



Nathanael

Transformed People: The Twelve Apostles
(B.L. Newberry, Spring 2020)

Nathanael within the Twelve



Luke 6:14-16

Peter
Andrew
James
John

Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas

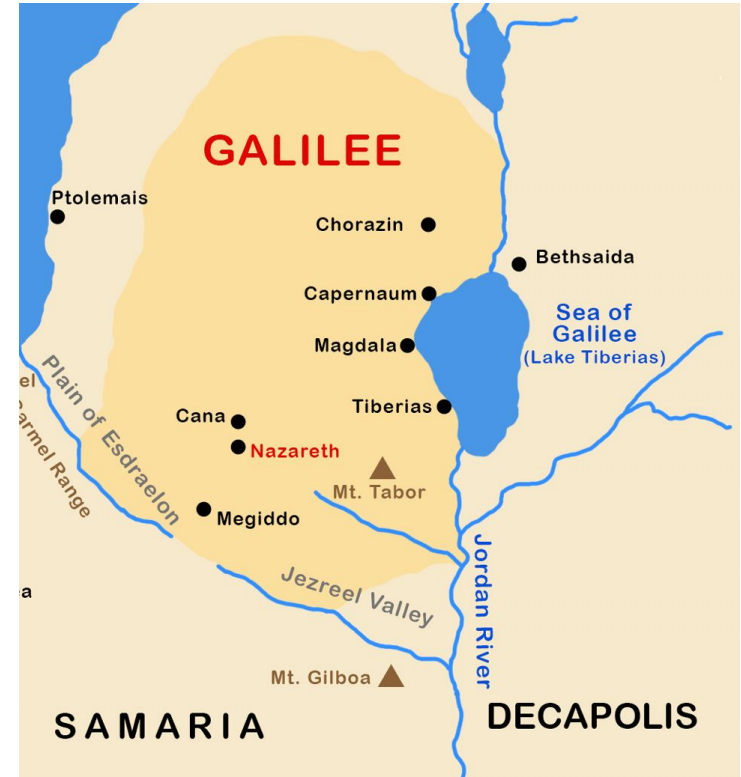
James (the less)
Simon
Thaddeus
Judas Iscariot

- Nathanael is likely the proper name. Bartholomew is a Hebrew surname meaning “son of Tolmai” ... Bar-Tolmai. The meaning of Nathanael is “God has given”. There are scholars that question if Bartholomew and Nathanael are one person.
- The gospels and Acts tell us very little of Nathanael. Only the Gospel of John has more than his name simply being listed.
John 1 ... the calling of Nathanael
John 21 ... Nathanael is included as one returning to Galilee
- Nathanael is always listed in combination with Philip. It would seem the two were close friends.

Nathanael's Home



- **John 21:2** states that Nathanael was “from Cana in Galilee”.
- Cana is the location of Jesus’ first recorded miracle (changing water to wine) and is near Nazareth.
- Cana was, otherwise, not a significant town (even less so than Nazareth). Travelers would routinely pass through Nazareth (due to a main road), but not Cana.



Nathanael's Calling



What we know of Nathanael comes from his calling ([John 1:43-51](#)):

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

Nathanael's Character

Struggles with Bias



- When Philip declares to Nathanael that he has found the Messiah, Nathanael's immediate reaction is doubt. **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”** Nazareth was looked down upon by most all of Galilee.
- It is unclear if this statement is one of prejudice (a common view of the day toward Nazareth) or one of simply doubt. Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament. What is clear is that Nathanael snapped to a judgment without full information. **We often do the same. Are we ever ready to assume without really knowing?**
- The best answer to bias ... “come and see”! It is desirable to seek rather than judge!

Nathanael's Character

An Honest Love for Scripture



- It is clear that both Philip and Nathanael are seekers wanting to find the Messiah. Philip is quick to share and Nathanael is quick to investigate. **Are we? This is a critical character trait for Christians (more on this to come).**
- Jesus states that Nathanael is “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” This is a powerful statement, given that Jesus will declare the religious establishment of the day as hypocritical. Nathanael, however, is pure (without deceit) in his pursuit to find the Messiah. Consider **Rom. 2:28-29**.
- Nathanael new scripture and uses Old Testament language. He says Jesus is the “Son of God” (**Psalm 2**) and the “King of Israel” (**Zeph. 3:15** and **Zech. 9:9**).

Nathanael's Character

A Sincere Heart to Follow



- The proclamations of Nathanael deserve more attention. Nathanael may have started from a place of bias, but he transitioned to a place of full commitment. We see Nathanael with understanding, at the time of his calling, that the other apostles still lacked at the crucifixion. Recall Philip's painful question to Jesus in the upper room.
- **Does it seem reasonable to reach this understanding so quickly? What does it take for this to happen?**
- The key is that Nathanael, with a pure heart, dwelled on scripture. He wanted to study and know God. Scripture is our lens into the heart of our Savior. (**John 8:31-32**)

Stories of Nathanael's Late Life

(Mix of historical and Biblical sources)



- Little is known of what happened to Nathanael after the resurrection of Jesus.
- Mixed accounts speak of him performing missionary work in India, Armenia, Ethiopia and South Arabia. One significant reference by Eusebius, who confirms his ministry in India, also states that he took the Gospel of Matthew to the people of India.
- His martyrdom is also controversial. Many accounts speak of him being skinned alive and then beheaded. In fact, Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* depicts Bartholomew displaying his skin. Others accounts speak of crucifixion and even drowning. It is impossible to be certain, **but all speak of his faith to the end as a martyr.**