



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 1:43-51 Commentary King James Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(John 1:43) The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

After spending a few days with John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus decided to go back to Galilee, where He was from and where some of John's disciples were from (Jesus was raised in Nazareth in Galilee, but we learn in Matthew 4:13, that "Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali"). From reading John 1:43, we do not know if Jesus found Philip among John's disciples and invited Philip to go with Him and the other disciples back to Galilee or if Jesus met Philip in Galilee and called Philip to follow Him. I lean toward Philip being one of John's disciples and being invited (or commanded) to go with Jesus to Galilee. Philip knew enough about Jesus to obey Him.

(John 1:44) Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

When we learn that Philip, Andrew, Peter, and John (the writer of this Gospel) were all from Bethsaida, and that they all could have been John's

disciples, it seems reasonable that Jesus called Philip from among John the Baptist's disciples. Jesus would not call Philip to blindly and without good reason follow Him, though Jesus had the power to do so. From reading the four gospels, we know that Jesus did not conduct His ministry by compelling people to obey Him. Jesus would never teach by example that someone should just blindly follow someone who seemed to have special powers or a persuasive personality. In John 6:44, Jesus explained how His followers are "drawn" to Him: "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day."

Remembering the way Jesus conducted His ministry, it is reasonable to think that John the Baptist had prepared Philip to meet the Lord and that Philip had seen Jesus earlier and had learned even more about Jesus from the testimony of Andrew, Peter, and John. So, knowing what was in Philip, Jesus called to him, "Follow me." Perhaps Philip was too shy to ask Jesus if he could follow Him; so, Jesus knowing Philip's heart called Philip to be one of His disciples. Jesus will reach into the life of the most fearful and humble believer and call to himself those who do not feel worthy to ask if they can follow Him. The name Philip means "lover of horses." We do not know the exact locations of Bethsaida or Bethany (archaeologists differ). John baptized in Bethany, which means "house of affliction or misery" or "house of dates or figs," located somewhere east of the Jordan River. Bethsaida means "house of fish" or "place of nets" and was also located east of the Jordan River, probably near Capernaum, which means "village of Nahum or village of consolation." Therefore, we do not know how far Jesus and His disciples travelled between these places.

(John 1:45) Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

John does not tell us how far Andrew had to travel to find Peter to lead him to Jesus or how far Philip had to travel to find Nathanael and tell him about Jesus. John leaves us with the impression that Philip found Nathanael in Galilee, perhaps in Bethsaida or in Cana, which means "place of reeds." The name Nathanael means "God given." In John 21:2, we learn that Nathanael was of Cana in Galilee, where Jesus would soon change water into wine. In

Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses prophesied, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet,” and Philip had learned that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and Jesus should be heeded. He also knew the Old Testament prophets that John had pointed to when preparing people to meet Jesus. John, the writer of this Gospel, truthfully tells what people believed in the early stages of learning about Jesus. Philip would later learn that Jesus was the son of Joseph by adoption, which we learn in Matthew and Luke, for Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus was from Nazareth, and Philip probably did not yet know that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, the city of King David, if fulfillment of prophecy. In Micah 5:2, we learn, “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” The readers of John’s Gospel will learn more about Jesus as they study, just as Philip learned more about Jesus as he followed Him.

(John 1:46) And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Philip did not know everything he would eventually learn about Jesus, but he knew enough about Jesus to tell Nathanael about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit used the truths that Philip shared with Nathanael to lead him to inquire about Jesus and seek to learn more about Jesus. The Holy Spirit can use the truths about Jesus that we know to lead others to want to know more about Jesus and come to faith in Him. We do not need to know everything about Jesus to witness for Jesus. We do know that after these disciples met Jesus, they wanted to tell someone else about Him and lead them to Him. We do not know why Nathanael felt as he did about Nazareth. Being from nearby Cana, perhaps he thought the town was insignificant, or perhaps the town was known to have many wicked people living there, because after Jesus preached in Nazareth those in the synagogue were so enraged they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff (see Luke 4:28-30). But in Matthew 2:23, we learn that Jesus came from Nazareth to fulfill prophecy: “There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a

Nazorean.”

(John 1:47) Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

Jesus spoke to Nathanael first. In Genesis, we learn God how changed Jacob's name to Israel. The name Jacob meant “supplanter.” Jacob used deceit or guile to acquire his brother Esau's birthright and blessing (see Genesis 25:33 and Genesis 27:36). After the LORD encountered Jacob and Jacob wrestled with a man the LORD changed his name to Israel. In Genesis 32:28, we read, “Then the man said, ‘You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.’” The name Israel means, “soldier of God or “contender with God.” Jesus gave Nathanael a great commendation when He said Nathanael was not like a deceitful Jacob but a true Israelite who was honest before God. Remember: Jesus knew what was in everyone (John 2:25).

(John 1:48) Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Nathanael wanted to know how Jesus knew him and his true character, for Nathanael was no hypocrite. He truly wanted to serve God, and after speaking to Philip was drawn to Jesus to learn more about the Messiah. We do not know what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, but whatever he was doing it was significant enough for him to recognize that Jesus had truly seen him. Jesus might have described more of what Nathanael was doing than John reports. Perhaps he was praying and pouring his heart out to God or reading the Scriptures, we simply do not know.

(John 1:49) Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Because Jesus could see where Nathanael was physically located, and also see into Nathanael's heart, Nathanael knew only a divine Person could do that, so he proclaimed Jesus the Son of God and the Messiah (the King of Israel). As the Holy Spirit guided his thoughts, Nathanael affirmed the

truth about Jesus being the Messiah that he had first heard from Philip.

(John 1:50) Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

Compared to what Jesus would do in the future for His disciples and others to see so they could learn more about His true character and nature, Jesus expressed the idea that comparatively speaking His ability to see Nathanael and what he was doing under the fig tree was pretty insignificant. He promised that as His disciple Nathanael would see greater things that John called “signs” and these “signs” would further strengthen his faith in Him as Son of God and Messiah. Jesus performed His first sign in Cana, where He changed water into wine—in a similar way, Jesus transformed and still transforms those who believe in Him into children of God.

(John 1:51) And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

“Very truly” are two different English words that translate the same word in two different ways. Jesus often used the same word twice and together for emphasis, “Verily, verily” (KJV), before telling people an important truth. The two words in the Greek New Testament are “Amen, Amen,” which can be translated “So be it” or “This is certainly true.” Jesus alluded to Jacob’s dream on his way to Haran. In Genesis 28:12, we learn Jacob “dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” Jesus probably meant that He is the ladder between heaven and earth. As the Son of Man, He is the ladder to God the Father and Jesus did mighty works, “signs,” as though angels were coming from heaven to earth to do them.

Jesus used “Son of Man” to most often describe or speak of himself. By calling himself “Son of Man” instead of Messiah (which He was), He would not be making a political statement about himself that could lead to such hostility from the authorities that He would not be able to complete His

mission as Rabbi (Teacher) of His disciples among other duties. “Son of Man” communicates at least three truths. First, Jesus is humble, and even as He worked many miracles and blessed others, He remained humble. Jesus never walked around proclaiming with a loud voice to draw a crowd, “I am the Son of God!” Jesus never bragged about being the Messiah or Son of God; Jesus just did what the Messiah and Son of God would do in fulfillment of Scripture and His Father’s will. Second, Jesus is truly Man as well as truly God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He is the Son of Man and the Son of God. Third, Jesus used the title that the LORD used when speaking to Ezekiel, “Son of Man” (translated “Mortal” in the NRSV), so Jesus was a prophet like Ezekiel. More importantly, Daniel wrote about his vision in Daniel 7:13-14: “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed” (NASB). Jesus claimed to be this Son of Man. An otherwise usually very good translation, I believe the NRSV translation is flawed in these two verses when it translates “Son of Man” as “human being” — “As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” Jesus is fully a human being and fully God, but the translation and use of Son of Man makes these verses more obvious as speaking of Jesus.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What is the first thing John tells us that Philip did after Jesus called him to follow Him?
2. How did Philip describe Jesus when he talked about Him. Was he totally right in his description? How was Philip almost right or almost wrong?

3. When Nathanael objected to Philip's conclusions about Jesus, what did Philip tell him to do? What can we learn from their responses?
4. How did Jesus describe Nathanael? How did Jesus say that He knew that about Nathanael?
5. After talking with Jesus, what did Nathanael decide about Jesus? Do you believe Nathanael was right or wrong?

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