

JACOB'S LADDER

John 1:43-51

Pastor Keith Gephart

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of John's Gospel presents an amazing portrait of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Please note the various names and titles attributed to Him:

Logos (1); God (1); Light (4); true Light (9); only begotten of the Father (14); a greater than John (15, 26-27, 30); Jesus Christ (17); only begotten God (18); Lord (23); Lamb of God (29, 36); baptizer in the Holy Spirit (33); [Chosen One (34) or Son of God]; Son of God (49); Rabbi (38, 49); Messiah (41); object of Prophecies (45); King of Israel (49).

But John is not finished. He has one more title to give to Him—one that Jesus Christ chose to use for himself; no other New Testament writer used it of Him. Only Stephen in Acts 7 uses the term of Christ. That term is **SON OF MAN** (51).

We will discover in this message why this is the one title that Jesus prefers to use for himself. We will also discover the calling of the fifth and sixth disciples (apostles). In fact, there are **three** major discoveries we will make in this passage:

- 1) Discovery of two more Disciples (43-46)
- 2) Discovery of Jesus' true Nature (47-49)
- 3) Discovery of the Way to Reunite Heaven and Earth (50-51)

In fact, **you will learn how to climb up "Jacob's Ladder"!**

I. DISCOVERY OF DISCIPLES (43-46)

SO far, **four** disciples have come to the Lord: Andrew, John, Peter, and (we assume) James. In this passage we see the calling of numbers **five and six**—Philip and Nathaniel (Bartholomew).

A. Jesus' Calling of Philip (43-44)

1. His purpose: "To go forth into Galilee"
2. His search—"He found Philip ("lover of horses"—only one of two (Andrew) with Greek names.
3. His call—"Follow Me."—First disciple whom Jesus specifically called.
4. His character: 6:7—not enough food
12:21-22—What to do with the Greeks—took to Andrew.
14:8-9—Ask for Jesus to show them the Father

Note, he didn't seek Jesus; Jesus sought him. He seemed quite an ordinary person. How about you? Are you ordinary?

5. His home-town (Bethsaida—44) "House of fishing"

The home of Andrew and Peter. Had they all been disciples of John?

- B. Philip's Finding of Nathaniel (45-46) [Name means "God has given.")
Nathaniel not mentioned in the other gospels (cf. Jn. 21:2)
Cf. our "Theodore". This is **not** another name for Matthew "Gift of God")

[*Same disciple as Bartholomew.*

1. Bartholomew never mentioned in John.
2. Bartholomew is coupled with Philip in all 3 synoptic gospels.
3. Bartholomew mentioned after Thomas in Acts 1:13, as Nathaniel is mentioned after Thomas in John 21:2.
4. Bartholomew is coupled with Philip in all three synoptic gospels; the first 6 apostles named are the first six called to follow Christ.
5. "Bartholomew" is not a proper name; it is a "patronymic" meaning "son of Tolmai—cf. "Barjona"=son of Jonah)
6. All those he is mentioned with in both passages of John became apostles.]

1. The discovery of Jesus

- a. Of Nazareth
- b. Son of Joseph

These are not inaccurate statements; Jesus had lived in Nazareth almost all of His life. His *legal* father was Joseph. Philip likely did not know the birth story of Christ at this point, nor did he know of the virgin birth.

"We have found" is last in his sentence. Likely he and Nathaniel had often spoken about the Messiah. Note how he now identifies himself with the other disciples: "**we**".

2. The Fulfillment of prophecy

- a. Spoken of by Moses—in prophecy (cf. Deut. 18) and types.
- b. Spoken of the OT prophets (cf. Is. 53; Micah 4-5, etc.)

3. The skepticism of Nathaniel: "Out of Nazareth, is anything able to be good?"
The last word spoken by Philip was "Nazareth"; now Philip picks up that word and doubts that Messiah could come from there.

Not so much that Nazareth was such a terrible place with a bad reputation. More so that It was so small and insignificant, and that the whole of Galilee had such a bad reputation among religious Jews—less cultured, less trained in the Law, poorer use of their language, more in contact with the Gentiles.

4. The wise reply of Philip: "Come and see." (cf. Jesus in v. 39 to Andrew and John.) Philip was confident that a personal investigation would justify his claim! **Let us invite our friends to come meet the Savior—being confident that once they meet Him, all of our confidence in Him will be justified.**

II. DISCOVERY OF JESUS' TRUE NATURE (47-49)

A. Jesus' All-Knowing Comments (47, 48)

1. Insight into Nathaniel's nature
2. "Israelite in whom is no guile" [An Israel in whom is no "Jacob"—"deceit" or "craft" used of Jacob's behavior in Gen 27:35-36. His very name means "one who trips by the heel, supplants, acts craftily." Jacob, once having a relationship with God, was renamed "Israel" ("prince with God")]

Nathaniel was an Israelite who lived up to the name!

How did Jesus know this? Had someone been talking with Him? Maybe Philip?

Thus he guilelessly, not falsely modest, asks, "How do you know me?" (48 a)

3. I saw you under the fig tree **before** Philip called you (48b)

This likely took place at Nathaniel's home—when no one else was around. (See the figure of serenity, peace, home security when one sits under his own vine and fig tree in such passages as Mic. 4:4 and I K. 4:25)

He was likely meditating on God—maybe even pondering the issue and identity of the Messiah. No earthly human knew about his private thoughts; he had not even shared them with his close friend Philip. **He wasn't thinking about Jesus—he didn't even know who He was. But Jesus was thinking about him!** This was the kind of supernatural knowledge that only God could have!

B. Nathaniel's Awe-Inspired Reply (49)

1. This stranger is his "great one"—his Teacher! (Rabbi—cf. v. 38)
2. This stranger is none other than **THE SON OF GOD**—One who has the closest possible relationship with God—the very Son of the Father (see v. 34).
3. This stranger is "the King of Israel"—the Messiah for whom they had been waiting so long.

Note John's purpose for this book (20:31—Jesus is the Christ—the Son of God)

III. Discovery of the Way to Reunite Heaven and Earth (50-51)

A. Jesus' "Surprised" Question at Nathaniel's Solid Faith at such a "Minor" miracle. Simply because He had manifested omniscience in a small matter!

B. Jesus Future Manifestation of a Far Greater Miracle

Some think of Jesus' many earthly miracles, even resurrections of the dead.

But, v. 51 shows us what He has in mind.

1. A very **solemn utterance**—"Truly, truly" (double usage only in John—and in gospels only used by Jesus)
[Comment on this Hebrew expression]

2. A view of an Opened Heaven—permanently so [perfect tense]
3. A view of Ascending (first) then Descending Angels
4. A view of the Son of Man

What is this **Scene** that these Apostles will one day see?

The background of this scene is the Genesis account of Jacob's Ladder (chapter 28). [Describe that scene.] Here, the Ladder is none other than Jesus—He is the one who unites heaven and earth. He brings man into a right relationship with God so that man's prayers may ascend (with the assistance of the angels) and that God may send back responses in answer to man's prayers.

JESUS BRIDGES THE GAP BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH. He makes possible access to God. Due to man's sin heaven had been closed and man was hopelessly out of fellowship with his Maker. Through His atoning work Jesus changed all of that!

Jesus is the Son of Man. [EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT.]

CONCLUSION

Yes, the disciples in becoming followers of Jesus, sound the one who would be His death and life reconcile earth with heaven. Thus, they would become **agents of reconciliation**—God is reconciling the world through Jesus Christ.

ARE YOU RECONCILED WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST?

HAVE YOU BECOME AN AGENT OF RECONCILIATION FOR HIM?

If you are His disciple, you have no other calling—you have “seen greater things” in the finished work of Christ. Now, you must spread His message to those who need to hear.