

# OpenTheo

## The First Disciples (Part 2)



### The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg delves deeper into the story of the first disciples of Jesus in this talk. He discusses John the Baptist's prophetic role and his initial skepticism of Jesus as the Messiah, as well as the background and beliefs of the disciples. Gregg notes that the disciples' eventual commitment to following Jesus full-time was a process rather than an immediate conversion, and examines the significance of Jesus' interactions with Nathaniel and Peter.

### Transcript

Jesus is a harmless creature. Is that what it's saying about him? Not necessarily. In Revelation, we have the people of the world saying to the rocks and mountains, Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his vengeance has come.

So, I mean, obviously, the Lamb, although a real Lamb is a harmless creature, Jesus, when called the Lamb, is not referring to his harmlessness. Then what is it referring to? Well, when Jesus first appears as a Lamb in Revelation 5, He sees a Lamb as if it had been slain, or slaughtered, or sacrificed. And here also, that is the sentence in which he is spoken of as a Lamb here.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This clearly refers not to his Lamb-like personality or character or looks or anything like that. It speaks of his sacrificial vocation.

He's come to offer his life like a Lamb on the altar dies for the sins of the worshippers in the Jewish temple as a vicarious victim. So, also, Jesus is going to be a vicarious sacrifice for our sins. That's what John's referring to here.

Now, I wonder how much John understood this. John was a prophet, but many times prophets didn't understand all they said. And at a later date, John appears to have been disappointed with Jesus in that Jesus was not rousing the troops and bringing them against the Romans.

He even sent a message from prison to Jesus, saying, are you the one who's come or

not? And so, it's not clear whether John really fully understood that Jesus was to die rather than lead troops to victory. It's not clear how much John knew. But many times prophets would speak beyond what they actually understood.

John was a prophet and he's speaking prophetically. He may not have even had fully weighed the import of his own words, but he certainly told the truth. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the elect.

Oops, it doesn't say of the elect, it says of the world. And you may be aware there is controversy between two major camps in Christendom, theological. Some believe Jesus died for the sins of everybody, others believe he died only for the sins of the elect.

This view, this second view is called the limited atonement and it's one of the five points of Calvinism. That Jesus didn't die for everybody, he only died for the elect. Well, John, though he was prophesied, apparently the Holy Spirit who inspired him didn't realize that, because it says that Jesus came to take away the sins of the world.

In fact, the same writer, John the Gospel writer, wrote in his epistle, in 1 John chapter 2, in the opening verses, it says that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. I think that's 1 John 2. So, the Gospel of John and the epistle of John both declare that Jesus' death is not for the sins of some limited number of people, but it's for the sins of the whole world. Now, John continues, having identified Jesus by this label, this is he of whom I said, after me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me.

I did not know him, but that he should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. All I knew was that the Messiah was going to be coming, I didn't know who he was. And John bore witness, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he remained on him.

I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. Now, why is there a problem here? Well, in this passage, John emphasizes twice.

I did not initially know him. All I knew was I was supposed to come and baptize people. I also knew that I was going to baptize somebody, I didn't know who, but I would see the Spirit come down on somebody, like a dove.

And I was told by him who sent me, meaning the God, God the Holy Spirit, he told me that when I see this, I am looking at the man who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now, he says, and I saw that. I didn't know him, but I saw this happen to him, and I knew, oh, that's the guy.

Right? Okay, so you get the impression here that John didn't know who Jesus was until he

baptized him and saw the Spirit come down on him. That's certainly what one gets the impression here. But when you read the other Gospels, you got the picture, got the problem? When Jesus came to be baptized, before it ever happened, what happened? John said, you should baptize me.

You want me to baptize you? It's obvious that John instantly knew, before he baptized Jesus, before he saw the dove come down, he instantly knew who Jesus was. He knew that Jesus was his superior. In fact, they were cousins.

They might have even been acquainted with each other prior. I don't know. But if this is true, how could John then say here that he didn't know him until the Spirit came down and he saw this sign and knew who he was? Well, I would like to suggest a solution along these lines.

John knew who Jesus was before this. He knew he was his cousin. He probably even knew he was the Messiah.

And when Jesus came to be baptized, in all likelihood, he knew that this was the Messiah coming to be baptized and thought it was strange that the Messiah wanted to be baptized by him. It should be the reverse. But I believe that John's understanding of who the Messiah really is, essentially, was perhaps until this point not entirely clear.

Because, like most Jews, even many of the prophets, they did not understand that the Messiah would be a divine person, that he'd be the Son of God, as well as the Son of David. The prophets emphasized that the Messiah would be the Son of David. There were some veiled allusions to the fact that he'd also be the Son of God.

For example, in 2 Samuel 7, there's a reference to how God will be his Father and he'll be a Son to him. But many of the Jews, including the devout ones, looked for the Messiah to be a descendant of David, but not necessarily a supernatural, divine person from heaven. Just another David.

David was not a man from heaven, but he was a great king and great leader and a godly man. That's what they thought the Messiah would be. It's possible that although John knew prior to this that Jesus was the Messiah, he didn't know this dimension of the Messiah's identity.

Because, when the Spirit came down on Jesus in the water, what else happened? John doesn't mention it here, but what else happened? There was a visible experience of the dove coming down, but there was also an auditory sign. What was that? A voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. Notice what John says in verse 3 and 4. And I've seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

Let me put this together for you as simply as I can. I believe that when Jesus showed up, and John said, oh, you should baptize me, not vice versa. He was speaking from his

awareness that Jesus was the Messiah.

But did not yet possess the awareness of the supernatural aspect, the divine character of the Messiah. He knew Jesus was the Son of David and was chosen to be the Messiah, but he maybe didn't know that he was the Son of God. Until the dove came down, and with the dove came a voice that said, this is my Son.

He says, oh, I now know him. I know him in a deeper way. I know more about who he really is than I did before.

When I baptized him and this phenomenon occurred, I came to realize what I can now testify about, that he is the Son of God. Which is saying more than just saying he's the Messiah. Because many people were believed to be the Messiah who were not believed to be the Son of God.

The fact that the Messiah is the Son of God was not a universal understanding among the Jews. John now understood it. At the baptism of Jesus was added to John's understanding the dimension of, oh, the divine aspect.

This is not just the Messiah, he's the Son of God. And I know it now. I didn't know it before, but I know it now.

And I can testify now that he's the Son of God. So, John testifies to the deity of Christ here. Not only that he'd be a sacrifice, but a lamb, but also that he's divine.

Verse 35, again the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as he walked, he said, behold the Lamb of God. The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned and seeing them following, said to them, what do you seek? And they said to him, Rabbi, which is to say when translated teacher, where are you staying? And he said to them, come and see. And they came and saw where he was staying and remained with him that day. Now it was about the tenth hour.

Probably reckoning from Roman time, that would make this ten in the morning. If reckoning from Jewish time, this would make it four in the afternoon. The Jews began numbering the hours of the day at six in the morning.

The Romans did it like we do from midnight. So, there is some evidence that John followed the Roman reckoning in his gospel. And therefore it would be ten in the morning as opposed to four in the afternoon.

So, if they stayed the whole day, it makes a big difference whether they started in the morning or started late in the afternoon. But the impression I think is that they met him early and stayed the rest of the day with him. And besides that, if it was four in the

afternoon, there might not be time for what we are about to read to occur.

Verse 40, one of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah, which is translated the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.

Now, when Jesus looked at him, he said, you are Simon, the son of Jonah, you shall be called Cephas, which is translated a stone. Now, if it was four in the afternoon when they met Jesus and they stayed with him the rest of the day, that would be until six, the day ends at six, it would have been into the night after that, then there might not be as much time for Andrew to go find his brother and bring him to Jesus and so forth and for them to end up spending much time with Jesus at all. The impression is they did get some significant exposure to Jesus on this occasion, but Andrew first went to God's brother.

Now, of course, we are told there are these two disciples in verse 35, their names are not given. In verse 40 it says one of them was Andrew. But the silence concerning the identity of the other is deafening.

I mean, you can hardly read verse 40 without saying in your mind, but who is the other? I mean, why do you tell me the name of one of them and you don't tell me who the other one is? Why is it that we don't have the name of both of them? Well, the theory that makes the most sense is that the other unnamed one was John himself who wrote the gospel. This is not John the Baptist, but John the son of Zebedee, brother of James, the fisherman. Now, in favor of this identification, we have a number of factors.

One is that he bothers to name one of the disciples, but he doesn't bother to name the other. And it is his custom not to name himself in his gospel. He refers to himself as a disciple, but he never names himself.

So, all other things being equal, it would be natural for him to speak of Andrew by name, but not mention himself by name. And that would fit the circumstances of the passage admirably. In addition to that, we know that John and his brother James were fishing partners.

We know this from the other gospels, not this gospel, but the other gospels tell us that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were fishing partners with Simon and Andrew, those two brothers. So, they were friends, acquainted with each other, and business partners, which would make it the more likely that these men might hang out together, even when they're not at business. They were friends and associates.

And to associate John with Andrew on this occasion would be very natural, since they worked together. Although, of course, they weren't working at the time that we are introducing them here, but they were close friends and associates. A third factor is that the author, as I mentioned earlier, appears to be an eyewitness.

And if he's not the unnamed disciple, it's hard to know how he would be a witness of these things. I mean, he could be a third party who is not mentioned. I mean, John, the writer of the gospel, could have been somebody else, not one of these two disciples, but there anyway.

But all of the things conspire together, I think, to suggest that John is the other disciple. So, John and Andrew were there. It tells us one thing interesting, and that is that these two men, who were originally, or who became, significant disciples of Jesus, among the earliest, they were first disciples of John the Baptist.

So, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, in general, also prepared the way for Jesus in the hearts of these men. They first were touched and influenced and affected by John the Baptist preaching. And that prepared them and sensitized them to be receptive to Jesus.

And when John said, Behold the Lamb of God, they left John and became followers of Jesus. Or did they become followers of Jesus? You know, that is sometimes assumed. But it is not stated here that they became permanent followers of Jesus.

Because the very next day, in verse 43, it says, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee and he called Philip, but it doesn't say he called John and Cephas and Andrew to go with him. We have, in fact, in verses 35 through 42, only a reference to them making acquaintance with Jesus. We do not read that they followed him after that day.

It is assumed by many that they did. However, I think it likely they did not. I think they became acquainted with Jesus.

They became believers in Jesus. But they did not yet become permanent followers of Jesus. Why do I say that? Well, anyone who has read the other Gospels will know why I say that.

Because all three of the other Gospels record these men, in another part of the country, at a later time in Jesus' ministry, fishing on the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus comes along, preaching on the shore. There are big crowds.

He needs to get away from the crowds. So he asks one of them to put him out in a boat offshore. And he preaches from the boat until the crowds are gone.

And the boat happens to be Peter's boat. And Peter and Andrew are in it. And James and John are nearby in their boat.

And at the end of that story, which is found in Luke chapter 5 and Matthew chapter 4 and Mark chapter 1, in that story, Jesus calls the fishermen to follow him. And they leave their boats and their nets. Everyone knows this story.

Every Sunday school child has heard it. And the fishermen left their nets and their boats, and they followed Jesus permanently. Now, these are the same men.

At least three of the same four meet Jesus here. And these events that we're reading in John could have happened as much as, and are thought to have happened as much as a year earlier than the call of the four fishermen recorded in the other Gospels. There are reasons for assuming that chronological distance.

It was at least months later, if not a year later, that Jesus called the fishermen from their nets. Same men that we read of here. If these men at this point became permanent followers of Jesus, it's hard to figure how it is that at a later date he found them fishing and called them to be disciples then.

It seems a more simple harmonization of the facts to suggest that they were disciples of John at this time. They met Jesus, but for the time being remained followers of John. John, after all, didn't just disappear when Jesus showed up.

John continued to minister. He still had disciples for a long time after. In fact, even after he was in prison, he had disciples.

Even after he died, he still had disciples. There were still disciples of John long into the ministry of Jesus. And some of them became disciples of Jesus ultimately, but there's not any evidence here that these disciples permanently gave up on their attachment to John and affixed themselves to a new teacher.

They met him. They were definitely impressed. They definitely figured he was the Messiah.

But there's no evidence that they followed him at this point, and it would appear they followed him later. That would also explain why in the other Gospels when Jesus comes along and just says, follow me, they just leave everything and follow him. You know, he's not some stranger walking up.

This is someone they've met before. It has been suggested that the men who met Jesus on this occasion, this encounter with Jesus, resembles the conversion of some people. They become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah.

They accept that by faith. That becomes a settled conviction with them, but it doesn't change their lifestyle immediately. I mean, it might change their lifestyle in terms of whether they go on sinning or not.

Certainly if they become Christians, they must give up their sin. But there is many times with people who have been Christians for some time, a second calling, a vocational calling, a calling from ordinary work to full-time Christian work. And that is what happened at the Sea of Galilee when they were fishing.

These men were already believers in Jesus when he strolled up. But they were full-time fishermen, not full-time ministers. And when Jesus called them from their nets, it was a secondary step in their relationship with Jesus.

The first was simply to become acquainted with him, to become believers, to put their faith in him. No doubt to, well, I mean, they were believers in him as the Messiah from this time that we read on. But almost a year later, he called them to leave what they were doing and to go into full-time ministry, for which he gave them special training for a couple of years or so.

So the two accounts have bothered some people. Some people, when they read the Synoptic Gospels, say, wait, I thought these guys met Jesus there, and this says they met him here. There's no conflict.

They met him here, but they stayed in their work. They remained fishermen for some time later, months, maybe a year later. And then Jesus encountered them again at the other end of the country in Galilee and called them to be full-time followers, which they later did.

Now, I heard a preacher once many years ago in the 70s compare this with conversion in the first instance and discipleship in the second. That is, he said, well, when Jesus met them on this occasion, they were converted. They became believers.

But later when he called them from their nets, it was a call to discipleship. And he was trying to make the point to his listeners that many of them had been believers, it may be for many years or for some time, but they have to be prepared to later be called to discipleship. And that made sense to me for a long time until I later learned from reading the Scripture that conversion is conversion to discipleship.

That if you're not yet a disciple, you're not yet converted, really. The call to be a Christian is the call to be a disciple. And one who has not yet responded to the call to be a disciple has not yet responded to the call to be a Christian.

Because a Christian is a disciple. Therefore, I want to try to clarify this. When they were called to follow Jesus full-time from the Sea of Galilee and their nets, this was not the first time they became disciples.

This is when they were called to become future apostles. The apostles were to be the leaders of the church, not just Christians. They were Christians before Jesus called them at the Sea of Galilee, but they became leadership trainees when they began to travel with Jesus.

And we need to remember that discipleship did not require that everyone leave their job. Just to be a disciple of Jesus did not require that everyone leave home, leave their family, leave their job physically, and never go back to it. Most of the disciples, as they're called



in the book of Acts, had jobs and homes and families and ordinary lives.

Jesus, when he called his disciples from their jobs, was not calling them to an ordinary discipleship. He's calling them to special full-time ministry. And it should not be thought that the modern person, in order to be a fully committed disciple, has to leave their job in order to be a fully committed disciple.

They may be a fully committed disciple in their job. But a certain number of people are called by Christ to leave their jobs and to go into full-time work. And that is what happened, that is full-time ministry work.

That's what happened with these men at a later date. On this occasion, however, we do not read of that happening. These men, John and Andrew, see Jesus, they hear John speak of him, they follow him.

He notices he's being followed. He says, what are you following me for? Where do you want to go? What are you looking for? They said, where do you live? He said, follow me. So they followed him.

But first, Andrew ran off and got his brother, who is named Simon. Now Simon, in verse 40, the first mention of Simon, it calls him Simon Peter. But his name was not Simon Peter yet.

He is called that by John here because that's what Christians later came to know him as. His name was simply Simon. Simon is a form of the Hebrew name Simeon, who, of course, was one of the sons of Jacob, Simeon, the tribe of Simeon.

There's a good chance that Peter was of the tribe of Simeon and named after the progenitor of that tribe. But Jesus gave him a new name. Now, Andrew already, at the time he went and got his brother, believed Jesus was the Messiah, as his confession in verse 41 says.

We found him who is called the Messiah. We found the Messiah. And he brought Peter to Jesus, or Simon to Jesus, and when Jesus looked at him, he said, you are Simon, the son of Jonah.

Jonah is another form of the name John. And he says, you should be called Cephas, which is translated a stone. Now, in verse 40, we find the name Peter.

Peter is the Greek word for a stone. Petras, in the Greek, means a stone. Cephas is the Aramaic word for the same thing.

If you wish to say stone in Greek, you would say Petra, or Petras, if it's masculine. Petra is the normal word, but it's a feminine word for stone in Greek. So Petra, or Petras, is the Greek word for stone.

If you wish to say the same thing in Aramaic, you say Cephas, or Cephias. And that would be a stone also. Now, Jesus spoke Aramaic, but the Gospels were written in Greek.

So, occasionally, the Gospel writers will retain something Jesus said in the original language he spoke, which is Aramaic. In this case, Cephas, you should be called Cephias. But most of the time, the Gospels, in speaking about Cephas, give the Greek form of that name, which is Petros, or Peter.

So we more commonly know him as Peter. But in the language Jesus spoke, he didn't call him Peter, he called him Cephas, which is the same name in a different language. Verse 43, the following day, the last of these four days, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee.

Now, most of Jesus' public ministry recorded in the Gospels happened in Galilee. And most of it was during one large time block, which was in excess of a year long, in his ministry. The vast majority of his ministry that we read of happened in Galilee.

And that is often called the Great Galilean Ministry. However, on this occasion where Jesus is going to Galilee, it does not mark the beginning of his Galilean Ministry. Actually, what happens, he goes to Galilee, he turns water into wine, then he turns around and goes back to Judea for the Passover.

He doesn't really begin his Galilean Ministry at this point. He doesn't do so until John, Chapter 4. But he does make a trip to Galilee. And it would appear the reason he went to Galilee is for a wedding.

He was invited to a wedding. We read that in John 2, Verse 1. On the third day, there was a wedding. Now, on the third day, seems to be in contrast to the previous chapter, the next day, the next day, the following day.

And then in Chapter 2, Verse 1, the third day, he apparently took three days getting to Cana. And it says, there was a wedding, and it specifically says in Verse 2, John 2, 2, Now both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. So this trip to Galilee probably was nothing more than a trip to this wedding.

Who got married? Well, we won't speculate about that. That belongs to Chapter 2. We're not covering that today. But the fact is, this trip to Galilee does not represent his relocation there for an extensive ministry.

He's just going there, very possibly, for nothing more than the wedding. And he wanted to go to Galilee, and he found Philip, and said to him, follow me. Now, he has not yet said that to any of the others that he's met.

He has not said, follow me, to John, Andrew, or Peter. At least not on record. He may have said it, but it's not recorded.

However, of course, when he met them later at the Sea of Galilee, he did say, follow me. And then they left everything and followed him. Which is why, one reason I think, they were not followers of his at this point, in the sense of geographically moving about with him.

Philip, therefore, is the first person, chronologically, who is called to follow Jesus, and probably was the first disciple to travel with Jesus. But he's a lot like Andrew. He's evangelistic.

He wants all his friends to know about Jesus, too. At least his best friends. So Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

And Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Now, it specifies that Philip was from the same city as Andrew and Peter were from. Which may be stated, in order to say he was acquainted with them.

They may have known each other growing up. They're from the same town. And therefore, since Peter and Andrew had met Jesus the day before, although we're not told that Philip had, Philip, by this time, by the next day, may have heard a great deal about Jesus from Peter and Andrew.

Peter and Andrew had spent the day with Jesus the day before, and were very impressed. Very possibly had told their friend Philip. So when Jesus walks up to Philip and says, hey, follow me, Philip knows who this is.

He's heard about him. And, in fact, he's already got an opinion. He goes to his friend and says, we've found the one of whom all the prophets wrote.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Notice how much biographical information he knows about Jesus. He knows his father's name, his hometown, and he also knows enough to believe that he's the one the prophets wrote about.

And yet, this is the first exposure to Jesus we read of Philip having. Therefore, I would suggest the likelihood that Philip had heard something from his friends, Peter and Andrew, from their previous day's visit, and this information he had possibly gotten from them. Now, Nathaniel's reaction was, in verse 46, he said, can anything good come out of Nazareth? And Philip said, come and see.

Now, the statement, can anything good come out of Nazareth, has led some people to believe that Nazareth might have been sort of a town from which it was not good to be from. Or, more properly, it would be better to be from there than in it. Many times preachers will say that Jesus grew up in a town that had a bad reputation.

They mean Nazareth. Let me just take a poll, because I know I've heard this. How many

of you have heard somewhere or another that Nazareth was a town that had a bad reputation? Most of us have probably heard that.

Where's that come from? Where's that idea come from? You know there's not one bit of evidence outside of this verse that Nazareth had a bad reputation as a town. There's nothing in the Talmud, nothing in the historical writings, nothing in Josephus, nothing else that were in the Bible. Nazareth is nowhere known from any outside sources except this verse.

Scholars do not have any reason to believe that Nazareth, as a town, had a bad reputation. They base that assumption strictly on what Nathaniel said. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Now you might say, well that's good enough.

That proves that Nazareth had a bad reputation, because Nathaniel was shocked to learn that anything good, like the Messiah, might come from a town like that. However, before we jump to the conclusion that Nazareth, as a town, had a bad reputation, or that Nathaniel was being somewhat chauvinistic or bigoted toward people of a town that he looked down on, we might consider an entirely different meaning to his words. He might have meant, one would expect the Messiah to come from Jerusalem, or some Judean town, but from Nazareth, a Galilean town? It may have been not so much Nazareth that had the reputation, but Galilee, which was, Nazareth was a town of Galilee.

If you'll notice in John chapter 7, near the end of that chapter, in verse 52, in fact almost the very end of that chapter, John 7, 52, the chief priests rebuking Nicodemus for his feeble support of Jesus, they answered and said to him, Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee. Well that's not technically correct. A lot of prophets had come from Galilee.

Elijah and Elisha, for example, and Jonah were among the several prophets who came from Galilee. Hosea also. But what they were saying is, the Messiah certainly wouldn't come from Galilee.

Galilee of the Gentiles? Galilee was technically in Israel, but there was actually a larger Gentile population in Galilee than there were Jewish population there. And the Jews in Judea thought of themselves as a much more purely Jewish region, and Galilee was somewhat of a mixed bag there. And Galilee was much less prestigious than being from Judea.

And they said, Come on now, the Messiah is going to come from Galilee? Give me a break, it can't happen. And that might have been essentially what Nathanael was saying. Nazareth? Can any good thing come from a Galilean town like Nazareth? Could have been his meaning.

Not so much that Nazareth as a town had anything wrong with it, but that it was

Galilean, not Judean. And if this was his meaning, which is very possible, it would not be so much a prejudice statement as it would be a humble statement, because Nathanael and Philip were themselves from Galilee. They were Galileans.

And it could have been simply a statement of humility. Can any good thing come from our place? From our neck of the woods? From Galilee, where we're from? Could it possibly be that something as good as the Messiah could come from the same place we're from? Could be what is implied by his statement. So it could go either way.

He either has something against the town of Nazareth and thinks himself too good to believe in someone from there, or else it's not so much Nazareth as Galilee, of which Nazareth is a part. And Nathanael is a Galilean himself, that he'd be more humbly saying, Can the Messiah really come from the same place we're from? Galilee? Nazareth? One of our towns? And thinking it improbable. But Philip said, Come and see.

This is a good way to witness. If people ask you theological questions that you don't know how to answer, you want to say, Well, check it out. Come and see.

Give it a try. I don't know how to answer all your questions. I'm not sure I can make a theological case for good things coming from Nazareth or not, but I'm not going to argue it.

Just come and see. Why don't you just come to Jesus and see whether it's true or not? Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Now, guile is a word for basically two-facedness or hypocrisy.

A person pretending to be something they are not. If a person is said to be without guile, it usually means they're very transparent. They're very innocent.

They don't hide things about themselves. They're very plain and it's obvious who they are at first glance because they're not putting on an act or a mask. Now, this was in contrast to so many of the Jews of the time that Jesus said were hypocrites.

So much of Judaism was shot through with hypocrisy. It was externalism. People were not lovers of God, but they kept the Jewish laws outwardly so as to give the impression that they were lovers of God.

And Jesus had a lot of negative things to say about the Jews who were hypocrites. But he was refreshed to find a Jew who was not. A man who spoke his mind.

A man who didn't pretend to be more spiritual than he was. A man in whom was no guile, no pretense. And you know what? When you read of the 144,000 in Revelation 14, who are said to be Jews of the 12 tribes, it specifically says in Revelation 14 that in their mouth was found no guile.

These are true Israelites. Jesus said this is a real Israelite indeed. He's really worthy of the name.

He's part of the true remnant that is worthy of the name Israel because there's no guile in his mouth. He's not a hypocrite. He's a sincere guy.

Now Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. And Jesus answered, I'm way ahead, I'm sorry.

I missed a very important verse. Verse 48. Nathanael said to him, how do you know me? That's not quite so emphatic as verse 49.

Start here. Here comes a man who's a true Israelite, no guile. He says, how do you know me? Jesus answered and said to him, before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

Then Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel. And Jesus answered and said to him, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.

And he said to him, most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man. Now, Jesus' first comment about Nathanael being an honest man took Nathanael by surprise. He said, well, how do you, I mean, you've just laid eyes on me, how do you know what kind of man I am? How do you know me? And Jesus said, well, I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.

Now, that statement obviously made a profound, stunning impression on Nathanael. Why? No one knows for sure. Why did Jesus' comment that he saw him under the fig tree before Philip called him make such a stunning impression? It is possible that it's only, it's simply that wherever the fig tree was, and we don't know where that was, was somewhere far from there, around several corners, and that Jesus could never with his eyes see him there.

And therefore it gave, it was clear that Jesus was speaking prophetically, given what we would in modern times call a word of knowledge. You know, Jesus could not in the natural have known that he had been sitting under a fig tree before Philip called him because it was somewhere far from there, not within view of there, and the fact that Jesus expressed knowledge that Nathanael had been under a fig tree at that time, and Nathanael knowing that to be true said, wow, this guy must really be something. But it would be quite a leap from just that bit of information to say, you're the Son of God, the King of Israel.

After all, Jesus did show similar knowledge of the life of the woman at the well. In John chapter 4 he said, you've had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your

husband. She was also impressed, but she said, oh, I perceive you're a prophet.

And that, you know, in giving what we would these days call a word of knowledge, a person would be showing himself to be prophetic. That kind of stuff is the stuff that prophets did in the Old Testament. They had things revealed to them about people that they couldn't have known naturally.

And that's what Jesus did when he saw, as mentioned, he saw him under the fig tree. But that would not justify Nathanael saying, you're the Son of God, the King of Israel. That would have just said, oh, you're a prophet, I see.

Now, it may be that he went further and said, you're the Son of God, King of Israel, because Philip had already said, we found the Messiah. We found the one of whom all the prophets spoke. And the very fact that Jesus gave such a word of knowledge that I'd seen you under the fig tree was enough to convince Nathanael that what Philip had said was true about him, and therefore he concluded these things.

Others have suggested that maybe under the fig tree, Nathanael had been in some activity that is not recorded, that is of significance. I've heard different theories about this. Some have actually speculated that he was involved in some sinful transaction of some sort.

Others have suggested the opposite, that he was perhaps involved in some meditation on Scripture or in prayer or something like that. One preacher I heard suggested he was doing something of which he was ashamed. When Jesus said, I saw you doing that, I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you, somehow this made him convicted of what he was doing.

He remembered what he was doing, he was convicted, and he fell down and said these things. It seems to me more likely, if there is anything significant that Nathanael is doing at all under the fig tree, to which Jesus was alluding, it would probably be something more spiritual. Very possibly meditating on Scripture, discussing with somebody the Scriptures about the Messiah or whatever.

We don't know. But I cannot say with any authority that he was doing anything in particular. He might have been snoozing, he might have been taking a siesta under the fig tree.

For all we know, we simply don't know. Maybe he had a dream, maybe he had a prophetic dream about the kingdom of God. Then Philip woke him up and Jesus said, I saw you before Philip came.

Something connected here with Nathanael. But it doesn't have to be that it was something significant about what he was doing under the fig tree before Philip came. It could be simply that this was a case where Jesus exhibited that he had supernatural

perception.

If there was any more significance than that, it is hidden from our eyes and the narrative leaves it out. Now Jesus is a bit surprised at Nathanael's enthusiastic endorsement of him and says, because I said I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. And he said to him, most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Now, did Nathanael ever see this? We don't know. Jesus tells the truth, so it may be that Nathanael actually had a vision of this sort. Maybe he actually did see the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

It could have happened exactly that way, although Jesus' words might have been more or less symbolic. He might have meant to say that you will have a greater revelation of who I am than what you've just said. You will come to perceive me in a certain light that you have not yet recognized.

What is that light? Well, you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This statement takes language deliberately from the story of Jacob's ladder. When Jacob was fleeing from Esau, he had a dream.

In the dream he saw a ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven. God was at the top, and it specifically says the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. The very phrase that Jesus uses here is a quotation from Genesis 28, verse 12.

And perhaps what Jesus is implying here is that Jacob's ladder, which Jacob saw connecting heaven to earth, the access between heaven and earth, through which angels and men must go if they would traverse the distance from heaven to earth, that ladder is me, and the time will come when you'll see that. The time will come when this revelation will dawn on you. I'm not just the King of Israel, I'm the Son of Man.

My mission is not just to Israel, but to all mankind. You called me the King of Israel, but you shall see a bigger vision of me. You shall see the Son of Man, not the Son of David, the Son of Israel, but the Son of Mankind, the Savior of all mankind, linked with the whole human race.

You will recognize me as the link, the access to heaven that was symbolically depicted in Jacob's dream, to which Jesus alludes when he says, you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. He's basically saying, what Jacob saw as a ladder, you will see as me. And you will come to understand and know that I am the only connecting link between heaven and earth.

Those who would go to heaven from earth must go through me. As John also records Jesus saying later on in John 14, 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to



the Father but through me.

Now as I said, I don't know whether Nathaniel ever actually had a visual vision of this. Jesus' words almost sound like he will, and perhaps he did. If he did, there's no record of it, but it's possible what Jesus means is you'll simply get this revelation.

You'll understand this about me in a way that you don't currently. You'll see the bigger picture of who I am and what I'm here for than you do now. And so we must assume that Philip and Nathaniel both became disciples.

By the way, Nathaniel's never mentioned in any of the Apostle Lists, but he is thought to be the same man as Bartholomew. In the Apostles Lists we find a man named Bartholomew, which literally means son of Tholomew. And most people believe that this is the same as Nathaniel.

Nathaniel's mentioned only in the Gospel of John, never said to be one of the Twelve Apostles. But in the other Gospels that give lists of the Twelve Apostles, he's not found. But associated closely with the name of Philip in all those lists is a man named Bartholomew, son of Tholomew.

And most, I think, scholars believe that is Nathaniel, who became a disciple at this time. Okay, well we've run out of time. Just about at the same time we ran out of words.