

# Bartholomew

## The Disciple with Two Names

Joh 1:45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

### Introduction:

1. All we know about Bartholomew from the Bible is derived from 7 verses in John 1. (45-51)
2. Matthew, Mark and Luke contain no details about Bartholomew's background, character or personality
  - a. Those gospels only mention him once each in the list of apostles
  - b. John's gospel features Bartholomew in just two passages
3. Bartholomew came from the small town of Cana in Galilee which was close to Jesus' hometown of Nazareth
  - a. Philip and Bartholomew were apparently close friends
  - b. In each list of the apostles in the synoptic gospels Philip and Bartholomew were listed together

4. The mention of Nathanael is more detailed and more interesting than the other disciples mentioned
5. It is surprising that we are told so much about him in one chapter and yet we know almost nothing otherwise

## I. A MAN WITH A DOUBLE NAME

1. Actually the apostle we are now considering was Nathanael Bartholomew (Bar Tolmai)
  - a) *Most scholars believe that the Nathanael of John 1 is the Bartholomew of the other lists of apostles*
    - (1) Mat 10:3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;
    - (2) Mark 3:18 And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite,
    - (3) Luke 6:14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,
    - (4) Acts 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.
  - b) *It was common for a man to have more than one name*
  - c) *Remember that Simon was called Peter and Cephas*
  - d) *Matthew was called Levi*
  - e) *Lebbaeus, Thaddaeus and Judas are names of the same person*
2. Evidence that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person
  - a) *Nathanael is twice named by John and John places him among the first disciples to respond to the call of Jesus. The amount of space dedicated to his meeting Jesus would be wasted unless Nathanael is later elevated to Apostle*
  - b) *John mentions that Nathanael was one of the 7 disciples who went back to their fishing after the crucifixion of Christ (21:2) and it is*

*assumed that disciple there is the same as apostle*

- c) *In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the names of Philip and Bartholomew are linked together as John links Philip and Nathanael as companions*

## **II. A MAN WHO WAS INTRODUCED TO CHRIST BY A FRIEND**

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

1. What a manual on evangelism is John 1
2. John and Andrew followed John the Baptist – he pointed them to the Lamb of God and they follow Him. Andrew then found his brother Peter and brought him to the Savior.
3. Jesus found Philip and Philip found Nathanael and brought Him
4. We need to be ready to point others to Christ and say with Philip “Come and see”
5. It seems that Philip and Nathanael were friends before they were united in a higher fellowship in the Lord
6. Probably Philip and Nathanael became closer friends since they both began following the Savior
7. Nathanael was interested in the OT Scriptures and Philip went to him and said, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
  - a) *Philip didn't say, "I found a man who has a wonderful plan for your life."*
  - b) *He didn't say, "I found a man who will fix your marriage and your personal problems and give your life meaning."*
  - c) *Philip spoke of the fulfillment of OT prophecy - "We have found the Messiah"*
  - d) *Nathanael's heart was open to the truth and he was hungry to know the truth*

8. I wonder if there was a certain amount of surprise in the voice of Philip - "You'll never believe this, but Jesus the son of Joseph, the carpenter's son from Nazareth is the Messiah!"

### III. A MAN WHO LEARNED OF CHRIST'S OMNISCIENCE

48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

1. Before Nathanael knew all about Christ, Christ knew about him
2. John went on to say in 2:24, 25 "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."
3. We can appreciate why Nathanael asked in amazement "Whence knewest thou me?"
4. He and Jesus had never met, but Nathanael went away convinced that his secret thoughts and desires and acts were open to the Man from Nazareth
5. How sobering this truth of divine heart-knowledge and searching should be to us.
6. When sin approaches, let us never forget that the all-knowing Christ sees us

### IV. A MAN OF STRONG PREJUDICE

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

1. Philip mentioned that he found the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth
2. Nathanael's answer – "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"
  - a) *Although Nathanael had strong spiritual interests and had spend much time poring over the Scriptures, he was still human and he had prejudices.*
  - b) *He could have said, "But Philip, the prophet Micah says that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem."*
  - c) *He could have said, "But Philip, the Messiah is identified with*

*Jerusalem and will one day rule and reign there.*

3. Nazareth was little and had a poor reputation and was despised and Nathanael was not interested in anyone living / coming from there
  - a) *His answer was not a Biblical objection*
  - b) *His answer was not a rational objection*
  - c) *It was based on sheer emotion and bigotry*
4. Nazareth was a stopping place for caravans and brothels were everywhere
  - a) *Roads crossed there and Nazareth was a rough town.*
  - b) *The Judeans had little time for Galileans and the Galileans didn't care much for the Nazarenes.*
  - c) *Like KY and Ohio*
5. Nathanael was a Galilean himself and had experienced the contempt of those who were from Judea.
6. Nathanael was surprised that anything good could come from such a despised people as those from Nazareth – big things came from Jerusalem
7. Prejudices or preconceived ideas often prove the greatest obstacles in the way of acceptance of the gospel message
8. Philip was wise and did not stay to argue with Nathanael
  - a) *His own notions had disappeared when he met the Savior*
  - b) *He knew that Nathanael's would disappear too if he would just meet Christ*
  - c) *He knew that prejudices are rarely touched by arguments*
9. Remember that God takes pleasure in using the weak, lowly things of this world to confound the wise and powerful - 1Cor 1:27
10. God could also take a man blinded by prejudice and use him to help transform the world
11. "Come and see" is the right way to deal with prejudice

## **v. A MAN WITH DEEP RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS**

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

- The Lord did not rebuke him for his prejudices, but commended him for his virtues in a three-fold way
- Jesus saw what Nathanael could become – the world saw a cynic and Jesus saw a disciple  
Joh 2:25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

#### **A. His Trust – “here is a true Israelite”**

1. How amazing that the Lord’s first words were of commendation for all that he had already was – a true Israelite
2. Nathanael was a Jew – not just by birth – but by character and disposition
3. Nathanael was no hypocrite - His love for God and his desire to see the Messiah were genuine.
4. Jesus commended Nathanael’s trust in the God of Israel
5. This compliment of Jesus was spoken to the other disciples who were present and Nathanael heard it
6. Jesus testified to Nathanael’s honorable character
7. As an Israelite indeed, Nathanael was one who feared God
8. The man of Nazareth read the heart of the man of Cana

#### **B. His Transparency – “no guile”**

1. Nathanael Bartholomew was the personification of sincerity
2. Jesus had never met Nathanael, but he knew his heart and commended this sincerity
3. Jesus was familiar with the Pharisees and he knew how insincere they were
4. The word for guile here is the same word in the LXX for subtlety in

Gen 27:35 when Jacob cheated Esau of the blessing

5. There was no cunning or deceit in Nathanael, like there was in Jacob
6. Psalm 15 describes the guileless person
7. Many aspects of modern life are filled with trickery, deceit and fraud

### **C. His Rest – “under his fig-tree”**

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

1. Philip visited Nathanael at his home and talked to Nathanael while he sat under his fig-tree in his garden
2. Often, in the heat of the day, Nathanael would rest under the fig tree and pray and meditate – he would muse on the Scriptures and pour out his heart to the Lord there
3. He did not pray on the street corners to be seen like so many of the Pharisees
4. In the shade of the fig tree, in his own backyard he was unseen by any eye, but seen by the eye of him from whom nothing is hid
5. Only One knew of that time of prayer and now that One stood before Nathanael
6. Nathanael knew that he was standing before Someone who could see into his very heart with an omniscient eye

### **D. His Testimony – “thou art the Son of God, King of Israel”**

1. Just and devout Jews were looking for the coming of the Messiah
2. When Simeon held the babe in his arms, he rejoiced that he could die in peace for his eyes had seen Messiah
3. Nathanael had not heard very much, but from what he had heard, he knew that Jesus was the Son of God
4. None other than the Son of God could have penetrated the thoughts of his mind or interpreted the desires of his heart

5. John's whole gospel was written to prove that Jesus is the Son of God  
Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.
  - a) *He started out saying that Jesus was the divine Word*
  - b) *Every miracle and sign pointed out that Jesus was the Son of God*
  - c) *Nathanael already knew this fact*

## **VI. A MAN WHO WAS GRACIOUSLY REWARDED – JN 1:50-51**

50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

### **A. “Verily, Verily”**

1. This was the first time this appears in the NT
2. This is always connected with some deep truth that is about to be revealed

### **B. “Ye Shall See”**

1. Jesus told Nathanael that he would see greater things
2. Jesus then told the disciples nearby that they would see greater things

### **C. Angels Ascending and Descending**

1. This seems to be a clear allusion to Jacob's ladder in his dream at Bethel – Gen 28:12-13
2. Could it be that when Jesus saw Nathanael under the fig-tree reading the scriptures that he was reading this passage?
3. If so, then Nathanael would be glad to know that Jesus would be all to him that he was to the patriarch of old

Conclusion:

1. Early church records and tradition suggest that Nathanael ministered in India and Persia and took the gospel as far as Armenia
2. There is no reliable record of how he died - he was no doubt martyred
3. Nathanael was faithful to the end.