

Who was Thomas in the Bible?

Thomas was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, Thomas was also called Didymus (John 11:16; 20:24), which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Thomas, both meaning “twin.” Scripture does not give us the name of Thomas’s twin.

In the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—Thomas is mentioned only in the listings of the apostles (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). In the Gospel of John, Thomas plays a leading role in two significant accounts.

Near the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, some people in Judea were plotting the Lord’s demise. It was during this time that Jesus and the disciples received the news that their friend Lazarus was at the point of death (John 11:1-3). Fearing for their lives, the disciples tried to talk Jesus out of returning to Lazarus’ hometown of Bethany, which was near Jerusalem where death threats certainly awaited them. Jesus was set on going, however, and Thomas spoke to his fellow disciples: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). Thomas’s readiness to stay with Jesus despite the consequences is noteworthy. Although his outlook may have been pessimistic and his words rather gloomy, Thomas demonstrated extreme loyalty to Jesus.

We learn from the life of Thomas that he was deeply committed to His master, and yet he struggled with doubts and questions. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to a group of His disciples in a closed room. For some reason, Thomas was not with them for this supremely significant event (John 20:19-24). When the disciples later told Thomas they had seen the resurrected Lord, he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

With those famous words, Thomas earned a nickname that he would be remembered by throughout history—Doubting Thomas. For Thomas, and for many of us, seeing is believing. But Thomas's skepticism was not the same as worldly opposition to the truth. His doubt represents a genuine, truth-loving quest. Earlier, Jesus had warned the disciples of His imminent departure and that He was going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them. The disciples were confused by Jesus' mysterious language. Thomas' honest skepticism and inquisitive nature prompted him to be the first to ask, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Jesus answered Thomas with these notable words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus wasn't talking about knowing a route or a location but about knowing a person.

When Thomas told the other disciples that he needed proof to believe that Jesus had risen, he was speaking honestly. Sincere faith does not prohibit sincere investigation. Eight days after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples met together again. This time Thomas was present. Jesus appeared to them once more and invited Thomas to touch the wounds and see for himself: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). Jesus knew what Thomas needed to believe, and He provided the evidence.

Jesus lovingly met Thomas at the exact point of his need and then guided him back to faith. We can be honest with God about our doubts and questions; He understands our struggles and is quite capable of strengthening our faith. Like Thomas, we will be able to confess, "My Lord and my God!" in full confidence of who Jesus is (John 20:28).

After Jesus confirmed Thomas's faith, He addressed all future readers of John's Gospel with these words: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, NKJV). These words reach down through the ages to help and encourage all of us who have not seen the resurrected Christ and yet have believed in Him.

Some days later, Thomas was fishing with Peter and the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:2). The final mention of Thomas is in Act 1:13, where he is listed among the disciples. Extrabiblical writings and Christian tradition hold that Thomas took the gospel to either Parthia or India and that he was martyred for his faith.

In the end, the nickname "Doubting Thomas" is a rather unfortunate one. It's true that Thomas demanded evidence of the miracle of Christ's resurrection before he accepted the truth. Doubt factored into his response to his friends, but it was not the defining quality of his life. Thomas should be better known for his loyalty, his obedience to the gospel, and his faith.