

Bible Heroes

Nathanael
Bartholomew

Teachers
notes



Essential Teachers notes:

For this story we are going to assume that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same character, while some scholars are more convinced of this than others, it is a widely held belief throughout many church traditions. His gift is honesty - sometimes translated as without deceit. Because his heart was open and honest, he could meet Jesus and see exactly who he was without reservation.

Main Passage : John 1

Additional Passages :

Do you have a nickname or another name people call you by?

How about a name that is something about you, perhaps a friend of Lisa, or neighbour to Mike?

I wonder if you have ever just been called a sister to... or a brother of... of a daughter or son?

People think today's bible hero had two names. Lots of people called him by his dad's name, they called him son of Tolomy - which in Aramaic is bar-tolomy or Bartholomew. Other people called him by his first name Nathanael.

Nathanael was praying about his two names one afternoon as he rested in the shade of his favourite fig tree. As he prayed he looked up at the branches twisting and turning over his head, sometimes one was easy to see and at other times it was hidden behind another. But all the branches were part of the same tree. Perhaps names were like that, they didn't matter as much as the person who held them.

Who was Nathanael really? He was a good man, an honest man, a part of the great family of Israel. He had listened to the scriptures, listened to the newest prophet John the Baptist and heard the truth in his words, he was expecting God's son to come soon. He wasn't an Israelite like the temple leaders, they would try and trick you into paying more taxes to the temple. He wasn't an Israelite like the Zealots either, they would use God's words to bring war against the Romans. No Nathanael was a simple fisherman, trying to live an honest life he thought would please God.

Nathanael was trying to think of a name that meant honest when the peaceful day was interrupted by his best friend Philip running towards his tree shouting his name like the house was on fire.

"We've found him, We've found him" shouted Philip, he was so excited he was dancing on the spot.

"Found who" asked Nathanael

"The one the prophets wrote about, Moses wrote about. His name is Jesus, the one from Nazareth."

Nathanael had been to Nazareth once, he didn't like it much.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" he wondered out loud

"Come and see Nathanael, come and see" cried Philip and started bouncing back the way he had come.

Nathanael had to run to keep up. Jesus stood with a few people near the waterside.

"Look" said Jesus pointing towards Nathanael as he got near, "Look this is a true Israelite, and an honest one!"

Nathanael stopped walking, he'd never met this Jesus, how did he know him, and how did he know what he'd just been praying about.

Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?"

Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Jesus had seen him, really seen him, seen right into his prayers or he wouldn't have used those words. Those words were so true Philip must be right.

Nathanael smiled, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

Nathanael was honest, he knew when someone was telling the truth too, and he believed those words. He would see great things if he followed this Jesus. And so he did, he followed Jesus and became one of his disciples, one of his 12 special disciples.

Today's hero is Nathanael, because he shows us the gift of Honesty

Ps. What does your name mean? Nathanel means gift from God. Amine is the Hebrew name for Honesty.