

The Apostle Thomas: Didymus? Let's Be Bible Detectives!

by Joelee Chamberlain

Have you ever heard the expression "doubting Thomas"? It means someone who doesn't believe what he's told. But do you know where that expression comes from? Why, it comes from something that happened in the Bible! Yes, there was a man in the Bible named Thomas. He was one of the apostles of Jesus, and at one point in his life he didn't believe what the other apostles told him that they had seen; Thomas doubted what they'd said. Well, today I thought we'd talk about what the Bible tells us about Thomas. And we'll find out when he doubted, too, when he didn't believe something he was told. Would you like that?

As I just said, Thomas was one of Jesus' apostles, so where in the Bible would we look to find out about Thomas? That's right, in the New Testament, of course! After all, the New Testament starts when Jesus was born, doesn't it? So, except for the Old Testament prophecies, anything to do with Jesus when He was here on earth would be in the New Testament, wouldn't it? Especially in the 4 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, those 4 books of the Bible that tell about what Jesus did when He was here on earth. (Remember, "gospel" means "good news", the good news about Jesus.)

Now we often find things in the New Testament about what all of the apostles did as a group. This group would, of course, include Thomas, but Thomas' name is actually only mentioned 12 times in the whole Bible!

Yes, only 12 times! But four of those times Thomas' name is just mentioned in a list with the names of all of the other apostles together as a group: One time in each of the 3 Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and then once in the book of Acts. But the rest of the times, the other 8 times when the Bible says Thomas' name, the Bible tells about something Thomas actually did or said. And these other 8 times are all found only in the Gospel of John.

So since the Bible says so little about Thomas, how are we going to find out about him? Well, today let's act like we're detectives! Let's be "Bible detectives" and really "investigate"! Let's look into the New Testament to see what it says about Thomas himself. That sounds like fun, doesn't it?!

Of course, a detective has all sorts of tools he uses, doesn't he? Like a magnifying glass or a camera or something to take fingerprints. And he may also have a translator. His translator would be a person who knows another language that the detective himself doesn't know. And then the translator can tell the detective what someone else is saying in another language.

These tools help the detective find out about things. Well, a Bible detective has "tools", too, but these tools are all special books that actually are easy to use. I'll tell you about them as we go along here.

Okay, to start with, how do I know that Thomas' name is only found in just those 12 places, as I just mentioned? Do you think I had to read through the whole New Testament to see where his name was? No! I used one of my Bible detective tools!

You see, there is a great big book called a con-cor-dance. It is sort of like a dictionary. The concordance gives lists of nearly all of the words in the Bible (imagine that!) and where those many, many words can be found in the Bible. So I looked up "Thomas" in my big concordance, and it gave me a list of all of the places in the Bible where there is the name of "Thomas". It listed the 1 verse each in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts that I told you about earlier where Thomas' name is just given in a list along with the names of all of the other apostles. And then the concordance also listed the only other verses where Thomas is talked about by name, which, as I said before, are all in the book of John. So, now I can look up those verses in my Bible and be able to tell you about Thomas! Now, wasn't that easy?! The concordance is a good Bible detective tool, isn't it?! (Many Bibles have a small concordance in the back that has some of the Bible words in it. These can be a help, too, though not so much of a help as a big concordance.)

So let's start out by looking at the actual name of Thomas. First, though, we need to remember that though Rome was ruling the world at that time, the common language that was spoken all over the big Roman empire was Greek. Well, as I've told you at other times, often at that time the Jews had two names, a Jewish name and a Greek name. And the Bible tells us that Thomas had two names. The Bible says, "Thomas who was called Didymus." You see, "Thomas" was his Jewish name and "Didymus" was his Greek name. Well, often names mean something in other languages, and both of Thomas' names (both Thomas and Didymus) mean "twin". So it is thought that probably Thomas had a twin brother or sister. But the Bible doesn't say anything about that, so of course we don't know for sure.

But again, how do I know that Thomas and Didymus both mean "twin"? Do I know the Jewish language and the Greek language? No, I don't! I only know English! So I needed a translator, didn't I? So again I used one of my Bible detective tools. This time it was a book that is called a lex-i-con. A lexicon is something else that is sort of like a dictionary. A lexicon tells you what language a word came from and then what that word means in English. So my lexicon is a translator for me, isn't it?! You can get separate books that are lexicons, but my big concordance has a lexicon in the back of it, so I used that.

You see, my concordance has a number beside each word that is looked up, and then that number shows where in the lexicon part to find that word. So I got the numbers for both Thomas and Didymus from my big concordance, and then I used those numbers to look up the words "Thomas" and then "Didymus" in the lexicon. And in both places in the lexicon it said that they meant "twin". So that's how I know that "Thomas" and "Didymus" mean "twin"! And now you know, too! It's fun being a detective and having all of these sorts of tools, isn't it?! (Maybe you know someone with a big concordance that has a lexicon in it who can show you this. I think it's very interesting.)

So those are our first two Bible detective tools: A concordance and a lexicon. A concordance lists all the times a word is used in the Bible and where to find that word in the Bible, and a lexicon tells us what the word means in English.

All right, so we found out about Thomas' name, that he had both a Jewish name and Greek name and that both of them mean "twin." But what does the Bible tell us about Thomas himself? Let's look and find out. First we'll look at the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Okay. One time a lot of followers of Jesus, His disciples, were together. That night Jesus, the Son of God, spent the night on a mountainside praying to God the Father. But the next morning Jesus called His disciples to Him, and then Jesus chose from among His many disciples, twelve of these disciples to be apostles. Jesus chose Thomas and Peter and Andrew and James and John and 8 others of His disciples to be His apostles. (I've talked about Peter with you before, haven't I?)

Now, what is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? I looked those words up in my lexicon, too. The lexicon says that the word "disciple" means someone who learns from someone else, and the word "apostle" means someone who is sent out.

You see, Jesus had many disciples who learned from Him. But from among those many disciples, He was choosing only 12 to be apostles. Jesus was going to especially teach those 12 men. Then Jesus was going to send out especially those 12 (Thomas and Peter and the others) to tell people how to be saved from their sins and then how to follow God.

So Thomas and the other 11 apostles went with Jesus all of the time, and Jesus taught them about the kingdom of heaven. And the apostles saw Jesus perform many miracles. And Jesus gave to His 12 apostles special power from the Holy Spirit so that they would be able to heal people. That way people would know that the apostles were from God and would listen to what they had to say.

Then Jesus sent out His 12 apostles to do this. And it seems that He sent them out in pairs, two by two. It sounds as if Peter and his brother Andrew went together. And James and his brother John (who later wrote the Gospel of John) went together. And Thomas and another apostle named Matthew (who later wrote the Gospel of Matthew) went together. And so on. And they all 12 went out, healing people and preaching. Then after a while Thomas and Matthew and the 10 other apostles all came back and reported to Jesus all that they had done.

So let's see, now. The books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke told us about those times, when Thomas is just mentioned along with the rest of the apostles. But now let's turn to the book of John in the New Testament part of the Bible. There we'll find the 8 times that John mentions Thomas by name.

All right then. One day someone came and told Jesus that his good friend, a man named Lazarus, was very sick. Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha lived near Jerusalem. Two

days after hearing this Jesus said, "Let's go there."

Well, when Jesus said they were going to go near Jerusalem, His apostles said to Him, "But Master, just a little while ago the Jews there wanted to stone you! And you're going there again?!"

But Jesus wanted to go anyway. And He said to His apostles, "Lazarus is dead. But I'm glad I wasn't there then, as this will be a way to help you believe." (In a minute I'll tell you what Jesus meant by this.)

Then Thomas spoke up and said to the other apostles, "Let's go, too, so that we can die with Him."

Now, I think it was the right thing for Thomas to be willing to go with Jesus when it sounded dangerous, don't you? But I think he should have trusted Jesus more; because, after all, remember that Jesus had said that this would be a way to help them believe, hadn't He?

Anyway, they all went there, near Jerusalem where Mary and Martha lived. And Mary and Martha were crying about their dead brother.

But guess what Jesus did then?! Why, Jesus made Lazarus alive again! Wow!! (The Lord Jesus can do anything, can't He?!) And the apostles saw when Jesus did this. And this big miracle would help the apostles to trust Jesus more, wouldn't it? And that's what Jesus had meant when He'd said that He was glad He hadn't been there earlier, that it would help them believe! Seeing Jesus' great power would help them to trust Him more.

And many other people saw this miracle, too. They saw Lazarus now alive. And then many more people believed on Jesus. Now, this was a good thing, and you'd think this would make everyone happy, wouldn't it? But it didn't! And I'm going to tell you why not.

But first, remember now, Jesus and all of the apostles were Jewish, and most of the believers in Jesus at that time were Jewish, too. And some of the Jews believed in Jesus, but other Jews didn't.

Well, some of the Jewish people who did not believe in Jesus went into the city of Jerusalem, and they told the Jewish leaders there about what had happened, how Jesus had made Lazarus to be alive again. Now, most of these Jewish leaders didn't believe in Jesus either, and they didn't even like Him. Why not? Because they were jealous of Jesus because so many people were listening to Jesus now and not so much to them. And that's why they were unhappy when Jesus made Lazarus alive again; because this miracle had more and more people believing in Jesus. So they wanted to kill Jesus! Can you imagine that?! Wanting to kill someone who was doing all those good things! Being jealous is very bad, isn't it? Being jealous can make us think bad things or even do bad things. We should be happy for other people when they do good things or have good things, shouldn't we? But those leaders weren't. And Jesus knew all of this,

that they wanted to kill Him, so for a while He went out into the countryside.

Well, it got close to the time when Jesus would do what He'd come to earth to do. And do you remember what that was? Yes, God the Father loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus, God the Son (who loves us very much, too). God the Father sent Jesus to earth to die on the cross for our sins, didn't He? And it was getting close to Passover time, so Jesus and His apostles went back to Jerusalem. The Lord's temple was in Jerusalem, and that's where the Jews went at Passover time. (I've told you about Passover at other times, haven't I?)

Well, Passover came, and that evening Jesus and His apostles were eating the Passover dinner together. And Jesus began explaining to them that He was going to die but that then He would be resurrected, be alive again. But the apostles didn't understand what He was saying.

Then Jesus said, "I am going away." (He meant to heaven).

He said, "I am going away to fix up a place for you so you can be with me. You know where I'm going, and you know the way."

Then Thomas said to Jesus, "But Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way there?"

Then Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one can go to God except by me."

Of course, Jesus meant that the only way we can be right with God the Father and be able to go to heaven when we die is by trusting Jesus to save us from our sins. But Thomas and the other apostles still didn't understand this.

Well, later that very night Jesus was arrested. And the next day He was put on the cross and died there. Then Jesus was buried in a cave-tomb. And the apostles were very, very sad. They still didn't understand that this all had to happen. Not only was that the only way to make it so that people could be saved from their sins and be able to go to heaven when they died, but also it had to happen because hundreds of years before, God's prophets had said that it would happen. Jesus' dying for our sins fulfilled these prophecies, these promises of a Saviour. Yes, God always keeps His promises, doesn't He?!

So Jesus was dead, and He was buried. But 3 days later, on a Sunday that we now call Easter Sunday, do you remember what happened then?! Yes!! Jesus was resurrected! He was alive again!! And though He's in heaven now, Jesus is still alive today, isn't He?!

Well, the first people to see Jesus alive again were some women, and they were so happy! And they ran to where the other believers were all sad and crying. And the women told them that Jesus was alive again! -- But the others didn't believe the women!

But that night all of the apostles except Thomas were together in a room, and the door was locked. When guess what happened?! Why, suddenly Jesus Himself was there in the room with them! And they were scared! They thought He was a ghost! But Jesus told them, "Why are you so scared? Touch me. I'm real!" And Jesus showed them the places in his hands and feet where the nails had been put when He had been nailed to the cross. And He showed them the place in His side where He had been stabbed while on the cross.

But the apostles were so happy and amazed that they still didn't believe it was really Jesus alive again! So Jesus said, "Give me something to eat." So they did, and Jesus ate it. After all, a ghost couldn't eat!

So then they believed that it was really Jesus and that Jesus was really alive. And they were very happy.

Now, remember I'd said that Thomas wasn't with them when this happened, didn't I? Well, later the others told Thomas, "We've seen the Lord!"

Do you think that made Thomas all happy now? No! But why not?! Because Thomas did not believe them!! In fact, Thomas said, "Unless I can see the marks the nails made in His hands when they put Him on the cross and put my finger in the nail holes, and unless I can put my hand in the stab wound in His side, I won't believe that Jesus is alive!"

Thomas doubted that Jesus was alive, didn't he? (Remember, "doubt" means not to believe something.) Thomas doubted even when his close friends had just told him it was true and that they had actually seen Jesus alive. And that is where we get the expression of "doubting Thomas"!

Well, a whole week went by. Thomas would still be sad all that week, wouldn't he? Yes, Thomas would still be believing that Jesus was dead, so he would be unhappy. But the other apostles would be happy, because they knew that Jesus was really alive. Right?

Well then, a week after the others had seen Jesus, they were all gathered together in the house again. This time Thomas was with them, too. And again the doors were locked. But guess what happened again?! Yes! Again Jesus was suddenly there with them, standing inside the locked room! And Jesus said, "Peace be with you."

Then Jesus said right to Thomas, "Reach out your finger; see my hands? And reach out your hand and put it into my side."

And Jesus said to Thomas, "Stop doubting and believe."

Well! Thomas knew then that Jesus was really and truly alive! And Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

Yes, Jesus is really our Master, our Lord, and He is really God, isn't He? Just as Thomas said.

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "You believe because you have seen Me. Blessed are those who have not seen Me but still believe."

But what does that mean? "Blessed are those who have not seen Jesus but still believe?" Now to start with, remember the lexicon that tells what words mean in English? Well, the lexicon tells that the Greek word for "bless-ed" (or "blest") means "happy". And so those who have never actually seen Jesus, like you and me, but who believe in Jesus, that He died for our sins and is alive again, those who believe, who trust in Jesus, those people are happy (blessed) because they know that they are saved from their sins and will be with Jesus forever and ever when they die. That's what God promises us in the Bible, and God always keeps His promises, doesn't He? I haven't actually seen Jesus myself. But I believe that about Jesus, and I've trusted the Lord Jesus to save me, and I know that someday I can go to heaven and be with Him. And that makes me happy. I am blessed, because I believe what the Bible says about Jesus. How about you?

But back to Thomas. Thomas now knew that Jesus was alive, and he was happy about it now, too.

Well, the apostles were told to leave Jerusalem and to go up to Galilee and wait for Jesus there, so they did. And it wasn't just a couple of miles away from where they were in Jerusalem, either. It was about 80 miles away!

Now how do I know that? How do I know they had to travel about 80 miles? After all, I've never been to Israel! And the Bible doesn't even tell us how far it is! Why, I know it because I was being a Bible detective, and I used another of my "Bible detective tools". This tool is called a Bible atlas. An atlas is a book that has maps; and a Bible atlas is a book that has maps that show places that the Bible talks about. And an atlas has little marks that can show how far away places are from each other. So on one of the maps in my Bible atlas, I just measured the distance between Jerusalem where they were to Galilee where they went, and then I compared that measurement to the little marks. Now wasn't that easy?! Most maps have these little marks. Maybe you can ask someone to show you how to do this on a map.

Anyway, the apostles did as they were told and went the about 80 miles up to Galilee. Now, there is a big lake in Galilee called the Sea of Galilee. And several of the apostles were fishermen and had lived near this big lake. They would catch fish and eat them or sell them. So one night while they were waiting for Jesus, Thomas and Peter and James and John and 3 others of the apostles were there by the Sea of Galilee, and Peter said, "I'm going to go fishing."

So Peter and Thomas and the others got into the fishing boat and went out and fished all night long. But they didn't catch any fish at all. When it was morning, they were about a block from the shore, and Jesus was there on the shore.

Jesus called out to them, "Friends, do you have any fish?"

Of course, they said, "No."

Then Jesus said, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat and you'll get some."

So Thomas and the others threw the fishing net out over the right side of the boat, and what do you think happened then? Yes! The net got full of fish! In fact, it was so full of fish that they couldn't even pull the net back into the boat! (The Bible even tells us that there were 153 fish in that net!) Then they knew that this was a miracle and that it was Jesus there on the shore who had told them to do this. And they quickly rowed the boat back to shore, dragging the heavy net full of fish behind them.

When they got to shore, Jesus already had fish cooking on a fire made with coals and some bread for them to eat. And that's all that we hear about Thomas at that time.

Well, as I said at the beginning of our time together today, the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke only mention Thomas by name in the list of the names of the other apostles. But from where did we get all of the actual little stories about Thomas that I've just told you? That's right! From the book of John. And the only other time we ever hear of Thomas again by name in the Bible is in the very first part of the book of Acts. So let's look at Acts now.

It was after Jesus had been alive again here on earth for 40 days. And Jesus and His apostles had gone back to Jerusalem. Well, one day the apostles had gone outside of Jerusalem with Jesus, and Jesus talked to them. Then suddenly Jesus just started going up into the sky! The apostles all just stood there and stared at Jesus as He went up into the clouds to heaven! And suddenly 2 angels were standing there with them and said to them, "Why are you staring up into heaven like that? Jesus is coming back to earth again the same way He went up into heaven."

And we know that someday the Lord Jesus will come back to earth again, don't we? Yes, the Bible tells us that. The Lord Jesus will come out of heaven and down to earth again, and then He will be the King of everyone and everything forever! Won't that be wonderful!?

But let's get back to the apostles. Well, they were watching Jesus go back to heaven, weren't they? But before He had gone back to heaven, Jesus had told the apostles to stay in the city of Jerusalem for a while. So after they had watched Jesus go back into heaven and the 2 angels had spoken to them, they all went back inside the city and into an upper room. There were Peter and Andrew and James and John and Thomas and Matthew and the others. And they were there praying along with other men and women who loved God and believed in Jesus.

And that is that last time that the Bible ever mentions Thomas' name. The Bible just doesn't tell us what happened to Thomas after that or what he himself did. Of course, he was probably with the other apostles when they did the things that are told in the first part of the

book of Acts, but his name isn't actually mentioned. And also, since Thomas was an apostle, one whom Jesus had chosen to send out, we know that Thomas must have gone out and preached about Jesus. But we are given no details or stories that are especially about him in the Bible anymore.

Now, there are some people who think that Thomas may have gone far away from Jerusalem clear over to the country of Persia, and other people think he may have gone way over to India. Maybe he did; I don't know. But, as I just said, the Bible doesn't tell us where Thomas went then, so I don't actually know for sure just where he went. And we need to be careful when the Bible itself doesn't tell us something, don't we? But what we can know for sure is that since Thomas was an apostle, he would have gone out and told people how to be saved from their sins and be able to go to heaven by just believing in Jesus, by trusting in Him. After all, everyone all over the world needs to hear the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, don't they?

So we've have a good time being detectives today, haven't we? And I told you about some of my Bible detective tools, didn't I? Let's see, now, what tools did I tell you that I used today? Yes, the concordance that showed me all of the places where the words "Thomas" and "Didymus" were found in the Bible. And the lexicon which told me that those names both meant "twin" and what the words "disciple" and "apostle" meant. And the Bible atlas where there were maps so I could find out about how far it was from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee.

But I have other Bible tools that I used today, too. I have a book called a Bible dictionary. A Bible dictionary tells all sorts of interesting things about things in the Bible. Like what the land is like around the Sea of Galilee or just who different people are in history at the time of the Bible. And it tells about the times that Thomas is talked about, and it also told about his Greek name of Didymus. The Bible dictionary also tells different historical things or other ideas people have. But I have to remember that the Bible dictionary is something that is just put together by people now; it is just what people say, not the Bible itself. After all, only the Bible is the Bible! Books about the Bible aren't really the Bible, are they?! The Bible itself has no mistakes in it because God let the people then know what to write; but books about the Bible might have mistakes in them. So we have to be careful, don't we?

But I also have another tool I used today that is just made from the Bible. It is a book called a "Harmony of the Gospels." The Harmony of the Gospels has all 4 Gospels in it, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and it just goes through all of them at the same time, each page showing them. If all of 4 Gospels talk about the same thing (for instance, when they tell that Jesus was put on the cross), then the Harmony of the Gospels shows on each page what each Gospel says about it. That way you can get all of the Bible details at the same time. But if, say, only one Gospel tells about something, like (though we didn't talk about it today) like when only Luke tells about when Jesus was born and the angels told the shepherds about it, then the Harmony of the Gospels only shows on that page what Luke said then. That way you know, "Oh, the story of the shepherds in the Christmas story is only found in the Gospel of Luke." I use my Harmony of the Gospels a whole lot when I tell you stories about Jesus or other stories from the 4 Gospels. That way I know I'm not leaving out any interesting details. Oh, this book is

called a "harmony" of the Gospels because it has 4 places together on the same page, sort of like when 4 people sing together in harmony.

Did you notice that all of my Bible detective tools are books? So what book-tools did I use today when I was being a Bible detective? Yes, I used a concordance and a lexicon and a Bible dictionary and a Bible atlas and a harmony of the Gospels. Those are all wonderful "tools" that Bible detectives can use, and I have fun using them. When you get bigger you can be a Bible detective and use them and have fun, too.

Did you like being a Bible detective with me today? I hope so.