

Exegetical Notes, John 1:35-51

“Jesus Calls Them”

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John 1:35-51

Verses 35-39

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

- On the day following Jesus’ baptism, John the Baptist was still in the same area baptizing people. Jesus was also there. When John saw Jesus walking by he again exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God." Two of John's disciples heard this remark from their teacher and followed after Jesus.
- The two men who followed after Jesus are unnamed. In verse 40, we learn that one of them was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. The identity of the other one is not revealed. Church tradition says that the unnamed man was John, the author of the Gospel, but there is no other evidence of that, except tradition.
- When Jesus saw them following him, he asked them why they were following him. They asked him in return where he was staying. Jesus said to them, "Come and you will see." This was an invitation for them to come with him to where he was staying and nothing more. It was not an invitation to leave John and become his disciples.
- They went with Jesus to the place where he was staying and spent some time with him. The Greek is unclear. They either went with Jesus and stayed with him until 4 in the afternoon or they went with him at 4 in the afternoon and stayed until evening. But they did not stay with Jesus indefinitely. After meeting with him they returned to their homes.

Verses 40-42

⁴⁰ **Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.** ⁴¹ **The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).** ⁴² **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).**

- After Andrew left Jesus he found his brother, Simon. He told Simon that he had found the Messiah, the Christ, and brought Simon to Jesus.
- Jesus renamed Simon, Cephas. Cephas in the Hebrew name for the Greek Petros. The English name for Petros and Cephas is Peter. The name means rock.

Verses 43-51

⁴³ **The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."** ⁴⁴ **Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.** ⁴⁵ **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."** ⁴⁶ **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.** ⁴⁷ **When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."** ⁴⁸ **"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."** ⁴⁹ **Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."** ⁵⁰ **Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."** ⁵¹ **He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."**

- The timing of events becomes a little confusing. John says that these events happened on the "next day." It could mean the day after the day of Jesus' first meeting with Andrew and the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist or, if Andrew brought Peter to meet Jesus on the day after his first meeting with Jesus, it could mean the day after that. But on the day when Jesus was leaving the place where John had baptized him, he saw Philip and invited Philip to follow him.
- It may be that Philip, not John the author of the Gospel was the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist who was with Jesus and Andrew on the "day

before." While this is contrary to the traditions of the church, it fits the context of the story better. Philip and Jesus would have known each other before. So Jesus' call to Philip to follow him came after they had gotten acquainted. This would make sense because the Greek word, "finding" in the text indicates that Jesus was looking for/searching for Philip.

- Philip was from the same town, Bethsaida, as were Peter and Andrew, and James and John.
- Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus. (Nathanael is believed to be the name by which Bartholomew, Luke 6:14, was known in the early church.) We do not know the exact relationship between Nathanael and Philip.
- Philip called Jesus the "son of Joseph." This is not a denial of the virgin birth. Legally Jesus' name would have been, "Jesus bar Joseph." The Hebrew phrase means "Jesus son of Joseph." He also calls Jesus, "Jesus of Nazareth". This caused Nathanael to ask if any good thing could come from Nazareth. This is because Nazareth was a little "back water place" from which no one expected anything of value to come. Philip invited Nathanael to come and see for himself.
- As Nathanael approached Jesus, Jesus declared that he was a "true Israelite in whom there was nothing false." This statement declared that Jesus knew Nathanael's heart, his true nature. When Nathanael heard Jesus' remark, he asked how Jesus knew him. The implication was that he had not known Jesus before this meeting. Jesus told Nathanael that he saw him sitting under the fig tree before Philip invited him to come find Jesus. Hebrews often sat in the shade of a fig tree to study Scripture. What Jesus saw confirmed that Nathanael was a true seeker, for he was studying the Bible. Nathanael was so impressed with Jesus that he confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, Israel's Messiah.
- Jesus told Nathanael that if he stayed with him, he would see greater things than this. Jesus said that he would see heaven open and angels descend on Jesus.

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