

First Five Disciples of Jesus

John 1:35-51

The first few days of Jesus' ministry is full of joy and alive with discovery! At this time, these five men are not forsaking all and following Jesus, that will come, but they are realizing who He is and His amazing power. In the years ahead, they will grow in their faith, and become part of the driving force of the Gospel message to the world!

The "days" of John 1:19-2:12 – Here we see a series of days in the life of Christ. They start at the Jordan River with John the Baptist and end at the wedding in Cana. Along with a narrative of the early ministry of Jesus, John is hinting that he was an observer and eyewitness to these specific accounts by giving us a day-by-day list of events.

John's clarification notes – Remember, John is writing about 80 AD, 15 years after the destruction and reconstruction of Israel by the Romans. Most of those reading his book will not know Hebrew, the Jewish names of towns or bodies of water, or understand Jewish manners or customs. John will spend more time than any other writer giving word meanings and commentary concerning the thoughts and actions of those involved. Examples: v. 38, 41, 42

"³⁵Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; ³⁶And looking (Gk - penetrating, intense gaze) upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! ³⁷And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? ³⁹ He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour (4 pm or 10 am)." John 1:35-39 Scholars differ at what time this is. Jewish time would place it at 4 pm but Roman time at 10 am. Either time gives the men plenty of time to talk and then stay with Jesus.

Disciple 1 & 2 – Andrew and Unnamed Disciple (John) In verse 40 Andrew is named, the other is not. Almost without fail, it is believed John, the writer of the book, is this disciple. Throughout the book of John, he does not identify himself, but the detail of this event gives suspect he was there. We will deal with this passage as John is the other disciple. The support for this is quite clear.

- "John stood, and two of his disciples;" – When Jesus was seen of John, the Greek tells us that he and his two disciples were apart by themselves. John's second "Behold the Lamb of God!" was said to them.
- "Behold the Lamb of God!" – John's first recorded use of this phrase was the day before. Then he had added, "which taketh away the sin of the world." This time he simply points out Jesus again to his two disciples using this "name" of Jesus – Lamb of God.
- "followed Jesus" – It is said this is the last official day of John the Baptist's ministry. He will continue to preach repentance but later he will say in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." We see here the beginning of John's fading as Jesus' ministry begins. JW Shepard said, "the work of the Baptist passed naturally into the work of Jesus." p. 84 Notice, John the Baptist did not suggest or command these two to go after Jesus. Jesus did not call them, but John and Andrew took John the Baptist at his word, and with that knowledge, followed Christ.

- “What seek ye?” – A clearer translation might be: “what do you want?” “what are you seeking?” But actually, these men weren’t “seeking” a “what” but a “whom!” With this question, Jesus is making Andrew and John articulate their objective. But their answer seemed as if they were not sure what or why!
- “Rabbi, where dwellest thou?” – John will give the meaning of the Jewish term Rabbi to his readers. A Rabbi was a respectable title both earned or honorary meaning teacher of the law. Even Nicodemus will call Jesus by this title.

Their statement seems to indicate they wanted to stay with Jesus. We will find that Jesus’ heart was always open and hospitable. In Matthew 11:28 He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” But this is the heart of God! Jer. 29:11-13; James 4:8; Rev. 22:17

- “Come and see” – Andrew and John spent this first day with Jesus based on John the Baptist’s testimony. At the end of that day, the two disciples were convinced enough to bring others to Jesus. This event was so life-changing the very time was burnt into the mind of John!

⁴⁰ One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him (Gk - penetrating, intense gaze), he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shall be called Cephas (Aramaic form of Peter), which is by interpretation, A stone.” John 1:40-42

Disciple #3 – Simon Peter

- “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother” – Andrew is the hero in this story, one of the first to meet and follow Jesus, now going out to find and bring his brother Peter to Jesus. But he is being identified as the brother of Peter, the one being brought! In 80 AD the readers knew of the great church leader, Peter, but probably knew very little or even nothing at all of Andrew.
- “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.” – After a day with Jesus, Andrew was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. This statement is even more clear and specific than John the Baptist’s, “Lamb of God” declaration. John has a commentary explanation for his readers concerning the Hebrew word “Messiah.” In the Greek it is “Christ” – they both mean the “Anointed One – Son of God.” Matt. 26:63-68 Jesus would be the last of the “anointed ones” – priest, prophet, and king!
- “he brought him to Jesus.” – The text says that Andrew “findeth his own brother” Peter and then it tells us that “he brought him to Jesus.” This has the idea that he sought him out, spoke to him, and then brought him back to Jesus. When we take time in our study of Jesus and look at each of the 12 disciples, we will see every time Andrew is found in the Gospels, he is bringing someone to Jesus. Here it is Peter!

- “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” – When Jesus looked on Peter that first time, He was seeing in His omniscience, both the present and future Peter and changed his name immediately! He saw Simon, the hot-tempered, unstable, weak man of most of the Gospels, and Peter, the stable as a rock man of the early church. Ps. 139:1-6; 23-24

“⁴³The day following Jesus would go (wanted to go) forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. ⁴⁴Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.”

John 1:43-44

Disciple #4 – Philip

- “The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee,” – In my study, I found a repeatedly possible change in translation and understanding of this verse. But it begins with verse 41 and the words describing Andrew’s action, “first findeth.” Usually, if there is a “first” there should be a “second.” But throughout these verses, there seems to be no “second” – or is there?!

Theories:

1. Andrew (first) and John (second) went and found their brothers. Andrew – Peter; John – James
Some scholars feel very confident with this thought.
2. In verse 43, the name of Jesus is not found in the Greek. It is simply the pronoun, “he.” If we reread it with the thought of Andrew, we would find the “secondly”, Andrew heading to Galilee, his home area, and finding Philip. The word “him” in verse 43 is definitely a reference to Jesus in the Greek.

This rendering is found in other English translations, and if it is truly what happened, and Andrew found Philip, it certainly is in step with his character found throughout the Gospels. He was always actively bringing people to Jesus, and this is just another case.

Don’t let a situation like this shake your faith in the translations or more importantly the Word of God. He has promised to preserve His Word, and He has! (Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19) This translation variation does not change doctrine or even basic truths of the Scripture. They are small details, translated from one language to another by scholars. Thankfully we can compare their work with the original languages, and other good, reliable translators.. Enjoy how the differences can expand the overall depth of the setting!

- “findeth Philip,” – Compared with the other 4 disciples in this event, so little is said about Philip’s call. We do know that Jesus (or perhaps Andrew) came from near the Jordan River and sought him in Galilee.
- “Follow me.” – Philip was the first person recorded to hear these words from the lips of Jesus! This simple phrase will become the most used combination of words during Jesus’ ministry! If we are believers in Christ, we too have heard these words, and like Philip obeyed! These are the words still used by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of unbelieving man!
- Bethsaida – We will read of Bethsaida throughout the ministry of Jesus. It was on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Primarily a location that centered on the business of fishing; a smaller city than Capernaum. It is called the city of Andrew, Peter, and Philip. The Greek wording seems to indicate the birthplace of these men. But we will find that Capernaum is where these will settle and make their homes as adults.

“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. ⁴⁶And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile (Gk - deceit)!”
John 1:45-47

Disciple #5 – Nathanael Most believe Nathanael and Bartholomew were the same man. Three out of the four times the 12 disciples are named in the gospels, Philip and Bartholomew are listed together. He was probably a fisherman. John 21:2

- “Philip findeth Nathanael,” – We do not know Philip’s story, but here he does prove his faith by his next recorded action – finding Nathanael.
- “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,” – Philip shared the good news of finding the Messiah! The Messiah’s coming is found throughout the Old Testament, Philip had found Him! One of the emphases of John as he writes his gospel is Christ’s fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- “Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” – This is exactly the way a first century Jew identified someone, by their birthplace and father! But in his ignorance, Philip got both wrong! Jesus was both in Bethlehem, just as prophesied in Malachi, and His true Father was God Himself!
- “any good thing come out of Nazareth?” – Poor Nathanael couldn’t get past Jesus’ hometown! This was the talking point of his unbelief. Later in Scripture, we will find out that Nathanael was from Cana, only about 4 miles from Nazareth. He would have known and have been familiar with it. You see, the Judeans despised the Galileans, but the Galileans despised those from Nazareth! But remember, questions and prejudices can only be answered by truth. And for us that is found in the Scriptures!
- “Come and see” – The two men could have continued to go around and around but Philip understood there was no use to argue with a skeptic. The debate ended with the simple phrase, “Come and see.” Realize, for all of us this is an important part of a spiritual journey. One must get up from a place of comfort and seek the Lord! Jesus used the word of invitation “come” many times. In it we see the grace of God extended to mankind.
- “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” – This statement of Jesus is about the personal integrity of Nathanael. Three times within this passage Jesus showed divine perception into the heart of man. (1. Simon shall become Peter 2. Here – “go guile” 3. “under the fig tree”) The word “guile” means deceit – concealing or misrepresenting the truth. So, looking at it from the opposite side, we could say – genuine, sincere, a seeking student, nothing false, honest. Jesus is saying there is no deceit in this man! WOW! This was God’s testimony and observation of Nathanael. God has always been concerned with the heart of man. A true Israelite was one who followed God with their whole heart and this is who Nathanael was. (Ps. 73:1; Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:1-3)

“⁴⁸ Nathanael saith unto him, Whence (How) knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. 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. 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.” John 1:48-51

- “when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.” – Please understand, God knows all of us (Is. 45:4-5; Gal. 4:9). We see here, Jesus not only knew the kind of man Nathanael was, but also his physical movements. A grove of trees was often used for meetings, debate, meditation, teaching, or open-air interaction. Jesus was evidently referring to a specific time and Nathanael understood this! So powerful was this revelation to Nathanael, he knew Jesus was the Messiah.

It will be Jesus’ supernatural knowledge and Philip’s testimony that will convince Nathanael of who Jesus was. Jesus will soon use this same type of knowledge when speaking with the Samaritan woman in John 4:17-18; 25-29. This is a tactic we should use as we speak to people concerning Christ and the Gospel. We don’t know the heart of man, but the Bible does reveal to us the basic needs and struggles of the human heart. We can share how Jesus is the answer to our needs! Heb. 4:12

- “Son of God”/ “King of Israel – Here we have recorded the person and office of the Messiah. These are a direct reference to the Messiah. Even Pilate will use this term when interviewing Jesus and later placing this title on the cross. Please notice, the Philip’s identification of Jesus was “son of Joseph” but Nathanael will change it to “Son of God!” He clearly understood Jesus as the Messiah, God in the flesh!
- “Verily, verily,” – This is the first recorded use of this phrase by Jesus. The meaning of the word is “Amen,” “Truly,” or “very true.” It confirms or emphasizes the importance and trustworthiness of what was to follow. It’s used in every Gospel book, but John is the only one who doubles it!
- “angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” – Nathanael was amazed and convinced by the supernatural knowledge of Jesus. But Jesus meets this with the statement, “thou shalt see greater things than these.” In the Greek, Christ will go on and say the following statement to all those that were following Jesus not just Nathanael. (v. 51 “him” – “them”; “ye” – plural form is used) It is agreed among scholars that this phrase is a reference to Jacob’s ladder found in Genesis 28. The connection to “no guile” or deceit and Jacob is strong. This random use of Jacob might also relay back to what Nathanael was contemplating under the fig tree!

Notice the wording, “ascending and descending **upon** the Son of man.” Jesus is the go between heaven and earth! John 14:6 It is “upon” Him we ascend to God!

“Son of man” – This is Jesus’ self-title used 83 times in the Gospels. Here is His first recorded use. Seldom is it ever used by anyone but Christ. It shows both the deity and human side of Christ. This was an Old Testament reference – Dan. 7:13.

Believer's Application:

1. After meeting Christ and accepting His person and work, He will change us by His power! This is what happened to Peter. John 1:12 [What causes spiritual growth in our lives?](#)

[Food - Word of God Heb. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:15](#)

[Trials & Tests – James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:7](#)

[Prayer – Ps. 145:18-19; James 5:13-16](#)

2. In this event in the life of Christ, we have seen young, immature followers of Jesus anxious to bring others to Jesus. Please realize, at any level of spiritual maturity and ability, this is God's plan! Are you seeking to bring others to Christ? Here we see a foundational principle for Christianity expansion; Believers bring others to Christ! We are to find others and bring them. The truth is people usually don't come to us seeking truth about Jesus. Here we see a New Testament pattern that spills over to all generations; we must seek them! Andrew and Philip went out and found others. (vs. 41, 43, 45) They were not well-versed scholars. These men were almost completely ignorant of Jesus and God's plan, yet God used them to bring two other disciples! What an encouragement that has to be to us. Giving the Gospel is lead by the Holy Spirit. It is not based on someone's knowledge or intellect. Your lack or great level of understanding Biblical truth is not a hinderance or even a help if the Holy Spirit is not leading, working, and enlightening. You are wasting your time! This event is a wonderful example during the early ministry of Jesus of two unlearned, ignorant men bringing others to Christ! We can do the same! Take special note of Acts 1:8.