

John – An In-Depth Study

[Part 4]

John 1:29-31 [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.’”*

By this time in the apostle John’s narrative of the life of Jesus Christ, the baptism of Jesus was past, recorded in **Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22.**

Also Jesus’ temptations when facing Satan, recorded in **Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13.**

John the Baptist then introduces Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God.

What was John the Baptist thinking about and what was he pointing the minds of the people towards?

a) The Passover Feast was **not** very far away. [**John 2:13**]

It was the spilt blood of a lamb, male and without any blemish, that protected the houses in which the Israelites lived on the night the angel of death smote the first-born of the Egyptians.

This final act of God freed the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt.

Slavery in Egypt being symbolic of our own slavery in sin. [**Exodus 12:1-14**]

Paul also thought of Jesus Christ as the Passover Lamb and His shed blood was the only way we can be delivered from our sins. [**1 Corinthians 5:7**]

b) John the Baptist was the son of a priest and would know all the ritual of the temple and its sacrifices.

Every morning and evening the life of a lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people. [**Exodus 29:38-42**]

c) Jeremiah wrote of a lamb being slaughtered. [**Jeremiah 11:19**]

Isaiah also writes about a lamb being brought to the slaughter. [**Isaiah 53:7**]

Both of these prophets foretold of One, who by His suffering and sacrifice, meekly and lovingly borne, would redeem God’s people from their sins.

d) Another picture of a lamb was very familiar to the Jews.

Between the times of the Old and New Testaments the Maccabees fought, died and conquered.

In some respects, the Maccabees set the pattern of Jewish nationalism and Messianic thought for the New Testament period.

In this period the lamb was the symbol of a great conqueror, Judas Maccabaeus is so described.

The Lamb of God is mentioned 29 times in Revelation, all referring to triumph of Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist says that he did not know Jesus Christ but as a relative of Jesus [Luke 1:36] he must have been acquainted with Jesus.

What John the Baptist is saying is that he did **know** who Jesus was, but not **what Jesus was**, the Son of God.

Once again John the Baptist makes clear what his only function was, to point people to Jesus Christ.

John 1:32-34 [NIV] *“Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.’”*

Something happened to John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus Christ that convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God. [Read **Matthew 3:13-17**]

When John the Baptist spoke of the Spirit he would have been thinking in Jewish terms.

The Jewish word for Spirit was “*ruach*” literally meaning wind.

To a Jew there were basic ideas of the Spirit.

Power – like a rushing wind. [Micah 3:8]

Life – the very dynamic existence of a person. [Isaiah 59:21; Isaiah 61:1; Ezekiel 36:26-27]

The ability – to be used by God to fulfil God’s purpose, at that time in human history, given **only** to certain men and women.

The availability of the Holy Spirit to all people would **not** come until Pentecost some years later after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. [Acts 2:1-4]

The coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus Christ with power was different to any other time in the Old Testament.

Before this giving of Holy Spirit it was what we may call a spasmodic experience of the Holy Spirit, limited to the fulfilling of the job it was given to accomplish.

Twice in this account John the Baptist points out that the Holy Spirit remained with Jesus Christ, a permanent abode.

For a fuller understanding of baptism please download and study our article under the main heading ‘*Baptism*’ on this website.

John 1:35-39 [NIV] *“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.”*

John the Baptist must have known very well that once he revealed who Jesus Christ was to His disciples they would leave him to follow Jesus Christ.

No jealousy for this is the goal John the Baptist had, to lead people to Jesus Christ.

These two disciples of John the Baptist may have been too shy to approach Jesus directly but followed at a distance.

Jesus then did something which was and is characteristic of Him.

Jesus turned and spoke to them, that is, He made it easier for them by meeting them half way.

This is symbolic of divine initiative, God always takes the first step. [John 6:44]

Jesus asked these two a fundamental question, “What do you want?”

Very relevant in Palestine at that time.

Legalists – looking for conversations about the little details of the law as did Scribes and Pharisees?

A position of power and authority as the Sadducees did?

A military commander to smash the occupying power of Rome as the Zealots did?

Or were they puzzled people looking for forgiveness from God?

Or humble people looking for God’s will in their lives?

We all need at times to ask ourselves this very personal question, ‘What is my goal in life?’

The answer John the Baptist’s disciples gave was they wished to join Jesus to be taught more, shown by calling Him Rabbi, or teacher.

Is this our goal in life to be disciples, students of Jesus Christ?

A true disciple of Jesus Christ, a Christian, can never be satisfied with a passing word, treating Jesus Christ as an acquaintance, but a lifelong constant friend who is always in His presence.

Jesus Christ’s answer was “come and you will see,” look to me for the answers to all the questions you have in life.

John’s mention of the time of day may indicate that he was one of two disciples of John the Baptist.

When a person meets Christ for the first time it will be a moment never forgotten.

It is the dividing time of when you know of Jesus Christ and begin to know who He really is.

John 1:40-42 [NIV] *“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).”*

In this passage of scripture John helps the Greeks, for whom he wrote, to understand the meaning of “Messiah” by adding the Greek word “Christos” both of which mean “anointed one.”

What little we know of Andrew shows him to be one of the most attractive characters in the apostolic band.

a) Andrew was always prepared to take second place – again and again Andrew introduced himself as Simon, Peter’s brother, accepted that he lived under the shadow of Peter.

Andrew was **not** part of the inner circle of the disciples, that is Peter, James and John.

See healing of Jairue’s daughter [Mark 5:35-37; Luke 8:51];

or transfiguration [Luke 9:28; Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2];

or Christ's agonising prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane [Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:33]

Andrew was quite content to stand back and let his brother have the limelight.

b) Andrew was a man who was constantly introducing others to Jesus Christ, only do we find three recorded incidents when Andrew took centre stage. [John 1:41; John 6:8-9; John 12:22]

Andrew was a man with a missionary heart, a great example of how we should **not** keep the friendship we have found with Jesus Christ to ourselves.

When Andrew brought Peter to Jesus Christ we are told that Jesus looked at Peter.

The word translated "looked" is "ěmblěpō" meaning clearly discern, far more than lies on the surface, Jesus was reading Peter's heart, his innermost feelings and motivation.

Jesus Christ was seeing what Peter could become, this is why He gave Simon a new name.

"Cephas" in Aramaic means the same as "psěphos" in Greek, a smooth stone or pebble, both translated Peter in English.

Understanding the above helps us know the true meaning of **Matthew 16:16-19**. Please download and read our article "'Who Do You Say I Am?' – Matthew 16:15-19' listed under 'Bible Study.'

John 1:43-50 [NIV] *"The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.' 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.' Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You shall see greater things than that.'"*

Philip, like Andrew, could not keep the Good News to himself.

What Nathanael said was true but his reaction was contemptuous.

Philip wisely did not argue. He simply said *"come and see."*

Not very many people have ever been argued into being a Christian, only way is to confront people with the life and promises of Jesus Christ.

Jesus could see into Nathanael's heart and recognised the potential that He could use.

A fig tree was leafy and shady, and it was custom to sit and meditate under the shade of its branches.

Was Nathanael meditating on the promises of God and the hope of the coming of the Messiah?

Very possible.

What surprised Nathanael was that Jesus could read his thoughts, and that Jesus was a person who understands my hopes, prayers and dreams.

John 1:50-51 [NIV] *"Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You shall see greater things than that.' He then added, 'I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'"*

Jesus referred to Jacob's dream as recorded in Genesis 28:12-13 and was telling Nathanael that He was the One who could lead people into the presence of the Creator God.

Who was Nathanael?

In John's gospel Nathanael was one of the first group of disciples, in the other three gospel accounts he does not appear, not even by name.

One explanation is that the gospel of John, Bartholomew's name is not mentioned, but is in the other gospel accounts and Acts.

In **Matthew 10:3** and **Mark 3:18** Philip and Bartholomew are listed together as if it was natural and inevitable to connect them.

Also Bartholomew is really a second name, meaning son of Tholmai or Ptolemy.

Bartholomew must have had a first name, so it is possible that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person under different names.