can serve as a standard and guide for all believers.¹²

THOMAS

Scripture references:

John 11:16; 14:5; 20:24–29

Date: About A.D. 5—?

Name: Thomas [TAHM-uhs; "twin"]

Greatest Accomplishment: Thomas was a disciple, then apostle, of Christ.

THOMAS'S LIFE AND TIMES

Thomas's name appears on the several lists of disciples found in the Gospels, often with the added phrase, "the twin." However, only John's Gospel reports incidents in which Thomas is an actor.

Thomas's loyalty (*John 11:16*). Jesus had left Jerusalem because the growing hostility of the religious leaders placed him in deadly peril. While Jesus was away, a close friend, Lazarus, became seriously ill. His sisters, Mary and Martha, immediately sent for Jesus. When Jesus received the message He waited several days. Then Jesus announced He was returning to Bethany, which lay just outside of Jerusalem. The disciples were reluctant to return, for the danger to Christ was real. Thomas "said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.'"

Jesus had become so significant to Thomas that he was unwilling to live if Christ were killed.

Thomas's uncertainty (*John 14:5*). The second incident featuring Thomas took place during the Last Supper. Jesus was explaining why it was to His disciple's benefit for Him to leave, and said, "Where I go you know, and the way you know" (*John 14:4*). This saying puzzled all of the disciples, but Thomas spoke up and said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Christ's response is one of the most significant of His sayings recorded in the New Testament: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (*John 14:6*).

Thomas and the others did know, for the key to understanding heaven is not that it is a location, but a relationship. Christ was going to be with the Father, and knowing Christ is our passport to where He is.

Thomas's expression of doubt (*John 20:24–29*). The first time after His resurrection that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, Thomas was absent. When the others told Thomas that they had been with Christ, Thomas announced: "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails ... I will not believe."

Remembering Thomas's readiness to die with Jesus rather than be without Him, we can perhaps understand. Thomas's life had been turned upside down by Jesus' death. **Hope that Jesus was alive was simply too painful to entertain.** Hope might be dashed, and the disappointment would be too great to bear.

Eight days later, Jesus came to His disciples again. This time, Thomas was present! When Jesus invited Thomas to explore the wounds in His hand and side, Thomas simply fell to the floor and said, "My Lord and my God!"

There is an unhealthy skepticism that refuses to believe, and there is an eager skepticism that wants desperately to believe but is afraid to hope. It was this skepticism that possessed Thomas. At the first sight of his Lord, the skepticism disappeared.

THOMAS: AN EXAMPLE FOR TODAY

¹² Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

Thomas, although briefly portrayed in the New Testament, comes across as a person with qualities we would do well to emulate.

- Thomas exemplifies both love and loyalty. **He was willing to go with Christ to Jerusalem because he could not face the prospect of life without Him.** Christ needs this kind of follower today, too.
- Thomas **exemplifies an inquiring spirit.** When puzzled by Christ's reference to "the way," Thomas spoke up with his question. Today truly honest Christians question matters of faith, not because they doubt, but because they yearn to know what God's Word means.
- Thomas **exemplifies the right kind of skepticism.** Thomas wanted what the disciples reported to be true, but at the same time he was afraid of further disappointment. As soon as Thomas saw Jesus, his doubts dissolved and he acknowledged Christ as Lord and God. When we have doubts, we need to remain open to belief so that when Christ's Spirit speaks to us we will be as ready as Thomas to respond with faith.¹³

JESUS APPEARS TO THOMAS

Thomas is not with the rest of the apostles when Jesus appears to them. John has already shown us that Thomas is solid and persistent—a man who makes up his own mind. It was Thomas who voted that they should all come to Jerusalem with Jesus, even though he was sure that they would die if they did (11:16).

Because Thomas was not with the others when Jesus appeared, he refuses to believe that Jesus is alive. He demands to see Jesus for himself, and to touch the marks of his crucifixion (20:24–31).

A week later, and again on a Sunday evening, Jesus accepts Thomas' challenge. He appears to his disciples when Thomas is with them, and invites him to reach out and probe his wounds. He urges Thomas to stop doubting and believe. Thomas gladly and humbly accepts that this is truly Jesus, and makes a ringing statement of personal faith: 'My Lord and my God!'

Most readers of John's Gospel can sympathize with Thomas. They have heard about Jesus, but not seen him alive for themselves. They must depend on what the witnesses say, and then take a step of faith.

Jesus has a special blessing for those who believe without seeing, who include ourselves: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' This is the final Beatitude (Matthew 5:3–11).

John has arrived at the purpose of his Gospel. His aim has been to present Jesus to us, so that we may believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. It is by believing in Jesus that we will enter the eternal life of the children of God.

The epilogue

John's Gospel is now complete, but he adds an epilogue. In it he gives two scenes from the ongoing life of the apostles.

Breakfast by the sea

(21:1–14)

It is the time between the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension. The apostles have returned north, where Simon Peter decides to go fishing on the Sea of Tiberias, which is Galilee. Some of the others decide to go with him.

There are seven in the boat, including Thomas (introduced again as Didymus, the twin), and Nathanael whom we learn is from Cana where Jesus turned water to wine. The sons of Zebedee are also present, although John doesn't mention their names or that he is one of them.

Suddenly, it is like the bad old days. They fish all night and catch nothing. Luke tells of the same thing happening on the day that Jesus first called Simon to be his disciple (Luke 5:4–5).

In the hazy light of dawn, a figure calls to them from the shore. He tells them to throw out their net on the other side of the boat. They haven't yet recognized Jesus, but his instruction brings memories flooding back for Peter—especially when they make an amazing catch of fish.

The beloved disciple is the first to realize it is Jesus on the shore; but Simon Peter is the one who throws on his coat and jumps overboard. John remembers how the others follow, dragging the great catch about 100 yards to the beach, and counting the fish. There are 153 of them.

If the number of fish has a special meaning, it may stand for the mission of the church. The Jews of these days believe there are 153 nations in the world; and Jesus has promised his disciples that they will 'catch men and women' (Luke 5:10).

¹³ Richards, L. (1999). *Every man in the Bible* (pp. 190–191). Nashville: T. Nelson.



Who Are The Apostles? Week #7: Speaking of Bartholomew & Thomas

After their long night's work, Jesus invites his friends to breakfast. He has prepared food for them, with fresh bread awaiting and fish already cooking on a charcoal fire. He is a Lord who provides. Again, the fire may trigger Simon Peter's memory. It was beside such a fire, in the high priest's courtyard, that he denied three times that he ever knew Jesus (John 18:18).

John mentions that none of the disciples asks Jesus if it is really him. There is clearly something 'the same but different' about his resurrection body.¹⁴

Thomas

Thomas is another of the apostles who is virtually ignored by **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**, and he is mentioned only three times in **John**. He is well known in Christian folklore as the doubter, but his position in all the listings of the apostles indicates that he was considered of only medium importance in the apostolic hierarchy (see Twelve Apostles, The).

The first mention of Thomas in John's Gospel is near the end of **Jesus'** ministry, when Jesus had already alienated the temple authorities and was a marked man. A messenger from Bethany had come to Jesus to tell him that **Lazarus** was dying, and the apostles tried to talk Jesus out of going to him (John 11:8ff.). Thomas urged the rest to go with Jesus, "that we may die with him" (John 11:16). This great willingness to stay with Jesus regardless of the consequences appears on the surface to have gone unnoticed, but John would not have recorded it if he (and probably the rest) did not think it significant. It may have been pessimistic, but it demonstrated extraordinary loyalty and dedication.

The second mention of Thomas takes place after the Resurrection, when he refused to believe the reports that Jesus had risen until he had seen him and touched his wounds. The touching of the wounds seems rather crass on the surface, but the wounds were the proof of the reality of the risen Jesus. When Jesus had appeared to the apostles earlier (and Thomas was not there), the first thing he did was show them his hands and his side (John 20:20; Luke 24:39). As soon as Thomas saw and touched him, he believed. Although Jesus did not chastise him for doubting, he brought all believers into recognition when he said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Shortly before the Ascension, Thomas is again mentioned as being among the apostles who saw Jesus and ate with him by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:2ff.).

When Jesus first appeared to the apostles after the Resurrection and Thomas was not with them, he gave them his first commission, saying, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He then breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:21ff.). The church has long held this event to be the first ordination of Christian priests, and there has been discussion for centuries as to whether Thomas was thus ordained. It becomes an irrelevant issue, however, in the light of the events on Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles is seen not only as their enlightenment and that of the church, but also as their consecration as the first bishops. There is no question that Thomas was present then, because Luke, having just spoken of the twelve apostles (the remaining eleven plus the newly elected Matthias), says that they were all together in one place when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:26ff.).

John calls Thomas *Didymus* (Δίδυμος, "twin") three times (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The name Thomas, in fact, means "twin," and ancient tradition says that his name was actually Judas Thomas, "Judas the Twin." While some attempts have been made to identify him with Judas the son of James or his twin, the evidence for this is far from compelling. The Acts of Thomas (see below) regard him as the twin of Jesus himself, and this is believed by the Mesopotamian Church, a sect of Christians in the Middle East. Twins were as interesting a phenomenon in ancient times as they are today, and surviving twins were rare. Infant mortality was extraordinarily high, and since twins are often frail when they are born, at least one of the two frequently died. A twin, then, would have gained notice.

While the Bible tells us nothing more about Thomas, there is a large collection of traditions about his missions and ministry. One is the Apocalypse of Thomas, which describes the details of the end of the world as allegedly revealed by Jesus to Thomas. Some of the writings are quite fanciful, especially the book of the Acts of Thomas, which reads more like a novel than a work of spiritual edification. It was written sometime near the end of the third century CE and tells of his mission to India and of the many spectacular miracles he performed there.

A more noteworthy work is the Gospel of Thomas, which has been thrust into popular notice by the best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code*. It was unquestionably a product of an early Gnostic sect, and while it contains quotations

¹⁴ Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., pp. 529–531). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.



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and acts of Jesus that may well be authentic, it has many portions that are outrageous. One is the collection of “infancy” tales that present the child Jesus as a bratty, cruel, arrogant little miracle-worker with no sense of responsibility and no compassion. He creates living birds out of clay, cripples a boy who has offended him, causes another child to drop dead for competing against him in a race, and kills another child by pushing him off a roof, then rushes down and restores him to life. This is not the stuff of Holy Scripture. Many versions eliminate this section, but it appears to have been a part of the original. There can be no doubt whatever that these works were not written by Thomas the Apostle.¹⁵

How Can I Avoid Being a Doubting Thomas?

We should thank God for the example of “doubting Thomas”! The famous story of the disciple Thomas, whose name literally means “doubter,” is recorded in John 20:24–29. All Christians suffer doubt at one time or another, but the example of doubting Thomas provides both instruction and encouragement.

After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared alive and glorified to His disciples to comfort them and proclaim to them the good news of His victory over death (John 20:19–23). However, one of the original 12 disciples, Thomas, was not present for this visitation (John 20:24). After being told by the other disciples of Jesus’ resurrection and personal visit, Thomas “doubted” and wanted physical proof of the risen Lord in order to believe this good news. Jesus, knowing Thomas’s human frailty resulted in weakened faith, accommodated Thomas.

It is important to note that Jesus did not have to fulfill Thomas’s request. He was not obligated in the slightest bit. Thomas had spent three years intimately acquainted with Jesus witnessing all His miracles and hearing His prophecies about His coming death and resurrection. That, and the testimony Thomas received from the other 10 disciples about Jesus’ return, should have been enough, but still he doubted. Jesus knew Thomas’s weakness, just as he knows ours.

The doubt Thomas experienced in the face of the heartbreaking loss of the One he loved is not unlike our own when facing a massive loss: despair, heartbreak, and exceeding sorrow, all of which Christ sympathizes with (Hebrews 4:15). But, although Thomas did in fact doubt the Lord’s resurrection appearance, once he saw the risen Christ, he proclaimed in faith, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Jesus commended him for his faith, although that faith was based on sight.

As an extra encouraging note to future Christians, Jesus goes on to say, “Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, emphasis added). He meant that once He ascended to heaven, He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would live within believers from then on, enabling us to believe that which we do not see with our eyes. This same thought is echoed by Peter, who said of Christ, “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8–9).

Although we have the Spirit within us, we can still experience doubt. This, however, does not affect our eternal standing with God. True saving faith always perseveres to the end just as Thomas’s did, and just as Peter’s did after he had a monumental moment of weakness by denying the very Lord he loved and believed in (Matthew 26:69–75). This is because, “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Jesus is “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Faith is the gift of God to His children (Ephesians 2:8–9), and He will mature and perfect it until He returns.

So how do we keep from doubting as Thomas did? First, we must go to God in prayer when experiencing doubt. That may be the very reason God is allowing a Christian to doubt—so that we will depend on Him through prayer. Sanctification is the process of growing in Him, which includes times of doubt and times of great faith. Like the man who brought his demon-possessed child to Jesus but was unsure whether Jesus could help him, we go to God

¹⁵ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 419–420). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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because we believe in Him and ask Him for more and greater faith to overcome our doubts, crying, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:17–27).

Second, we must recognize that Christians fight a spiritual battle daily. We have to gear up for the battle. The Christian needs to daily be armed with the Word of God to help fight these spiritual battles, which include fighting doubt, and we arm ourselves with the “full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10–19). As Christians, we must take advantage of the lulls in spiritual warfare to polish our spiritual armor in order to be ready for the next battle. Times of doubt will become less frequent if we take advantage of the good times to feed our faith with the Word of God. Then when we raise the shield of faith and do battle with the enemy of our souls, his flaming darts of doubt will not hit their target.

Doubting Christians have two things doubting Thomas did not have—the indwelling Holy Spirit and the written New Testament. By the power of both the Spirit and the Word, we can overcome doubts and, like Thomas, be prepared to follow our Lord and Savior and give all for Him, even our lives (John 11:16).¹⁶

THOMAS, THE PESSIMIST

The final apostle in the second group of four is also a familiar name: Thomas. He is usually nicknamed “Doubting Thomas,” but that may not be the most fitting label for him. He was a better man than the popular lore would indicate.

It probably is fair, however, to say that Thomas was a somewhat negative person. He was a worrywart. He was a brooder. He tended to be anxious and angst-ridden. He was like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. He anticipated the worst all the time. Pessimism, rather than doubt, seems to have been his besetting sin.

Thomas, according to John 11:16 (KJV), was also called “Didymus,” which means “the twin.” Apparently he had a twin brother or a twin sister, but his twin is never identified in Scriptures.

Like Nathanael, Thomas is mentioned only once each in the three synoptic Gospels. In each case, he is simply named with the other eleven apostles in a list. No details about him are given by Matthew, Mark, or Luke. We learn everything we know about his character from John’s Gospel.

It becomes obvious from John’s record that Thomas had a tendency to look only into the darkest corners of life. He seemed always to anticipate the worst of everything. Yet despite his pessimism, some wonderfully redeeming elements of his character come through in John’s account of him.

John’s first mention of Thomas is found in John 11:16. It is a single verse, but it speaks volumes about Thomas’s real character.

In this context, John is describing the prelude to the raising of Lazarus. Jesus had left Jerusalem because His life was in jeopardy there, and “He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed” (John 10:40). Great crowds of people came out to hear Jesus preach. John says, “And many believed in Him there” (v. 42). This may have been the most fruitful time of ministry the disciples had witnessed in all the time since they had begun to follow Christ. People were responsive. Souls were being converted. And Jesus was able to minister freely without the opposition of the religious rulers of Jerusalem.

But something happened to interrupt their time in the wilderness. John writes, “Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick” (John 11:1–2). Bethany was on the outskirts of Jerusalem. And Jesus had formed a close and loving relationship with this little family who lived there. He loved them with a special affection. He had stayed with them, and they had provided for His needs.

¹⁶ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.



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Now His dear friend Lazarus was sick, and Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick” (v. 3). They knew if Jesus came to see Lazarus, He would be able to heal him.

This presented a quandary. If Jesus went that close to Jerusalem, he was walking into the very teeth of the worst kind of hostility. John 10:39 says the Jewish leaders were seeking to seize Him. They were already determined to kill Him. He had eluded their grasp once already, but if He returned to Bethany, they were certain to find out, and they would try again to seize Him.

The disciples must have breathed a sigh of relief when Jesus answered, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4). What He *meant*, of course, was that Lazarus’s death would not be the *ultimate* result of his sickness. The Son of God would glorify Himself by raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus knew, of course, that Lazarus would die. In fact, He knew the very hour of his death.

John writes, “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was” (vv. 5–6). At first glance, that seems a strange juxtaposition of statements: Jesus loved Lazarus and his family, so He stayed put while Lazarus was dying. He deliberately tarried to give Lazarus time to die. But this *was* an act of love, because ultimately, the blessing they received when Lazarus was raised from the dead was a greater blessing than if he had merely been healed of his sickness. It glorified Jesus in a greater way. It strengthened their faith in Him immeasurably more. Therefore Jesus waited a couple of extra days so that Lazarus was already dead four days by the time He arrived (v. 39).

Of course, Jesus, with His supernatural knowledge, knew exactly when Lazarus died. That is *why* He waited. “Then after this He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again’ ” (v. 7).

The disciples thought this was crazy. They said, “Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?” (v. 8). They frankly did not want to go back to Jerusalem. The ministry in the wilderness was phenomenal. In Jerusalem they all risked being stoned. Now was not a good time for a visit to Bethany, which was virtually within sight of the temple, where Jesus’ bitterest enemies had their headquarters.

Jesus’ answer is interesting. He gives them an illustration. “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (vv. 9–10). In other words, there was no need for Him to skulk around like a common criminal. He was determined to do His work in the bright light of day, because that’s what you do in order *not* to stumble. Those who were walking in darkness are the ones in danger of stumbling—particularly the religious leaders who were secretly looking for a way to kill Him.

He said that to the disciples to calm them down. They obviously did not want to go back and die. But Jesus reassured them they had nothing to fear. And of course, He knew His time to die was in God’s timing, not His enemies’. Our Lord made His purpose clear when He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (v. 11).

The disciples missed His meaning. They said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well” (v. 12). If he’s only asleep, why not let him rest? After all, Jesus had already said his sickness was not unto death. The disciples couldn’t see the urgency of the situation. It sounded to them like Lazarus was already on the road to recovery.

“However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him’ ” (vv. 13–15).

Now they understood. Jesus *had* to go back. He was determined to do so. There would be no talking Him out of it. To them, it must have seemed like the worst possible disaster. They were floundering in fear. They were convinced that if Jesus returned to Bethany, He would be killed. But He had made up His mind.



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It was at this point that Thomas spoke up. Here is where we meet him for the first time in all the Gospel records. “Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’ ” (v. 16).

Now that is pessimistic, and that’s typical for Thomas. But it is a heroic pessimism. He could see nothing but disaster ahead. He was convinced Jesus was heading straight for a stoning. But if that is what the Lord was determined to do, Thomas was grimly determined to go and die with Him. You have to admire his courage.

It is not easy to be a pessimist. It is a miserable way to live. An optimist might have said, “Let’s go; everything will work out. The Lord knows what He is doing. He says we won’t stumble. We will be fine.” But the pessimist says, “He’s going to die, and we’re going to die with Him.” Thomas at least had the courage to be loyal, even in the face of his pessimism. It is much easier for an optimist to be loyal. He always expects the best. It is hard for a pessimist to be loyal, because he is convinced the worst is going to happen. This is heroic pessimism. This is real courage.

Thomas was devoted to Christ. He may have been the equal to John in this regard. When we think about someone who loved Jesus and was intimate with Him, we usually think of John, because he was always near Jesus. But it is clear from this account that Thomas did not want to live without Jesus. If Jesus was going to die, Thomas was prepared to die with Him. In essence he says, “Guys, suck it up; let’s go and die. Better to die and be with Christ than to be left behind.”

Thomas was an example of strength to the rest of the apostles. It appears they collectively followed his lead at this point and said, “OK, let’s go and die”—because they *did* go with Him to Bethany.

Thomas obviously had a deep devotion to Christ that could not be dampened even by his own pessimism. He had no illusion that following Jesus would be easy. All he could see were the jaws of death opening to swallow him. But he followed Jesus with an undaunted courage. He was resolved to die if necessary with his Lord rather than forsake Him. He would rather die than be left behind and separated from Christ.

Thomas’s profound love for the Lord shows up again in John 14. You’ll recall from our study of Philip that Jesus was telling them of His imminent departure. “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). “And where I go you know, and the way you know” (v. 4).

In verse 5 Thomas speaks: “Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ ” Again we see his pessimism. In essence, he was saying, “You’re leaving. We’ll never get where you are going. We don’t even know *how* to get there. How are we supposed to get there? It was a better plan for us to die with You, because then there’s no separation. If we died together, we would all be together. But if You just go, how are we ever going to find You? We don’t even know how to get there.”

Here is a man with deep love. He is a man whose relationship with Christ was so strong that he never wanted to be severed from Him. His heart was broken as he heard Jesus speak of leaving them. He was shattered. The thought of losing Christ paralyzed him. He had become so attached to Jesus in those years that he would have been glad to die with Christ, but he could not think of living without Him. You have to admire his devotion to Christ.

This was overwhelming for Thomas. And his worst fears came to pass. Jesus died and he didn’t.

We pick up the next picture of Thomas in John 20. After Jesus’ death, all the disciples were in deep sorrow. But they all got together to comfort one another. Except for Thomas. John 20:24 says, “Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them.”

It is too bad he wasn’t there, because Jesus came and appeared to them. They had locked themselves in a room somewhere (most likely the Upper Room in Jerusalem). John writes, “The doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews” (v. 19). Suddenly, although the doors and windows were sealed shut, “Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’



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When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (vv. 19–20).

Thomas missed the whole thing. Why wasn’t he there? It is possible that he was so negative, so pessimistic, such a melancholy person, that he was absolutely destroyed, and he was probably off somewhere wallowing in his own misery. He could see only the worst of everything. Now his worst fear had been realized. Jesus was gone, and Thomas was sure he would never see Him again. He may have still been thinking he would never find the way to get where Jesus was. He was no doubt regretting the fact that he did not die with Jesus, as he had been so determined to do in the first place.

Thomas may well have felt alone, betrayed, rejected, forsaken. It was over. The One he loved so deeply was gone, and it tore his heart out. He was not in a mood to socialize. He was brokenhearted, shattered, devastated, crushed. He just wanted to be alone. He simply couldn’t take the banter. He wasn’t in a mood to be in a crowd, even with his friends.

“The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord’ ” (v. 25). They were exuberant. They were ecstatic. They were eager to share the good news with Thomas.

But someone in the kind of mood Thomas was in was not going to be cheered up so easily. He was still being a hopeless pessimist. All he could see was the bad side of things, and this was just too good to be true. “So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’ ” (v. 25).

It is because of that statement that he has been nicknamed “Doubting Thomas.” But don’t be too hard on Thomas. Remember, the other disciples did not believe in the resurrection until they saw Jesus, either. Mark 16:10–11 says after Mary Magdalene saw Him, “She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.” The two disciples on the road to Emmaus walked with Him a long distance before they even realized who He was. And then “they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either” (v. 13). When Jesus showed up in the room where the disciples are gathered, “He showed them His hands and side” (John 20:20). *Then* they believed. So they were *all* slow to believe. What set Thomas apart from the other ten was not that his doubt was greater, but that his sorrow was greater.

John 20:26 says that eight days passed after Jesus appeared to the disciples again. Finally Thomas’s ragged grief had eased a bit, apparently. Because when the apostles were returned to the room where Jesus appeared to them, this time Thomas was with them. Once again, “Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ ” (v. 26).

No one needed to tell Jesus what Thomas had said, of course. He looked right at Thomas and said, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (v. 27). The Lord was amazingly gentle with him. Thomas had erred because he was more or less wired to be a pessimist. But it was the error of a profound love. It was provoked by grief, brokenheartedness, uncertainty, and the pain of loneliness. No one could feel the way Thomas felt unless he loved Jesus the way Thomas loved Him. So Jesus was tender with him. He understands our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). So He understands our doubt. He sympathizes with our uncertainty. He is patient with our pessimism. And while recognizing these as weaknesses, we must also acknowledge Thomas’s heroic devotion to Christ, which made him understand that it would be better to die than to be separated from his Lord. The proof of his love was the profoundness of his despair.

Then Thomas made what was probably the greatest statement ever to come from the lips of the apostles: “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28). Let those who question the deity of Christ meet Thomas.

Suddenly, Thomas’s melancholy, comfortless, negative, moody tendencies were forever banished by the appearance of Jesus Christ. And in that moment he was transformed into a great evangelist. A short time later, at Pentecost, along with the other apostles, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered for ministry. He, like his comrades, took the gospel to the ends of the earth.



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There is a considerable amount of ancient testimony that suggests Thomas carried the gospel as far as India. There is to this day a small hill near the airport in Chennai (Madras), India, where Thomas is said to have been buried. There are churches in south India whose roots are traceable to the beginning of the church age, and tradition says they were founded under the ministry of Thomas. The strongest traditions say he was martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear—a fitting form of martyrdom for one whose faith came of age when he saw the spear mark in his Master’s side and for one who longed to be reunited with his Lord.

TWO TRANSFORMED

It’s interesting that God used a publican like Matthew and a pessimist like Thomas. Matthew was once the vilest of sinners—a wretched, despicable outcast. Thomas was a tender-hearted, moody, melancholy individual. But both of them were transformed by Christ in the same way He transformed the others. Are you beginning to get the idea of what kind of people God uses? He can use *anyone*. Personality, status, and family background are all immaterial. The one thing all these men except Judas had in common was a willingness to acknowledge their own sinfulness and look to Christ for grace. He met them with grace, mercy, and forgiveness and transformed their lives into lives that would glorify Him. He does that for all who truly trust Him.¹⁷

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THE APOSTLES

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus selected 12 men to travel with Him. These men would have an important responsibility: They would continue to represent Him after He had returned to heaven. Their reputation would continue to influence the church long after they were dead.

So the selection of the Twelve was a great responsibility. “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose 12, whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:12–13).

Most of the apostles came from the area of Capernaum, which was despised by polite Jewish society because it was the center of a part of the Jewish state (only recently added) and was known in fact as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Jesus Himself said, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven, shalt be brought down to hell” (Matt. 11:23). Yet Jesus molded these 12 men into strong leaders and articulate spokesmen of the Christian faith. Their success bears witness to the transforming power of Jesus’ lordship.

¹⁷ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *Twelve ordinary men: how the Master shaped his disciples for greatness, and what He wants to do with you* (pp. 157–165). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.



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None of the Gospel writers have left us any physical descriptions of the Twelve. Nevertheless, they give us tiny clues that help us to make “educated guesses” about how the apostles looked and acted. One very important fact that has traditionally been overlooked in countless artistic representations of the apostles is their youth. If we realize that most lived into the third and fourth quarter of the century and John into the second century, then they must have been only teenagers when they first took up Christ’s call.

Different biblical accounts list the Twelve in pairs. We are not sure whether this indicates family relationships, team functions, or some other kind of association between them.

- I. **ANDREW**
- II. **BARTHOLOMEW (NATHANAEL?)**
- III. **JAMES, SON OF ALPHEUS**
- IV. **JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE**
- V. **JOHN**
- VI. **JUDAS (NOT ISCARIOT)**
- VII. **JUDAS ISCARIOT**
- VIII. **MATTHEW**
- IX. **PHILIP**
- X. **SIMON PETER**
- XI. **SIMON ZELOTES**
- XII. **THOMAS**
- XIII. **JUDAS’S REPLACEMENT**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS

Where is Peter Buried?

I. Andrew. The day after John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus, he identified Jesus for two of his disciples and said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36). Intrigued by this announcement, the two men left John and began to follow Jesus. Jesus noticed them and asked what they were seeking. Immediately they replied, “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” Jesus took them to the house where He was staying and they spent the night with Him. One of these men was named Andrew (John 1:38–40).

Andrew soon went to find his brother, Simon Peter. He told Peter, “We have found the Messiah ...” (John 1:41). Through his testimony, he won Peter to the Lord.

Andrew is our English rendering of the Greek word *Andreas*, which means “manly.” Other clues from the Gospels indicate that Andrew was physically strong and a devout, faithful man. He and Peter owned a house together (Mark 1:29). They were sons of a man named Jonah or John, a prosperous fisherman. Both of the young men had followed their father into the fishing business.

SEA OF GALILEE. *This freshwater lake is also referred to in the New Testament as the “Sea of Tiberias” (John 21:1) and the “lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1). Several of the apostles worked as fishermen along its shores. It measures up to 10 km. (6 mi.) wide and 24 km. (15 mi.) from north to south. Along the shores of the lake were many towns such as Capernaum (in the background), where Christ conducted much of His ministry. In His time, these towns formed an almost continuous belt of settlements around the lake.*

Andrew was born at Bethsaida on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Though the Book of John describes Andrew’s first encounter with Jesus, it does not mention him as a disciple until much later (John 6:8). The Book of Matthew says that when Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee He hailed Andrew and Peter and invited them to become His disciples (Matt. 4:18–19). This does not contradict John’s narrative; it simply adds a new feature. A close reading of John 1:35–40 shows that Jesus did not call Andrew and Peter to follow Him the first time they met.

Andrew and another disciple named Philip introduced a group of Greek men to Jesus (John 12:20–22). For this reason, we might say that Andrew and Philip were the first foreign missionaries of the Christian faith.

Tradition says that Andrew spent his last years in Scythia, north of the Black Sea. But a small book entitled the *Acts of Andrew* (probably written about A.D. 260) says that he preached primarily in Macedonia and was martyred at Patras.

Roman Catholic tradition says that Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross, a religious symbol that is now known as St. Andrew’s Cross. It was believed that he was crucified on November 30, so the Roman Catholic church



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and Greek Orthodox church observe his festival on that date. Today he is the patron saint of Scotland. The Order of St. Andrew is an association of church ushers who make a special effort to be courteous to strangers.

II. Bartholomew (Nathanael?). We lack information about the identity of the apostle named Bartholomew. He is mentioned only in the lists of apostles. Moreover, while the synoptic Gospels agree that his name was Bartholomew, John gives it as Nathanael (John 1:45). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was the surname of Nathanael.

The Aramaic word *bar* means “son,” so the name *Bartholomew* literally meant “son of Thalmai.” The Bible does not identify Thalmai for us, but he may have been named after the King Thalmai of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3). Some scholars believe that Bartholomew was connected with the Ptolemies, the ruling family of Egypt; **this theory is based upon Jerome’s statement that Bartholomew was the only apostle of noble birth.**

Assuming that Bartholomew is the same person as Nathanael, we learn a bit more about his personality from the Gospel of John. Jesus called Nathanael “an Israelite ... in whom is no guile” (John 1:47).

Tradition says Nathanael served as a missionary in India. The Venerable Bede said that Nathanael was beheaded by King Astriagis. Other traditions say that Nathanael was crucified head-down.

III. James, Son of Alphaeus. The Gospels make only fleeting reference to James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Many scholars believe that James was a brother of Matthew, since Scripture says that Matthew’s father was also named Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). Others believe that this James was identified with “James the Less”; but we have no proof that these two names refer to the same man (cf. Mark 15:40).

If the son of Alphaeus was indeed the same man as James the Less, he may have been a cousin of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:56; John 19:25). Some Bible commentators theorize that this disciple bore a close physical resemblance to Jesus, which could explain why Judas Iscariot had to identify Jesus on the night of His betrayal (Mark 14:43–45; Luke 22:47–48).

Legends say that this James preached in Persia and was crucified there. But we have no concrete information about his later ministry and death.

IV. James, Son of Zebedee. After Jesus summoned Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, He went a little farther along the shore of Galilee and summoned “James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets” (Mark 1:19). Like Peter and Andrew, James and his brother responded immediately to Christ’s invitation.

James was the first of the Twelve to suffer a martyr’s death. King Herod Agrippa I ordered that James be executed with a sword (Acts 12:2). Tradition says this occurred in A.D. 44, when James would have been quite young. (Although the New Testament does not describe the martyrdom of any other apostles, tradition tells us that all except John died for their faith.)

The Gospels never mention James alone; they always speak of “James and John.” Even in recording his death, the Book of Acts refers to him as “James the brother of John” (Acts 12:2). James and John began to follow Jesus on the same day, and both of them were present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2–13). Jesus called both men the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).

The persecution that took James’s life inspired new fervor among the Christians (cf. Acts 12:5–25). Undoubtedly, Herod Agrippa had hoped to quash the Christian movement by executing leaders such as James. “But the Word of God grew and multiplied” (v. 24).

Strangely, the Gospel of John does not mention James. John was reluctant to mention his own name, and he may have felt the same kind of modesty about reporting the activities of his brother. Once John refers to himself and James as the “sons of Zebedee” (John 21:2). Otherwise he is silent about the work of James.

Legends say that James was the first Christian missionary to Spain. Roman Catholic authorities believe that his bones are buried in the city of Santiago in northwestern Spain.

CATACOMB FRESCO. *Dating from A.D. 200–220, this fresco is one of the oldest catacomb paintings yet discovered. It depicts the events of John 21, when seven disciples (i.e., Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples) feasted on bread and fish.*

V. John. Fortunately, we have a considerable amount of information about the disciple named John. Mark tells us he was the brother of James, son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19). Mark says that James and John worked with the “hired servants” of their father (Mark 1:20).



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Some scholars speculate that John's mother was Salome, who observed the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:40). If Salome was the sister of Jesus' mother, as the Gospel of John suggests (John 19:25), John may have been a cousin of Jesus.

Jesus found John and his brother James mending their nets beside the Sea of Galilee. He ordered them to launch out into the lake and let down their nets to catch fish. They hauled in a tremendous catch—a miracle that convinced them of Jesus' power. "And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Simon Peter went with them.

John seems to have been an impulsive young man. Soon after he and James entered Jesus' inner circle of disciples, the Master labeled them "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). The disciples seemed to relegate John to a secondary place in their company. All of the Gospels mentioned John after his brother James; on most occasions, it seems, James was the spokesman for the two brothers. When Paul mentions John among the apostles at Jerusalem, he places John at the end of the list (Gal. 2:9).

John's emotions often erupted in his conversations with Jesus. On one occasion, John became upset because someone else was ministering in Jesus' name. "We forbade him," he told Jesus, "because he followeth not us" (Mark 9:38). Jesus replied, "Forbid him not ... For he that is not against us is on our part" (Mark 9:39–40). On another occasion, James and John ambitiously suggested that they should be allowed to sit on Jesus' right hand in heaven. This idea antagonized the other disciples (Mark 10:35–41).

Yet John's boldness served him well at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. John 18:15 tells us that John "was known unto the high priest." A Franciscan legend says that John's family supplied fish to the high priest's household. This would have made him especially vulnerable to arrest when the high priest's guards apprehended Jesus. Nevertheless, John was the only apostle who dared to stand at the foot of the cross, and Jesus committed His mother into his care (John 19:26–27). When the disciples heard that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb, John ran ahead of the others and reached the sepulcher first. However, he allowed Peter to enter the burial chamber ahead of him (John 20:1–4, 8).

If John indeed wrote the fourth Gospel, the letters of John, and the Book of Revelation, he penned more of the New Testament than any of the other apostles. We have no sound reason to doubt John's authorship of these books. (See "Outline of the Books of the Bible.")

Tradition says that John cared for Jesus' mother while he was pastor of the congregation in Ephesus, and that she died there. Tertullian says that John was taken to Rome and "plunged into boiling oil, unhurt, and then exiled on an island." This was probably the island of Patmos, where the Book of Revelation was written. It is believed that John lived to an old age and that his body was returned to Ephesus for burial.

THE LAST SUPPER. *Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) began work in 1496 on what many art critics consider to be his greatest masterpiece. Christ is shown at the center of the table. He has just revealed that one of them would betray Him. The disciples murmur among themselves, wondering which of them would do this (Luke 22:21–23). Judas, the second figure left of center, sits silently and clutches the disciples' purse (cf. John 12:4–6).*

VI. Judas (Not Iscariot). John refers to one of the disciples as "Judas, not Iscariot" (John 14:22). It is not easy to determine the identity of this man. Jerome dubbed him *Trionius*—"the man with three names."

The New Testament refers to several men by the name of Judas—Judas Iscariot (*see below*), Judas the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), and "Judas, not Iscariot." Clearly, John wanted to avoid confusion when he referred to this man, especially because the other disciple named Judas had such a poor reputation.

Matthew refers to this man as Lebbeus, "whose surname was Thaddeus" (Matt. 10:3). Mark refers to him simply as Thaddeus (Mark 3:18). Luke refers to him as "Judas the son of James" (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). The KJV incorrectly translates Luke as saying that this man was the *brother* of James.

We are not sure who Thaddeus's father was. Some think he was James, the brother of Jesus—making Judas a nephew of Jesus. But this is not likely, for early church historians report that this James never married. Others think that his father was the apostle James, son of Zebedee. We cannot be certain.

William Steuart McBirnie suggests that the name Thaddeus was a diminutive form of *Theudas*, which comes from the Aramaic noun *tad*, meaning "breast." Thus, Thaddeus may have been a nickname that literally meant "one



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close to the breast” or “one beloved.” McBirnie believes that the name Lebbeus may be derived from the Hebrew noun *leb*, which means “heart.”

The historian Eusebius says that Jesus once sent this disciple to King Abgar of Mesopotamia to pray for his healing. According to this story, Judas went to Abgar after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, and he remained to preach in several cities of Mesopotamia. Another tradition says that this disciple was murdered by magicians in the city of Suanir in Persia. It is said that they killed him with clubs and stones.

VII. Judas Iscariot. All of the Gospels place Judas Iscariot at the end of the list of Jesus’ disciples. Undoubtedly this reflects Judas’s ill repute as the betrayer of Jesus.

The Aramaic word *Iscariot* literally meant “man of Kerioth.” Kerioth was a town near Hebron (Josh. 15:25). However, John tells us that Judas was the son of Simon (John 6:71).

If Judas indeed came from the town of Kerioth, he was the only Judean among Jesus’ disciples. Judeans despised the people of Galilee as crude frontier settlers. This attitude may have alienated Judas Iscariot from the other disciples.

The Gospels do not tell us exactly when Jesus called Judas Iscariot to join His band of followers. Perhaps it was in the early days when Jesus called so many others (cf. Matt. 4:18–22).

Judas acted as the treasurer of the disciples, and on at least one occasion he manifested a penny-pinching attitude toward their work. When a woman named Mary came to pour rich ointment on the feet of Jesus, Judas complained, “Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:5). John comments that Judas said this “not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief” (John 12:6).

As the disciples shared their last meal with Jesus, the Lord revealed that He knew He was about to be betrayed, and He singled out Judas as the culprit. He told Judas, “That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27). However, the other disciples did not suspect what Judas was about to do. John reports that “some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, ‘Buy those things that we have need of against the (Passover) feast ...’” (John 13:28–29).

Scholars have offered several theories about the reason for Judas’ betrayal. Some think that he was reacting to Jesus’ rebuke when he criticized the woman with the ointment. Others think that Judas acted out of greed for the money that Jesus’ enemies offered him.⁶ Luke and John simply say that Satan inspired Judas’s actions (Luke 22:3; John 13:27).

Matthew tells us that Judas in remorse attempted to return the money to Jesus’ captors: “And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5). A folk legend says that Judas hanged himself on a redbud tree, which is sometimes called the “Judas tree.” In most modern works, Judas is portrayed as a zealot or extreme patriot who was disappointed at Jesus’ failure to lead a mass movement or rebellion against Rome. There is, as yet, little evidence for this viewpoint.

CHALICE OF ANTIOCH. *This large silver cup (19 cm. or 7 1/2 in. high) was discovered in 1916 at Antioch. At first, many scholars thought this was the actual cup used at the Last Supper. However, subsequent study of the artwork on the cup leads authorities to believe it dates no later than the fourth or fifth centuries A.D. The plain metal lining may be a substitute for an original glass vessel. In 1954, Warner Brothers Studios produced a feature-length film about the story of this cup, entitled “The Silver Chalice,” starring Paul Newman and Jack Palance.*

VIII. Matthew. In Jesus’ day, the Roman government collected several different taxes from the people of Palestine. Tolls for transporting goods by land or sea were collected by private tax collectors, who paid a fee to the Roman government for the right to assess these levies. The tax collectors made their profits by charging a higher toll than the law required. The licensed collectors often hired minor officials called *publicans* to do the actual work of collecting the tolls. The publicans extracted their own wages by charging a fraction more than their employer required. The disciple Matthew was a publican who collected tolls on the road between Damascus and Accho; his booth was located just outside the city of Capernaum and he may have also collected taxes from the fishermen for their catches.

Normally a publican charged five percent of the purchase price of normal trade items and up to 12.5 percent on luxury items. Matthew also collected taxes from fishermen who worked along the Sea of Galilee and boatmen who brought their goods from cities on the other side of the lake.



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The Jews considered a tax collector's money to be unclean so they would never ask for change. If a Jewish man did not have the exact amount that the collector required, he borrowed from a friend. Jewish people despised the publicans as agents of the hated Roman Empire and the puppet Jewish king. Publicans were not allowed to testify in court, and they could not tithe their money to the temple. A good Jew would not even associate with publicans in private life (cf. Matt. 9:10–13).

Yet the Jews divided the tax collectors in two classes. First were the *gabbai*, who levied general agricultural taxes and census taxes from the people. The second group were the *mokhsa*, the officials who collected money from travelers. Most of the *mokhsa* were Jews, so they were despised as traitors to their own people. Matthew belonged to this class of tax collectors.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus approached this unlikely disciple as he sat at his tax table one day. Jesus simply commanded Matthew to "follow me," and Matthew left his work to follow the Master (Matt. 9:9).

Apparently Matthew was fairly well-to-do, because he provided a banquet in his own house. "And there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them" (Luke 5:29). The simple fact that Matthew owned his own house indicates that he was wealthier than the typical publican.

Because of the nature of his work, we feel quite certain that Matthew knew how to read and write. Papyrus tax documents dating from about A.D. 100 indicate that the publicans were quite efficient with figures. (Instead of using the clumsy Roman numerals, they preferred the simpler Greek symbols.)

Matthew may have been related to the disciple James, since each of them is said to have been a "son of Alphaeus" (Matt. 10:3; Mark 2:14). Luke sometimes uses the name Levi to refer to Matthew (cf. Luke 5:27–29). Thus some scholars believe that Matthew's name was Levi before he decided to follow Jesus, and that Jesus gave him the new name, which means "gift of God." Others suggest that Matthew was a member of the priestly tribe of Levi.

Even though a former publican had joined His ranks, Jesus did not soften His condemnation of the tax collectors. He ranked them with the harlots (cf. Matt. 21:31), and Matthew himself classes the publicans with sinners (Matt. 9:10).

Of all the Gospels, Matthew's has probably been the most influential. Second-century Christian literature quotes from the Gospel of Matthew more than from any other. The church fathers placed Matthew's Gospel at the beginning of the New Testament canon, probably because of the significance they attributed to it. Matthew's account emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It stresses that Jesus was the promised Messiah, who had come to redeem all mankind.

We do not know what happened to Matthew after the day of Pentecost. In his *Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe stated that Matthew spent his last years preaching in Parthia and Ethiopia. Foxe says that Matthew was martyred in the city of Nadabah in A.D. 60. However, we do not know from what source Foxe got this information (other than from medieval Greek sources) and we cannot judge whether it is trustworthy.

IX. Philip. John's Gospel is the only one to give us any detailed information about the disciple named Philip. (This Philip should not be confused with Philip the evangelist—cf. Acts 21:8.)

Jesus first met Philip at Bethany beyond the Jordan River (John 1:28, RSV). It is interesting to note that Jesus called Philip individually while He called most of the other disciples in pairs. Philip introduced Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:45–51), and Jesus also called Nathanael (or Nathanael Bartholomew) to be His disciple.

When 5,000 people gathered to hear Jesus, Philip asked his Lord how they would feed the crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little," he said (John 6:7).

On another occasion, a group of Greek men came to Philip and asked him to introduce them to Jesus. Philip enlisted the help of Andrew and together they took the men to meet Him (John 12:20–22).

While the disciples ate their last meal with Jesus, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8). Jesus responded that they had already seen the Father in Him.

These three brief glimpses are all that we see of Philip in the Gospels. The church has preserved many traditions about his later ministry and death. Some say that he preached in France; others that he preached in southern Russia, Asia Minor, or even India. In A.D. 194, Bishop Polycrates of Antioch wrote that "Philip, one of the twelve apostles, sleeps at Hierapolis." However, we have no firm evidence to support these claims.

ST. PETER'S BASILICA. According to tradition, Peter was executed in the circus of Nero, where thousands of Christians suffered martyrdom. In A.D. 319, Emperor Constantine destroyed the circus and built over its northern foundations the first basilica of Saint Peter. The present structure was



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started in 1450 and took 176 years to build. Michelangelo designed the magnificent dome. St. Peter's is the largest church building in the world.

X. Simon Peter. The disciple named Simon Peter was a man of contrasts. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter immediately replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15–16). But seven verses later we read, "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him...." Going from one extreme to another was characteristic of Peter.

When Jesus attempted to wash Peter's feet in the Upper Room, the intemperate disciple exclaimed, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But when Jesus insisted, Peter said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:8–9).

On their last night together, Peter told Jesus, "Although all shall offend thee, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). Yet within hours, Peter not only denied Jesus but cursed Him (Mark 14:71).

This volatile, unpredictable temperament often got Simon Peter into trouble. Yet the Holy Spirit would mold Peter into a stable, dynamic leader of the early church, a "rockman" (*Peter* means "rock") in every sense.

The New Testament writers used four different names in referring to Peter. One is the Hebrew name *Simeon* (Acts 15:14), which may mean "hearing." A second name was *Simon*, the Greek form of Simeon. A third name was *Cephas*, Aramaic for "rock." The fourth name was *Peter*, Greek for "rock"; the New Testament writers apply this name to the disciple more often than the other three.

When Jesus first met this man, He said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas" (John 1:42). Jonah was a Greek name meaning "dove" (cf. Matt. 16:17; John 21:15–17). Some modern translations render this name as "John."

Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16). He spoke with the accent of a Galilean, and his mannerisms identified him as an uncouth native of the Galilean frontier (cf. Mark 14:70). His brother Andrew led him to Jesus (John 1:40–42).

While Jesus hung on the cross, Peter was probably among the group from Galilee that "stood afar off, beholding these things" (Luke 23:49). In 1 Peter 5:1 he wrote, "I ... am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...."

Simon Peter heads the list of apostles in each of the Gospel accounts, which suggests that the New Testament writers considered him to be the most significant of the Twelve. He did not write as much as John or Matthew, but he emerged as the most influential leader of the early church. Though 120 followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Scripture records the words of Peter (Acts 2:14–40). Peter suggested that the apostles find a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:22). And he and John were the first disciples to perform a miracle after Pentecost, healing a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of Jerusalem (Acts 3:1–11).

The Book of Acts emphasizes the travels of Paul, yet Peter also traveled extensively. He visited Antioch (Gal. 2:21), Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11), and perhaps Rome. Eusebius states that Peter was crucified in Rome, probably during the reign of Nero.

Peter felt free to minister to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10) but he is best known as the apostle to the Jews (cf. Gal. 2:8). As Paul took a more active role in the work of the church and as the Jews became more hostile to Christianity, Peter faded into the background of the New Testament narrative.

The Roman Catholic church traces the authority of the Pope back to Peter, for it is alleged that Peter was bishop of the church at Rome when he died. Tradition says that the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome is built over the spot where Peter was buried. Modern excavations under the ancient church demonstrate a very old Roman cemetery and some graves hastily used for Christian burials. A careful reading of the Gospels and the early segment of Acts would tend to support the tradition that Peter was the leading figure of the early church. The tradition that Peter was the leading figure of the apostolic church has strong support.

CAESAREA PHILIPPI. *This town was situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, on the main source of the Jordan River. Here Christ asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter immediately replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).*

XI. Simon Zelotes. Matthew and Mark refer to a disciple named "Simon the Canaanite" (modern translations have "Canaanite," which is more correct), while Luke and the Book of Acts refer to one named "Simon Zelotes." These names refer to the same man. *Zelotes* is a Greek word that means "zealous one"; "Canaanite" is an English transliteration of the Aramaic word *kanna'ah*, which also means "zealous one"; thus it appears that this disciple belonged to the Jewish sect known as the Zealots. (See "Jews in New Testament Times.")



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The Scripture does not indicate when Simon Zelotes was invited to join the apostles. Tradition says that Jesus called him at the same time that He called Andrew and Peter, James and John, Judas Iscariot and Thaddeus (cf. Matt. 4:18–22).

We have several conflicting stories about the later ministry of this man. The Coptic church of Egypt says that he preached in Egypt, Africa, Great Britain, and Persia; other early sources agree that he ministered in the British Isles but this is doubtful. Nicephorus of Constantinople wrote: “Simeon born in Cana of Galilee who ... was surnamed Zelotes, having received the Holy Ghost from above, traveled through Egypt and Africa, then Mauretania and Libya, preaching the Gospel. And the same doctrine he taught to the Occidental Sea and the Isles called Britanniae.”

XII. Thomas. The Gospel of John gives us a more complete picture of the disciple named Thomas than we receive from the synoptic Gospels or the Book of Acts. John tells us he was also called Didymus (John 20:4) the Greek word for “twins” just as the Hebrew word *t’hom* means “twin.” The Latin Vulgate used Didymus as a proper name and that style was followed by most English versions until the twentieth century. The RSV and other recent translations refer to him as “Thomas called the Twin.”

We do not know who Thomas might have been, nor do we know anything about his family background or how he was invited to join the apostles. However, we know that Thomas joined six other disciples who returned to the fishing boats after Jesus was crucified (John 21:2–3). This suggested that he may have learned the fishing trade as a young man.

On one occasion Jesus told His disciples that He intended to return to Judea. His disciples warned Him not to go because of the hostility toward Him there. But Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16).

Yet modern readers often forget Thomas’s courage; he is more often remembered for his weakness and doubt. In the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” But Thomas retorted, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:4–5). After Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas told his friends, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). A few days later Jesus appeared to Thomas and the other disciples to give them physical proof that He was alive. Then Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

The early church fathers respected the example of Thomas. Augustine commented, “He doubted that we might not doubt.”

Tradition says that Thomas eventually became a missionary in India. It is said that he was martyred there and buried in Mylapore, now a suburb of Madras. His name is carried on by the very title of the Marthoma or “Master Thomas” church.

XIII. Judas’s Replacement. Following the death of Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter suggested that the disciples choose someone to replace the betrayer. Peter’s speech outlined certain qualifications for the new apostle (cf. Acts 1:15–22). The apostle had to know of Jesus “from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us.” He also had to be “a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).

The apostles found two men who met the qualifications: Joseph surnamed Justus and Matthias (Acts 1:23). They cast lots to decide the matter and the lot fell to Matthias.

The name Matthias is a variant of the Hebrew name *Mattathias*, which means “gift of God.” Unfortunately, Scripture tells us nothing about the ministry of Matthias. Eusebius speculated that Matthias would have been one of the 70 disciples that Jesus sent out on a preaching mission (cf. Luke 10:1–16). Some have identified him with Zaccheus (cf. Luke 19:2–8). One tradition says he preached to cannibals in Mesopotamia; another says he was stoned to death by the Jews. However, we have no evidence to support any of these stories.

Some scholars have suggested that Matthias was disqualified and the apostles chose James the brother of Jesus to take his place (cf. Gal. 1:19; 2:9). But there appear to have been more than 12 men thought of as apostles in the early church and Scripture gives us no indication that Matthias left the group.¹⁸

¹⁸ Packer, J. I., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., Jr. (1997). *Nelson’s illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (pp. 528–539). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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The Twelve Apostles

Matthew 10:2–4	Mark 3:16–19	Luke 6:13–16	Acts 1:13
Simon “Peter”	Simon “Peter”	Simon “Peter”	Peter
Andrew	James, son of Zebedee	Andrew	John
James, son of Zebedee	John	James	James
John	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James, son of Alphaeus			
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot	Judas, son of James	Judas, son of James
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

²⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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