

John's Disciples Follow Jesus

John 1: 35-51

DIG: In light of John 1:30-31, how do you think John felt when his disciples left him to follow Jesus? What does that say about Yochanan? What motivated the disciples of John to follow Yeshua? What are the titles used in this file to describe Jesus? What do they mean? What did Philip have in common with Andrew? What type of person is Nathanael? Why might he find it hard to believe Philip's statement? What formula did Messiah use when calling the five talmidim who initially followed Him?

REFLECT: What are you looking for? What's your goal in life? What are you really trying to get out of life? What was your motive in following Jesus? How did you come to trust in the Savior? What were the circumstances? How much did you know about Him? Who was the Andrew in your life?

No one is more careful about the details of time as John is. Starting from these verses and going to 2:11 he tells us, step by step, the story of the first momentous week in the public life of Jesus. The events of **the first day** are in Yochanan 1:19-28; the story of **the second day** is 1:29-34; **the third day** is unfolded in 1:35-39. The three verses 1:40-42 tell the story of **the fourth day**; the events of **the fifth day** are told in 1:43-51. **The sixth day** is not recorded for some reason. And the events of **the seventh day** of the week are told in 2:1-11.³⁰⁰

Once again we see John the Baptist pointing beyond himself. He must have already spoken to his disciples about leaving him and transferring their loyalty to this new and greater Rabbi once He appeared. The Baptizer didn't have a jealous bone in his body. It's extremely difficult to be the warm-up band once you've been the main attraction; however, John was determined to fulfill his God-given mission. So as soon as Yeshua emerged, John didn't hesitate to release his disciples to Him. They left with his blessing.

In conjunction with the declaration that the Kingdom was near, Jesus continued to call His apostles. In this commentary on **the Life of Christ**, I make a distinction between apostles and disciples. The Twelve will be called apostles, or talmidim (Hebrew), and the others would come to believe in Him would be called disciples. While it is true that the apostles were also disciples, it is not true that all disciples were apostles.

The white space between Bible verses is fertile soil for questions, and there is much written between the lines here. Our Lord called His first six apostles: **John son of Zebedee, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. James son of Zebedee** was not specifically mentioned in this account, but he was obviously there. We can see this written between the lines because **Jesus** developed a close relationship with his brother **John**, and **James and John, sons of thunder (Mark 3:17)**, were inseparable. The concept of discipleship was not new. Any significant **rabbi** would have faithful followers who would be called to a commitment of both following and learning (thus the word **talmid** (singular, which means *learner*). This involved more than merely passing information, as it also implied a close personal relationship with one's **rabbi**.

This is beautifully stated in **the Talmud**, commentary on the Torah, where a **disciple** is called to: **Let your house be a meeting place for the rabbis, and cover yourself in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily (Pirke Avot 1:4)**. The best **talmidim** (plural) were the ones who stayed so close to their **rabbi** that they could take in every detail of their mentorship. That should be a fresh challenge today as we consider the call of **Yeshua** upon our lives.³⁰¹

The third day: The next day John the Baptist was there again with two of his disciples, **Andrew** and **John, son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21a; Mark 1:19a)**, who would end up being the human author of the book of **John**. It was a common literary device in those days for the author to include himself in the scene without mentioning his name. For example, **Mark** would refer to himself fleeing from the garden of Gethsemane when he wrote: **a young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Yeshua. When they seized Him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind (Mark 14:51-52)**. And without naming himself, **John, son of Zebedee**, would refer to himself as **the [apostle] whom Jesus loved (John 13:23)**. **John** quickly identified **Andrew (John 1:40)** as one of his **two disciples**, but did not mention himself, as was the custom for authors then.

When the **John the baptist** saw **Jesus** passing by, he said to both of them: **Look, the Lamb of God. When the two (soon to be) apostles heard him say this, they followed Jesus (Yochanan 1:36-37)**. It may be they were too shy to approach **Him** directly and followed respectfully some distance behind. Then **Yeshua** did something entirely typical. **Turning around, Jesus saw them following and spoke to them (John 1:38a)**. That is to say, **He met them half way. He made things easier for them. He opened the door that they might come in. Here we have the symbol of the divine initiative.**

ADONAI always takes the first step. When the human mind begins to seek, and the human heart begins to long, the LORD comes to meet us more than half way. YHVH does not leave us to search and search until He comes; He goes out to meet us. As Augustine said, "We could not even have begun to seek for God unless He had already found us." When we go to Elohim we do not go to One who hides Himself and keeps us at a distance; we go to One who stands waiting for us, and who even takes the initiative.³⁰² As Yochanan 3:16-17 says: For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (see Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer). For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

Then Jesus began by asking them the most fundamental question in life: **What are you looking for (John 1:38b GWT)?** It was a very relevant question for Palestine in their day. Were they legalists, looking only for subtle and difficult to understand details in the Torah, like the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers? Were they materialistic, live only for today because there is nothing left after we die, Sadducees? Were they nationalists looking for a military commander to throw off the Roman yoke like the Zealots? Or were they humble men of prayer looking for ADONAI and His will? Or were they merely puzzled, confused sinful men looking for forgiveness from God? We might well ask ourselves the same question today!

They said: Rabbi (which means "Teacher"), where are you staying (John 1:38c)? **In the Jewish world, this question was the means by which a talmid would submit himself to the teaching of a rabbi. If the rabbi essentially said it was none of his concern, then that person would be rejected as a talmid. But the opposite was also true. If the rabbi said, "Come and see," that person would be accepted as his talmid. Come, Jesus replied, and see.**

So they went and saw where He was staying, and they spent that day with Him. It was about four in the afternoon (Yochanan 1:39). This was very important to John and he wrote down the exact time. One can only imagine the conversation that took place that afternoon and evening as Andrew and John listened to the Rabbi from Galilee expound on the Scriptures. Like the two on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection (Luke 24:13-32), they were captivated by what they heard. O to spend the day talking with Jesus!

It is important to be aware that the Lord did not start calling the rabbis from the many seminaries in Jerusalem. Instead, Yeshua called simple fishermen toiling around the Sea of Galilee. They were not, however, ignorant because they undoubtedly received the mandatory training of any growing up at that time. Yet, many are surprised that some of the apostles were common people.

The fourth day (John 1:40-42): Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John the Baptist had said and who had followed Jesus (John 1:40). Andrew was so taken by what our Savior had said to him the previous day, the first thing he did the next morning was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah, that is, the Christ" (Yochanan 1:41). It was clear that Andrew lived under the shadow of his charismatic brother Peter. People might not know who Andrew was, but everyone knew Peter, and when they spoke of Andrew they described him as Peter's brother. Andrew wasn't one of the inner circle of talmidim. When Yeshua healed Jairus' daughter, when He was transfigured on Mount Hermon, when He underwent the agony of Gethsemane, it was Peter, James and John, whom the Son of God took with Him.

It would have been so easy for Andrew to resent Peter. Was he not one of the first two apostles who ever followed Jesus? Didn't Peter owe his meeting with Jesus to him? Might he not reasonably have expected a leading place within the twelve? But all that never even occurred to Andrew. He was quite content to stand back and let his brother have the limelight. Matters of precedence, place and honor didn't mean anything to Andrew. All that mattered was to be with Yeshua and to serve Him as well as possible.

So Andrew brought Simon to Jesus (Yochanan 1:42a). This will become a common theme, because every time we see Andrew, he is bringing someone to the Savior. There are only three times in the Gospels when Andrew is brought onto the center stage. First, there is the incident here, where he brought Simon to Yeshua. Second, there is the feeding of the 5,000 when he brought a boy to the Lord with five barley loaves and two small fish (John 6:8-9). And third, he brought enquiring Greeks into the presence of Jesus (John 12:22). It was Andrew's greatest joy to bring others to the Meshiach.³⁰³

Jesus looked at Peter. The Greek word for looked is *emlepein*. It describes a concentrated, intent gaze that does not only see the superficial things, but that which reads a person's heart. And the Lord said: **You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas**, which, when translated from the Aramaic, is Peter (John 1:42b). Shim'on was the Hebrew name for the one also known in Greek as *petros*. Peter or *petros* is a masculine noun and means a *small stone or pebble*.

The fifth day (Yochanan 1:43-51): The next day, after saying goodbye to His houseguests, Jesus decided to leave for a teaching expedition in the north through Galilee. Another potential disciple named Philip lived in Judea, perhaps with extended family in the little town of Emmaus, seven miles from Yerushalayim. Jesus knew him to be from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northern banks of the Sea of Galilee that had recently been built into a city to honor the daughter of Caesar Augustus. Philip, like Andrew and

Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida, which was close to Capernaum (John 1:44).

Upon finding Philip, Yeshua extended a rabbi's invitation to him, saying: **Follow me (Yochanan 1:43)**. The present tense verb has continuous force, *keep on following*. So the expression would be understood the call to be a permanent **apostle**. **It was not only the practice of the rabbis, but regarded as one of the most sacred duties, for a master to gather around him a circle of talmidim**. Philip was undaunted and immediately followed. The ease with which he believed is remarkable. In human terms, no one had brought Philip to Yeshua. He was like Simeon, a **righteous and devout man who waited for the LORD to comfort Isra'el (Luke 2:25a)**. He was ready. He was expectant. His heart was prepared. And he gladly received Jesus, unhesitatingly, as the long-promised **Meshiach**. No reluctance. No disbelief. It didn't matter to him what town Yeshua had grown up in. He knew instantly that he had come to the end of his search.

That was frankly out of character for Philip, and it reveals to what great degree the **Holy Spirit** had prepared his heart. His natural tendency might have been to hold back, doubt, ask questions, and wait for a while (see **Fn - Jesus Feeds the 5,000**).³⁰⁴

We are not given any explanation of how Jesus knew Philip. It is not even said where He found him or if Philip was a **disciple of the Baptist**, though it seems likely. So the Lord went out of His way to find this perfectly ordinary man and enlist him in the rapidly growing **talmidim**. Some of the **apostles** were undoubtedly men of great ability, but Philip compels us to reflect on the fact that others were very ordinary people. **Messiah** had use for such followers. It is also noteworthy that like His healings, there was no formula in the manner in which the Lord performed His miracles or called His **talmidim**.

Philip, like Andrew, could not keep the Good News to himself. So Phillip found **Nathaniel** and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Torah, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, a member of the Joseph household" (John 1:45). The plural **we** shows that Philip had already identified himself with the **talmidim**.

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked (John 1:46). Notice the disparaging view of the **Nazarenes** by the Galileans. Nazareth was considered a backward hick town, not far from Sepphoris, which housed a garrison of Roman soldiers. It was situated in a slight depression in the mountains overlooking the vast Jezreel Valley. This made it a perfect place for the soldiers to keep watch over the region. But when you find a town full of bored soldiers, you will find fertile ground for corruption and immorality. As a result, the Jews of **Natzareth** gained a reputation for decadence that became legendary, perhaps because of their regular contact with those gentiles, and the depraved habits of

military men of that day. Today, it would be like saying, "The Son of God comes from Sin City." It was a reputation the Nazarenes didn't deserve, but to the religious mind of Isra'el, it didn't matter. Appearances meant everything.³⁰⁶

Philip didn't attempt to argue with Nathanael. People aren't argued into the kingdom of Heaven. In fact, arguments usually do more harm than good. The only way to convince someone of the reality of Christ is to confront him or her with Christ. On the whole it is true to say that it is not argumentative or philosophical preaching and teaching that have won the lost to the Messiah. It is the presentation of the story of the Cross. Philip was wise. He didn't argue. He simply said: **Come and see**.³⁰⁷

Nathanael's question still lingers, even two thousand years later . . . Can anything good come from Nazareth? And Philip's answer is just as relevant today: **Come and see**.

Come and see the changed lives . . .
the alcoholic now sober,
the embittered now joyful,
the shamed now forgiven,
marriages rebuilt, the orphans embraced,
the imprisoned inspired . . .

Come and see the pierced hand of God touch the most common heart, wipe the tear from the wrinkled face, and forgive the ugliest sin.

Come and see. He avoids no seeker. He ignores no probe. He fears no search.³⁰⁸

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him: **Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit** (John 1:47). Jesus knew that Nathanael was meditating on Genesis 28 where Jacob stopped at Beersheba on his way to stay with his uncle Laban. Now if there ever was **an Israelite in whom** there was *much deceit*, it was Laban.

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked (Yochanan 1:48). In those days, it was impossible for everyone to have a copy of the Scriptures. So they spend a lot of time memorizing it, and then meditating on it. The rabbis taught that if you wanted to meditate on the Scriptures and receive a blessing from God, the best place to do it was under a **fig tree**. It held a special status, and as a result, some rabbis would even teach under a **fig tree**. Jewish commentaries on the TaNaKh even said a person would understand the Scriptures better if they meditated under a **fig tree**.

Jesus answered: I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. But this time in His life (opposed to when He was born), Jesus was omniscient and knew everything. But Nathanael could have just as easily been meditating at the Temple or doing anything else. What was Nathanael's response?

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Isra'el" (John 1:49). This is a very strange response. If someone said, "I saw a vision of you at temple last Shabbat, or at church last Sunday," the normal response would *not* be: **You are the Son of God.** There would be nothing unusual about being in temple or church to warrant that response. It would be expected. But Yeshua not only knew that Nathanael was meditating under a **fig tree**, He knew the exact chapter he was meditating on!

Jesus said: **You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that. He then added: Very truly I tell you, you** (the Greek is plural in both instances of **you**) **will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"** (John 1:50-51). It was at Beersheba that Jacob stopped to spend the night and had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angles of God ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28:12). And not only did Yeshua know the exact chapter Nathanael was meditating on, *Jesus claimed to be the stairway*, the only means to get from earth to heaven. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Yeshua the Messiah (First Timothy 2:5).

The Spirit of God was working in the hearts of the first five talmidim. There would be more. But next, Jesus would privately perform His first miracle so that His apostles would believe in Him.