

Bartholomew / Nathanael

The sixth apostle named in Matthew's list of apostles is Bartholomew (Matthew 10:3). Little is said of Bartholomew in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). However, many equate Bartholomew with the Nathanael mentioned in John's Gospel.

Clarke offers four reasons why it is assumed Bartholomew of the Synoptics is the same as Nathanael from John's gospel. He reasons,

"1. That the evangelists who mention Bartholomew say nothing of Nathanael; and that St. John, who speaks of Nathanael, says nothing of Bartholomew...

3. The name of Bartholomew is not a proper name; it signifies the son of Ptolomy; and Nathanael might have been his own name.

4. St. John seems to rank Nathanael with the apostles, when he says that Peter and Thomas, the two sons of Zebedee, Nathanael, and two other disciples, being gone a fishing, Jesus showed himself to them, John 21:2-4."

In addition to this, it is also notable that James and John as well as Andrew and Peter are *coupled* together in the listing of the apostles just as they were *called* to the apostleship together. Thus, it is reasonable to assume Bartholomew's name follows Philip's because it was Philip who invited Nathanael to learn of Jesus (John 1:45).

If Nathanael is the same person as Bartholomew, there are useful lessons we may learn from John's gospel about this character.

First, Nathanael was honest about his prejudices while being open to change. Nathanael had been led to believe nothing "good" could "come out of Nazareth" (John 1:46). Thus, he was initially prejudiced against "Jesus of Nazareth." Nazareth was considered a crude, common city. Before Jesus, there was nothing notable or prestigious about it. Astute Jews would not predict the Messiah to come from such a city. Even so, when Nathanael is asked by Philip to "Come and see" he is willing to have an open mind toward Jesus and after a brief conversation confesses, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49).

We are born into a world, a nation and families filled with bias and prejudice. Some are prejudiced against Christianity, or even the "church of Christ." Yet, like Nathanael we need to be able to put prejudice aside enough to objectively consider the evidence and make a decision about the Lord and the church He purchased. Uneducated, closed-minded prejudices can be great obstacles.

Second, Nathanael is called an "Israelite indeed." Many could claim to be Israelites "in name." They may have worn the title but been quite ignorant of the Mosaic laws and customs. This was not the case with Nathanael. He was an Israelite in word and deed. Jesus can always use Christians who do more than wear the name. They live the life.

The one who does not live a life like Christ but pretends to be His follower comes across as insincere and cripples the Christian influence.

Finally, Nathanael was one "in whom is no deceit" (John 1:47). Many leading Jews in the days of Jesus were frauds. They were hypocrites. Their interest was not in truth, but keeping their presumed power and prestige. Largely, for this reason, they killed Jesus. He offered no earthly kingdom (John 18:36), he did not come to promote the Jewish Rabbi to worldly prosperity and did not applaud their willingness to keep selfish traditions instead of the Word. They were deceivers. This was not so with Nathanael.

Are you a "Christian" merely because of ulterior motives? Is it just for social or business reasons, to keep the family happy or because of mere tradition? Or, do you serve Christ out of a sincere belief that shines through in every facet of your life? The church needs less hypocrites and more Nathanael's.

As with most of the other apostles, Nathanael was reportedly a martyr for Christ— remaining loyal to the very end.