

No Names/ Who was that Masked Man?

Names play an important role in the Bible. While major characters such as Peter, Paul and John, Mary and Joseph, King Herod and Pontius Pilate are named, minor characters are often not given a name. However, some minor characters do receive a name such as Simon of Cyrene who helped Jesus carry his Cross, Zacchaeus, the tax collector with whom Jesus ate dinner, and Barabbas, the criminal who won his release instead of Jesus. but there are plenty of examples of characters with no name. This creates intrigue about these characters, similar to the mystery that surrounded the masked Lone Ranger (an old TV Western) which led people to ask, "Who was that masked man?"

Biblical Examples

Women

Wives: Cain, Noah, Lot, , Moses' Cushite wife, Job, Pontius Pilate

Daughters: Adam, Lot, Pharaoh's daughter, Jephthah, Herodius, Philip

Mothers: Samson, David

Role models: Widow with Oil, The Queen of Sheba, Widow with mite, Syrophenician woman (Matt 15:21-28), Woman who poured perfume (Luke 7:36-50), Samaritan Woman

Negative Role models: Potiphar's wife, Witch of Endor

Men:

Pharaoh, Man born Blind (John 9), Magi, Thieves crucified with Jesus, Ethiopian Eunuch

Unnamed who change the course of History

- Man who pointed Joseph to Dothan (Gen 37)
- Fellow inmate who identified Joseph as a dream interpreter

Unusual cases:

- Sometimes anonymous figures have their given names later identified: Amram and Jochebed/Miriam) and Pharaoh's magicians: Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8).
- Saul's entire life is bookended by 2 unnamed characters (1 Sam 9:3 with 31:4) Also his Uncle in unnamed 10:14 and court assistant 16:18)
- Some characters are "known" but unnamed (John 18:16 "the Beloved Disciple"- John This cloaking is done in order to allow readers to identify more closely with those who exhibit appropriate belief-responses. Another example is John Mark in Mark's gospel.

Whys and So what's:

- Sometimes it fits the author's goal of minimizing some figures (Pharaoh)
- Yet, the absence of a name does not always indicate insignificance or divine disfavor. Only a couple of angels are named and some unnamed figures are worthy of honor (Woman who poured perfume -Luke 7:36-50).
- Studies on characterization have shown that authors use anonymous characters in a story to draw the reader or listener more closely into the detail of the action and the point of view of the author expressed in the account.
- May have been a literary device for readers to put themselves in the place of these unnamed characters (disciples on the road to Emmaus – one is named (Clopas) but not the other)