

# John 1:19-51

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One goal of these notes is to bring attention to segments of this Gospel that are less familiar to many Christians. This is one such passage. Here the narrative begins. The prologue (1:1-18) showed that John the Baptist had a very important role. He is mentioned there and Jesus' disciples are not, except for personal pronouns "we" & "us" in verses 14 & 16. Only Matthew and Luke give an account of the birth of Christ, but early in all four Gospels we find an emphasis on the ministry of John. For a short time, he was a shining lamp in Israel (5:35). He was not the coming light, but he was sent to bear witness to that light, whose life is the light of men (1:4,8).

John was a witness, but what was his testimony? And what was his authority? John was one who baptized with water, but why? John had disciples, but how did he influence them? John was to introduce Christ, but what was his description of Jesus and how did he identify Jesus? These questions are answered in John 1. Other Gospels give more detail of John's preaching.

Jesus called twelve men to be his apostles. Five are mentioned here, four of them by name. At one time, two of those were disciples of John the Baptist, whose ministry was to reveal Christ. John gave up some of his own disciples to follow Jesus, a thing this unique and humble man was glad to do (3:26-30). Before John 1 is completed the Apostle reports a number of confessions made by John and Jesus' disciples. This fits the writer's fervent purpose that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (20:31).

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## **1:19-27 The Investigation by a Delegation**

The religious leaders must have heard many reports of John the Baptist. Naturally they would be very curious about his activities. The New Testament never tells us that John ever entered Jerusalem; the only record is of him in remote places. The delegation who came were priests and Levites. Those with the most power in Judea and Jerusalem were the Sadducees, a priestly group. Since John practiced a religious ritual with water, they would be very interested in what his baptism meant, and under what authority he baptized. They certainly did not authorize his activity, and they did not expect someone to appear as the voice in the wilderness, mentioned in Isaiah 40:3. These priests had no knowledge of John and his role, though his appearance on earth was first announced to the father of John by an angel in the Temple (Luke 1:5-25). Lest we miss it, the Sadducees were mainly priests, and the angel Gabriel appeared in the Temple to Zechariah, a priest. The birth of John the Baptist and related happenings were so extremely unusual that the whole area was wondering what the Lord would do through this child (Luke 1:66). That early activity of the Lord was missed by the Sadducees.

**1:19** And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

**1:19** Often when the Apostle refers to "the Jews" he means the religious leaders in Jerusalem. It is this way here. Often he is critical of them, but not always. Jesus said to a Samaritan, "Salvation is of the Jews" (4:22), meaning that truth was in *their* tradition and Scriptures. This is not anti-semitism. In 5:1 "Jews" means all the people, but in 5:10,15,16, & 18 "Jews" means only the leaders.

**1:19-23** And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent

us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

**1:19-23 Who Are You?** John the Baptist was well aware that others in his time had claimed to be the Messiah. So before he said who he was, he made clear who he was not. He was not the Christ. If he allowed any confusion there, he would have destroyed his mission from God. Someone else was the Christ, not John.

The priests investigating John knew the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6 that the Lord would send Elijah prior to the great day of the Lord. So they asked John if he was Elijah. The Lord Jesus said that John was the Elijah who would come (Matthew 11:7-15, especially v.14. See also Matthew 17:12 and Mark 9:11-13). So John was *an Elijah figure* and he was the fulfillment of the Malachi prophecy. It is possible that John did not think of himself that way. He did know he was called to be the voice that Isaiah 40:3 predicted. Often in Scripture, disciples did not know much of who Jesus was or what would happen even when they were told. Jesus understood the significance of John's ministry more than John did. Some thought that Elijah, who did not die but entered heaven in a chariot (2 Kings 2), would return as the same man. John denies that he is *that* Elijah back on earth again. Instead he came *in the spirit and power of Elijah* (Luke 1:17), thus he was not the original Elijah, but a unique "Elijah type" with a similar powerful ministry.

Then is the Baptist "the prophet"? See below "Who is Coming?" Maybe John did not realize he was the fulfillment of Malachi 4; he certainly denies that he is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:18,19.

**Who is Coming?** In a variety of prophecies the Old Testament predicted the coming of Christ without stating each time that this one person would come in different roles. Messianic texts do not refer to each other; we are to know they refer to Christ based on the content of the predictions. Some Jews thought there would be a Son of David, a priest, and a third distinct figure, the prophet, thereby expecting three different persons. Only the Lord can be the priest of Psalm 110:4. Only the Begotten Son can be the anointed king of Psalm 2. The ultimate prophet in Deuteronomy 18 must be one who spoke with God face to face. So in 1:19-23, Jesus is the Christ and the prophet, positions John did not claim for himself. Yet there was still another coming person (1:6), the Elijah figure who was not the light but was sent to introduce him. That person could not be the Christ. The Bible did not predict four persons to come but two: Christ, the Prophet, Priest, and King, preceded by John, the voice calling in the wilderness.

**1:22-23** The group inquiring of John needed an answer to take back to Jerusalem. It was important to John's calling to deny that he was the Messiah. For his explanation of himself he referred to Isaiah 40:3-5. (This shows that something very important in God's Word may appear in very few words.) Isaiah's message in chapter 40 and following was of the salvation the Lord would bring. Their God was coming to them (Isaiah 40:9,10). In John's day, the Lord had come. There should be an introduction for such a great King, and John gave it. There should also be a proper preparation of heart in repentance from sin. The Apostle John presents Christ as the ultimate Word (1:1) who makes the Father known (1:18) while the Baptist was a voice to identify the Messiah for Israel (1:31).

**1:24-27** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

**1:24-27 Why Did John Baptize?** Some Pharisees were in this delegation. The answer to them is given in two parts (1:26,27 & 1:29-34). In both passages, John's words turn to speaking about Christ so quickly that his reply seems to overlook their question about him. Note the reply, *"I baptize with water [they knew that] but there stands one among you that you do not know!"* Every genuine Christian ministry is eager to speak of Christ! John said that the Messiah was already there among them. So Jesus was in the same locality, yet unrecognized. Similar to 3:10, the leaders of Israel did not know him.

They did not know him, yet Jesus was born on the schedule given by the Prophet Daniel (Daniel 9), in the village identified by the Prophet Micah (Micah 5), in the line of David, as the historical book of 2 Samuel, the psalms and the prophets all affirmed (Psalm 132, Isaiah 9). The Light would shine *"in the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations"* (Isaiah 9:1), the very location where the delegation was questioning John! Jesus was nearby in fulfillment of prophecy, though he was not yet known. The next day, John would see Jesus and identify him as the Lamb of God (1:29) and the Son of God (1:34).

John's previous denials fit his way of showing how very exalted Christ is above him. For a while John was the one receiving all the attention. His audience was eager to hear what he said about himself, but the Baptist described the majesty of Christ by stating how low he was in comparison. Only the most lowly servants were called upon to remove their master's shoes. John proclaimed that Christ was so great even this task was one he was not worthy to do. When the Apostle John wrote this, he was planning to write in chapter 13 that Christ (of all people!) would be the one to wash his disciples' feet.

**1:28** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

**1:28 The Location of this "Bethany"** The Apostle John is careful to distinguish the village Bethany near Jerusalem (11:1,18) from this Bethany in chapter 1. The Bethany mentioned here is not said to be a village or town; thus it could be a region, and it probably was. It is to the east of the Jordan, "across" from the side where Jerusalem and the great majority of Jews lived. In Hebrew the "th," in Bethany may easily be pronounced as a "t". There is good reason to think that John was baptizing in Batanea, a region across the Jordan, east of the Sea of Galilee. (They had a variety of spellings of name places in the Bible.) Batanea in the OT is Bashan. In 1:43 Jesus went to Galilee, a distance he could walk in one day from Batanea, but not from other another location far to the south that has been suggested as the location of this Bethany in John 1. Furthermore, the northern location near the Sea of Galilee fits much better with the travel times related to the sickness of Lazarus in John 11. (See the notes on John 10:40-42 and John 11).

**1:29** The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

**1:29** John the Baptist knew the identity of Jesus the Messiah from an earlier revelation giving him the way to identify the Lord. Now with the Jerusalem delegation he sees Jesus approaching and says "Behold." John's role was to point out Christ, turn attention to him, witness to his identity, and state his role as the sacrificial Lamb. This text begins a series of significant titles or descriptions that bring understanding about Jesus. The Baptist states two of them.

**The Lamb of God** This is an expression not found in the OT. And the added words *"Who takes away the sin of the world"* are not from previous Biblical language to portray a sin-bearing sacrifice. Yet John connects the description of Christ as a lamb with the removal of sin. Sometimes in John (as in 11:50) there is a record of words that are closer to the gospel than the person meant who spoke

them. John the Baptist was a prophet of God, so whatever he said is truth, but like OT prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12) the revelation could be truth beyond the immediate understanding of the person speaking. The Greek word for *lamb* is not the same word used in the LXX for the Passover lamb, nor is the Greek word for take away/remove a verb that for bearing sin in OT ritual. Some Jews in that time thought of the Messiah as a Warrior Lamb (similar to Revelation 6:16) who would cleanse the world of sin. The Baptist could be speaking for those who had that understanding of the Messiah. He might then mean, "Here in your sight is that real Lamb of God who removes sin." The Greek word for lamb in 1:29 is the same one used in Isaiah 53:7, where the Servant of the Lord is like *a lamb led to the slaughter* so that he could remove sin. After the cross we see how well these words describe the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb of God sent, provided, and accepted by the Father.

Like other places in this Gospel, the outlook is the entire *world*, a word that appears 79 times in the Gospel of John, but only 23 times total in the Synoptics\*. John draws attention to people who are not Jews. When it is suggested by some in our day that Jesus has taken away the sins of each person in the world, that is not in fact what he did. Many have since gone to hell in their sin, because their sin was not removed from them (8:24). Jesus' death was for all without distinction but not for all without exception. In other words, he is not the Savior of Israel only (Romans 10:12) but of sinners in all the world (1 John 2:2).

\*(a word to refer to Matthew, Mark & John)

**1:30** This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'

**1:30** With puzzling words, the Baptist made people wonder what he meant. Then when they realized, it would remain in their memories. Jesus was both after and before John. He was later than John in human birth as Luke 1 makes clear, but before him as Eternal Lord. Because the one who came after John on earth was the Lord himself, his pre-existence shows his rank as God. He was with the Father from the very beginning (1:1,2).

**1:31** I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

**1:31** The mothers of Jesus and John were cousins, but we are not told if Jesus and John ever met, except when their pregnant mothers met (Luke 1:39-44). God called John to be a prophet and used an event to signal to him who the Messiah was, so that Christ might be revealed to Israel. Baptism was not an arbitrary sign. It was an obvious act of cleansing, a ritual that pointed to Christ's saving work and man's sinfulness. Thus at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, God emphasized that the Messiah's work included saving sinners from their sin (Luke 19:10). Water cleanses; in this ritual it implies that such was needed and can be received from the Lord. The Spirit remaining on Jesus identified for John that Jesus was the one, the Savior who would do the cleansing.

**1:32,33** And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

**1:32,33** God told the Baptist he would see the Spirit descend on Christ *and remain*. Then John knew whom to announce as the Lord. When he told Israel to prepare a way *for the Lord*, he meant a way for Christ. This shows that Jesus is the Lord. (In Isaiah 40:3 *Lord* in Hebrew is the Divine Name, Yahweh or Jehovah). The Spirit would rest on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1,2). John witnessed this specific fulfillment when he saw the Spirit coming on Jesus and remaining (Isaiah 42:1). Later Jesus announced that the Spirit

was upon him when he read Isaiah 61 and said he was the fulfillment of that prophecy! (See Luke 4:16-21). Christ not only received the Holy Spirit for his ministry, he is the one who gives the Spirit.

<b>The Baptism by John</b>	<b>The Baptism by Jesus</b>
It was done with water	It is done with the Holy Spirit (not by the Spirit)
It is a ritual, a sign of cleansing.	It is the reality of spiritual cleansing.
Water has no permanent result.	Fire brings permanent change ( Matthew 3:11).
The baptizer is man.	The Baptizer is Christ whose baptism is salvation.
Christ never performed this ritual (John 4:1,2).	Man cannot baptize with the Spirit
The receiver may or may not have the reality.	The receiver of this baptism has been saved.

*Christian baptism with water is a ritual performed by men. This act signifies the personal spiritual cleansing accomplished by Christ through His Spirit.*

**1:34** And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

**1:34** If the delegation was still around to hear more, John said he did more than baptize. He had not only seen the Spirit remain on Christ, He has been witnessing (*I have borne witness*) since then that Jesus is the Son of God (or the Elect of God!). John's oral witness identified the Messiah. (Note that John baptizing Jesus is reported only in the other gospels.)

Which is it, **Son of God or Elect of God?** The best early Greek manuscripts say *Son*, yet there is good reason to wonder if the original was *Elect*. The scribes who copied these texts by hand were human. To copy that Jesus is the Son would be very familiar to them, but to write that he was the Elect of God would be quite unfamiliar. They would be very unlikely to change Son to Elect, but more likely to change Elect to Son. It would also be quite a surprise to call one who is the Lord, "Elect!" A number of manuscripts do read "Elect". Further, the Father said of Christ, "*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him...*" Isaiah 42:1. When the Baptist explained his role he referred to Isaiah 40. That the Spirit would remain on Christ fits Isaiah 11:1. Jesus receiving the Spirit ties to his being "my Chosen" (i.e., the Elect One) in Isaiah 42:1. So with all this Isaiah influence, there is some reason to think that the original word might have been "Elect". If so, this fits the pattern in 1:19-51 of the Apostle reporting a variety of titles for Christ. No other NT passage assembles this many.

**1:35-37** The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

**1:35-37** John the Baptist directed the attention of two of his disciples to Jesus. (One was Andrew and the other was probably John the Apostle, who never named himself in the Gospel he wrote.) They understood who he meant when John again called Christ the Lamb of God. Telling people to prepare the way for the Lord was John's exhortation. Joining baptism to his preaching was his method. Identifying Jesus as the Messiah and seeing people follow him (including his own followers) completed the mission of the Baptist on earth. At this point in John 1, Jesus eclipses John who is not mentioned again till 3:22ff.

**1:38,39** Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and you will see." So

they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

**1:38,39** They began to follow. Jesus asked what their purpose was for doing so. In their reply they called him *Rabbi*, which means teacher. They wanted him to teach them. To ask where he was staying was a way of asking if they could join him, since disciples in that time often lived with their masters. The tenth hour in Jewish reckoning was ten hours after sunrise, so it would be late afternoon. Sunset was approaching; the two disciples would probably stay overnight.

**1:40-42** One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). 42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

**1:40-42** Andrew went and found his brother Peter. (Peter was a fisherman and the Sea of Galilee was nearby.) Andrew's word to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah was probably the effect of Andrew hearing the Baptist's testimony. Many knew John was a prophet from God (Matthew 21:26). This prophet from God was informing those who listened that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus had the Spirit, and he was the Lamb of God who would take away sin. So Andrew had good reason to go find his brother.

Peter was later to be the leader of the disciples. Jesus gave him a name that means *rock*. Peter in English is from *petros* (masculine) in Greek, like *petra* (feminine) from which the word petroleum comes; petroleum is oil from rock. When Jesus said that Simon would be Peter, this was more than giving him an additional name. The Lord was announcing his purpose to turn Simon into a man of courage.

The Apostle John wanted the readers of his Gospel to believe in the Lord Jesus, so he wrote in Greek, which was not his native language. More people throughout the Mediterranean world spoke Greek than any other language. So in vv.38,41,42, John translated for them. It is a beautiful Christian tradition to spread the Word of God in every language of every people. This tradition is seen in the way the Apostle John wrote.

**1:43,44** The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

**1:43,44** The next person was Philip. Philip & Andrew had Greek names; in the NT there is no Jewish name given for them. They lived in Bethsaida in Galilee of the Gentiles (See Matthew 4:12-16). Most or all of Jesus' disciples came from Galilee, and most of his time was spent there. Since two disciples had Gentile names, we get an early hint that the gospel will spread among Gentiles. The Lord did not call the educated elite in Jerusalem to be his apostles. In this Gospel there is a keen interest in the whole world. What began in Galilee of the Gentiles did spread to all the earth.

**1:45-49** 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." 46 Nathanael said to him, "Can

anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

**1:45-49** Next is Nathanael who had a real Hebrew name. (His other name is Bartholomew in Mark 3:18.) Philip found him. The Apostle wants us to see that the message about Christ spread from friend to friend. Evangelism is not always institutional. True evangelism always speaks of Christ in affirmations. In John 1, men who discovered who Jesus was, quickly spread the word to others and called him: Lamb of God, Messiah, and "him of whom Moses in the law and prophets wrote". To have evangelism, there must be truth about Christ confessed, so hearers may know whom to trust.

### A Week at the Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

**Day 1** The Delegation from Jerusalem meets with John.

**Day 2** ("the next day") John sees Jesus and calls him "the Lamb of God," 1:29.

**Day 3** ("the next day") John points two of his disciples to Jesus, 1:35. They join him about 4:00 PM and go to where he stayed. Because of this time factor, 4:00 PM being late in the afternoon, probably Andrew finding and bringing Peter to Jesus was on the following day.

**Day 4** Andrew finds Peter and brought him to Jesus, 1:40-42.

**Day 5** ("the next day") Jesus went to Galilee and meets Philip & Nathanael, 1:43.

**Day 6** There is no record of anything that happened on this day.

**Day 7** The wedding in Cana of Galilee is on the third day after Jesus met Philip & Nathanel (2:1). The third day would be their way to refer to the time beginning with Day 5. Day 5 is the first; Day 6 is the second, so the third day, the day of the wedding, is Day 7.

The Apostle sets out this week deliberately, stating activity on *six* of the seven days. Highlighted here is confession of who Christ is. Later John will give a week at the end of Jesus' ministry beginning *six days* before the Passover (12:1), with the Passover as Day 7. That week had much to do with his disciples privately (John 13-17), including mention of their more mature confession of him: "*They ... have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me*" (17:8). These two references to days serve as *inclusios* to mark off a section of this Gospel by reporting a week at the beginning and one at the end. The words were made intentionally clear to non-Jews, but with these *inclusios* the structure of this Gospel remains very Jewish.

1:45 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."

**1:45** The witness from Philip is simple, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote." It shows the Biblical focus in his witness. He did not say, "Let me tell you how Jesus has made me a better person." He brought Nathanael's attention to Christ *as he was presented in Scripture*. This Gospel often shows a basis for faith in the words of Scripture (7:38; 10:35). Later when Jesus spoke of himself, he said the Scriptures "bear witness about me" (5:39), and Moses in the OT wrote of him (5:46). When we wonder what kind of strategy to use in evangelism, we can always use this one used by the Lord and his apostles! The Word of God was not only a guide to life and

thought among Jesus' disciples, it was their message. Peter could say in his preaching, "To him all the prophets bear witness [in Scripture] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). This is the kind of thinking demonstrated in Philip's words to Nathanael.

**When Were the Disciples Really Called to Be Jesus' Disciples?** In Matthew 4, Mark 1 and Luke 5, some of these same men mentioned in John 1 were called to be Jesus' disciples. It was a different occasion. He said in the Synoptics that he would make them *fishers of men*. Some say this shows that the Bible has its facts wrong! They say that the other report of the disciples' call disagrees with John 1. Supposedly something is wrong.

The way the men responded so immediately in Matthew, Mark, & Luke indicates that they must have known something about him. This implies that the moment Jesus called them in Matthew, Mark, & Luke was *not* the first time they had known of him. It is not difficult to see that John 1 refers to *first encounters* with Jesus, while some were still disciples of John the Baptist. Later, men who had been introduced to Christ earlier, were called to follow. In John 1 Jesus said only to Philip, "Follow me" (v.43). In the Synoptics he said, "Follow me" to Peter, Andrew, James, and John (and later Matthew). A possible explanation is: Some were looking to see who Jesus was at first, and later, when called, they committed to being his disciples.

**1:46-49 Nathanael's Cautious Response** Perhaps Nazareth lacked a good reputation. When Nathanael heard a claim of a Messiah from Nazareth, it provoked a serious question in him. In that time there were a number of false messiahs. How would he know if Jesus was just another one? Philip did not demand that Nathanael must believe immediately; he invited him to "Come and see." We invite people to explore whether Christ is true. Faith is not possible without knowledge, and certainty is never based on anything irrational. It takes time to consider the gospel. Jesus did not chide Nathanael for his questions but rather spoke favorably of Nathanael, a man without deceit. One can be an unbeliever and honestly wonder if the gospel is true. Honest doubts result in honest inquiry. In Acts 17:10-12, some checked what the apostles said with the Scriptures to see if their message was true. We should encourage honest questions. True faith is not gullible. It was actually honorable to check up on apostles.

An Israelite in whom there is no deceit was unlike his forefather Jacob – named Israel – who was legendary for his deceit. The Lord Jesus was willing to show this honest man something unusual to indicate that Philip's witness about him was true. Jesus told Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree. Nathanael needed and wanted to know truth. The Lord surprised him and met his need. In some way the Lord will do whatever is needed for all who are willing to believe and obey (John 7:16-18).

This Gospel does not explain the mystery of how Jesus knew many things. He was more than human, since he was always God. He was still fully human, thus he could learn the way others did (9:35) and see Nathanael under a fig tree without being nearby. Thus when it suited God's purpose, Jesus having a human and divine nature, know something only God would know (1:47,48)!

**Nathanael's confession: King of Israel.** Christ as King is one aspect of his role as Messiah. Nathanael made a major confession when the Lord revealed himself to him. Since John wrote brief highlights, we do not know what Scriptures (v.45) they might have discussed. Some Scriptures speak of the Messiah as King in the line of David. Nathanael's confession was not rash, but considered.



## Confessing Christ with Titles

The Lord Jesus is described in John 1:19-51 with a number of titles. Some were confessed by future disciples of Jesus, in addition to what John the Baptist said. This Gospel reports early confession of Christ. Except for the last one in this chapter ("Son of Man"), all are made by new believers. That is really delightful. Surely the Apostle John wants to encourage an early confession of Christ among all believers. In the examples that follow, the apostle does not assume that they understand well what they are saying. When they called Jesus the Messiah, they had much to learn about what kind of Messiah he would be. Even in the last year of Jesus' ministry, Peter resisted the idea of Jesus being crucified (Matthew 16:21-23). They were slow of heart to believe (Luke 24:25). Many things they understood later (13:7) after his resurrection (2:22). Note: *"His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him"* (12:16). If we wait till we understand fully what we confess about Christ, we will never speak at all! One way all Christians can confess Christ is to affirm titles that describe him. To speak of him as "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph" identified him locally in the wider community. Six of the following are titles\*.

1. **\*The Lamb of God** vv.29;36.
2. **\*The Elect of God** v.34; this is not certain; see the notes of v.34 above.
3. **Rabbi** vv.38, 49 ... a term of respect used for many teachers.
4. **\*The Messiah** v.41.
5. **Him of whom Moses in the Law and Prophets wrote** v.45.
6. **\*The King of Israel** v.49.
7. **\*The Son of God** v.49.
8. **\*The Son of Man** v. 51. (*This title Jesus applied to himself.*)

**1:50** Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

**1:50,51 The Promise to Nathanael** Nathanael quickly accepted the evidence Jesus provided. The Lord then told him much more was to come. The miracle of Jesus knowing Nathanael's private life was only the beginning of what Nathanael would see of the Son of God, the King of Israel (v.49). Jesus referred to the experience of Jacob when heaven was opened for him (Genesis 28:11-17). In Jesus a greater than Jacob was on earth; he was the ladder that came down to us. Jesus promised Nathanael and (switching to a plural) the *others* that they too would see heaven opened. The angels would ascend and descend on Jesus Christ the Son of Man. This shows that Christ is the link between heaven and earth, and thus between God and man. Jacob later became Israel, the father of the nation. Jesus is the true Israel (Isaiah 49:3) and Israel's eternal King (v.49).

The first disciples had not yet seen a miracle; the first one would occur two days later in Cana. Many glorious things would amaze them. They would see his mighty works and hear his words of life. They could not imagine that Christ would be crucified for them, and then they would see him in his resurrected body. By knowing Christ they would see the Father (14:6-9). They too would see heaven opened. Later Jesus would promise them that they would even do greater works than he did (14:12), because Christ would ascend to his Father.

**Son of Man** For the first time in this Gospel, Jesus called himself the *Son of Man*. Except for a question to him (12:34), it was always a description he initiated. The other titles like King of Israel and Messiah were more familiar to the people, but when Jesus used *Son of Man* he took a rare title found in Daniel 7:13,14. The Son of Man is a man, or such a title would not be used of him. In Daniel it is clearly used of a King who will reign forever, and all people will serve him. Jesus was claiming to be that King! Surprisingly, Jesus rarely said he was *the Christ* (Matthew 16:13-20 & Luke 24:25-27). In Matthew 26:64 Jesus referred to Daniel 7. In that text the Son of Man comes with “the clouds of heaven” – imagery reserved exclusively for the majestic advances of God. (See Psalms 18, 97, & 104.) In other words, this Son of Man is Christ the Lord, whose most frequent title for himself was the Son of Man.