

LEARNING TO FOLLOW JESUS WITH THE TWELVE APOSTLES

WHO ARE THE APOSTLES?

The word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” Before Jesus’ time, it was used for messengers, delegates, and ambassadors. It wasn’t specifically connected to any religion. Disciples included any who followed Jesus, but the apostles had a special role in the early leadership of the church. Some moments were shared by all the apostles: the sermon on the mount and other teachings, the feeding of the 5,000 miracle, walking on water, the Last Supper, Resurrection appearances, the commission to go out into the world and preach the Gospel, the Ascension, and the meeting to replace Judas Iscariot after his betrayal and death. Other conversations and moments happened with specific Apostles. As we get to know the Twelve, we will be focusing more on their unique moments with Jesus.

Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards

Bartholomew/Nathanael



Bart gets +2 to spiritual growth when meditating under a fig tree.
(John 1:43-51)

Born: 1st century AD in Cana in Judaea

Name(s): Bartholomew means “Son of Talmai” (either “son of furrows,” meaning “rich in land” or “son of war,” meaning “warlike”) OR Nathanael means “God has given,” “Gift of God”

Major Moments: Called with Philip, The Miraculous Catch of 153 Fish after the Resurrection

Death: 1st Century AD in Albanopolis, Armenia by being flayed alive and beheaded OR by being tortured and crucified upside down OR by being kidnapped, beaten unconscious, and thrown into the sea to drown

See Him in Art: You can recognize him because he either carries a knife or he carries his own skin

BACKGROUND & CALLING

Bartholomew is the name of an apostle who occurs in Matthew, Mark and Luke, while Nathanael only occurs in the Gospel of John. This has led many theologians and scholars to believe that they are the same person, perhaps named Nathanael Bartholomew (as in, Nathanael, son of Talmai). Let's look at his call story!

Bartholomew/Nathanael's Call Story (John 1:43-51)

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus found Philip and Philip found Bartholomew. In the Gospels, Philip and Bartholomew (or Philip and Nathanael) are always mentioned together. Think about your own spiritual journey. Who did Jesus send to find you? Who has been supportive in your faith? How are we called to find people for Jesus?
2. Nathanael's first response to news of Jesus is, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It's possible that he believed in the messiah, but thought that the messiah would come from Bethlehem, not some scrubby, backwater Judean village. Nathanael is skeptical, but he is honest about it. Jesus' first words to him are that he is not a liar – he's a straight shooter. Rather than punish his rudeness, Jesus embraces his forthrightness. Sometimes we think that we need to put on a nice face and say all the right things in our prayer life and in our work in the community and the world. Are there things that you want to say to God in prayer that you hesitate to say? Are there questions of faith that you want to ask, but worry about the consequences?

3. When Jesus meets Nathanael, he already knows him and tells him that he was sitting under a fig tree with Philip found him. In Jesus' day, fig trees were often used as a place to sit under for meditation. It's also possible that Jesus was referring to a passage from Hosea 9:10a in which God says, "Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors." Jesus saw Philip where he was in under a fig tree just as God called the chosen people into holy community. The same God who called in the past is calling now in the present. Do you feel God, Christ, Spirit calling you, seeing you, knowing you? Is this difficult to fathom? Joyful? Uncertain?

LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS

Bartholomew/Nathanael was present for the major events with Jesus, but there's only one other event where he's mentioned specifically:

-THE MIRACULOUS CATCH OF 153 FISH (JOHN 21:1-14)

This is the third resurrection appearance of Jesus. Seven Apostles were at the Sea of Tiberias in Galilee and they decided to go fishing together. They didn't catch anything all day or all night. Just after the dawn, Jesus appeared to them standing on the beach. They didn't recognize him. He knew that they had no fish and asked them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. Then it was so full of fish that they weren't able to haul it back up – 153 fish! The Beloved Disciple (never explicitly named) recognized Jesus. Peter swam to Jesus and the rest of the Apostles dragged the boat and net into shore. They all shared a beach barbecue breakfast and they all knew it was the Lord.

THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts mentions that Bartholomew was there for the Ascension and for the meeting to find a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot.

The Church has traditionally held that each of the Apostles had their own mission field. They came together and drew lots to find out where God wanted each of them to go. Here are a few traditions:

1. Bartholomew went to preach the Gospel in Greece, Phrygia (modern day central west Turkey), and Syria along with Philip and his sister Mariamne.
2. Another tradition says that Bartholomew went to India and brought them the Gospel of Matthew. From there, he went to Armenia. (Some say he evangelized Armenia with Judas Thaddeus.)
3. Yet another tradition claims that he evangelized Ethiopia, Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq), Parthia (modern day Iran), and Lycaonia (modern day south central Turkey).

The tale of his death is different depending on which tradition you follow. One is that he died in Albanopolis, Armenia by being flayed alive and beheaded (hence the image above). Others say that he was crucified upside down as a punishment for converting some royalty in Armenia. Others say he was kidnapped, beaten unconscious, and then thrown into the sea to drown.

LEGENDS


There's a small island off the coast of Sicily that claims that St. Bartholomew's body washed up on their shore. His feast day became a major celebration on this island. The church had an elaborate silver and gold statue in honor of the saint. Locals say that during World War II, some fascists came to the cathedral, looking to loot any valuable goods to fund their war efforts. They saw the silver and gold statue of Bartholomew and weighed it to see if it was worth melting down. Their scale said that it only weighed a few grams and so they gave it back. Little did they know that the statue actually weighed many kilograms!

PRAYER

God of wisdom, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle Bartholomew. Give us the courage to meet you honestly, to ask you questions, and to draw ever nearer to you. Help us to be people in whom there is no deceit so that we can build up the body of Christ all around. Amen.

Quick Glance with the Twelve Apostles Trading Cards

Judas Thaddaeus



When Jude travels with you, whole group gets +2 to warmth and courage.
(John 14:18-24)

Born: 1st century AD in Galilee

Name(s): called Jude the Apostle to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. Jude and Judas are short for Judah, which means “God be praised.” He is also called Thaddeus and Labbaeus, which mean “large-hearted” or “courageous.”

Major Moments: Jude Asks Jesus How He Will Reveal Himself to Us and Not to the World

Death: 1st Century AD in Persia or Ararat, Armenia. There is a tradition that he was martyred in Beirut, Syria with Simon the Zealot (another apostle).

See Him in Art: He often carries an axe, club, boat, oar, medallion, or carpenter's rule. Sometimes he holds an image of Christ.

BACKGROUND & CALLING

Jude was the son of James. His mother isn't mentioned by name. Some manuscripts of the Bible say that he was, "Lebbaeus, who was surnamed Thaddaeus" (Matthew 10:3 in the old King James). There is a tradition that he was a farmer and that he was a vegetarian, though this is not mentioned in scripture. Jude's call story is not told in the Bible, but he is mentioned in all three lists of the Apostles.

LIFE & TIMES WITH JESUS

Jude the Apostle was present for the major events with Jesus, but there's only one other event where he's mentioned specifically:

Jude Asks How Jesus Will Reveal Himself (John 14:18-24)

¹⁸ [Jesus said,] "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus makes this speech at the Last Supper. He has washed everyone's feet and commanded them to, "Love one another just as I have loved you." He foretold Peter's denial and told them, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." As Jesus prepares to die, he is promising to leave the Holy Spirit with them. Here, we are witness to an intimate moment where Jesus assures those closest to him that they are not being abandoned. Jesus promises that, though the world cannot see him, his followers can. How do you find Jesus in moments of suffering? Is it harder to find Jesus in those times or does it feel like he bears your burden with you?
2. Jude seems to speak from fear and grief, but his words are also words of love. When we feel like we are losing someone, we often try to hold them closer, to know them better, to

stay connected to them any way that we can. His question may be a simple matter of him not understanding what Jesus is saying or it could be him wanting to learn how to continue to have Jesus in his life after he suffers death. What do you think?

3. Jesus answers Jude that loving Jesus and keeping his word are the keys to staying connected to him. When we do this, he says, Jesus and the Father make their home with us. What do you think about this metaphor? How are our lives and our homes a home to our G-d? Are there ways we could make it cozier? Stronger? More welcoming?

THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts mentions that Jude was there for the Ascension and for the meeting to find a replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot.

The Church has traditionally held that each of the Apostles had their own mission field. They came together and drew lots to find out where God wanted each of them to go. Here are a few traditions:

1. Jude preached the Gospel nearby in Judea, Samaria, Idumaea (south of Israel), Syria, Mesopotamia, and Libya.
2. Another tradition says that he evangelized Armenia with Bartholomew.

Some believe that he was the writer of the Epistle of Jude, who describes himself as, “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (Jude 1:1). However, this could also refer to Jude, the brother of Jesus.

The tale of his death is different depending on which tradition you follow. He died in Persia or Ararat, Armenia, or possibly Beirut together with Simon the Zealot in 65 AD.

PRAYER

God of love, we pray to you as people who walk with your Apostle Jude. Help us to stay open hearted, warm hearted, and courageous as we follow you. Let us remember that we are called to love you as closely as anyone else in our lives and that you are always with us. Keep us firmly rooted in the ties that bind us in Christian love. Amen.

References

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