

# The Book of John – 12

**Introduction** - As we close out chapter 1, we are told of Nathanael's encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Nathanael is believed by many to be the man Bartholomew. This is evidenced by two several main thoughts:

1. John never mentions the name, Bartholomew.
2. Bartholomew appears in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, and Luke 6:14 in the list of the apostles.
3. Bartholomew is listed coupled with Nathanael.
4. Lastly, if you look at the construction of the name Bar-tholomew (Tholomai/Tolomai- family name?), it indicates that this is the family name of Nathanael. Much the same as we saw for Simon Barjona.

The Lord Jesus Christ exclaims of him in **verse 47**, “...*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*”

The word guile used here is slightly different from the word lie, but it is related to lying. It means **to trick or to decoy**. Having no guile is a quality that ought to be characteristic of a Christian. We **are not** to live a life of decoys or trickery, but we are to be **Christians of character**.

Just recently, this was brought home to me reading and meditating on **Proverbs 11:1** “*1 A false balance is abomination to the Lord: But a just weight is his delight.*” Two verses later, it states, “*The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.*”

Nathanael's **first response was one of skepticism**.

**v46** “*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*”

**John Philips** comments on this perception of the day and states, “*Because of its proximity to gentile cities and its mixture of gentile population, its backwoods manners, general biblical illiteracy and lack of sophistication, and the coarseness of its dialect, the people of Judea held Galilee in low esteem.*”

One of the lessons that you and I can glean from this statement is that **the world's fads and opinions do not change the truth**. We constantly reinforce in Hampton Roads School of the Bible that Christians need to know what they believe, but what they believe needs to be **rooted in the Word of God. God has given us His Word, which is truth**. Our Adversary, the Devil, is **full of lies and the Father of it (John 8:44)**, but he is also full of guile or trickery. (**Acts 13:10, II Corinthians 11:3**) Philip's answer once again was one of instruction for us. His answer is simple and direct, “*Come and see...*”

**Albert Barnes** again states, “*He [Philip] did not sit down to reason with him, or speculate*

*about the possibility that a good thing could come from Nazareth; but he asked him to go and examine for himself, to see the Lord Jesus, to hear him converse, to lay aside his prejudice, and to judge from a fair and candid personal inquiry.”*

When we come to **verse 47**, we are confronted with this blessed truth that the Lord **saw Nathanael**. But something more significant is introduced to us as well. The **Lord had His eye on Nathanael before Philip found him**.

We discover that **God minds us**.

**Psalm 8:4** *“4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?”*

Secondly, **God knows our frame**.

**Psalm 103:13-15** *“13 Like as a father pitieth his children, So the Lord pitieth them that fear him. 14 **For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.** 15 As for man, his days are as grass: As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.”*

**God knows what is in us**.

**John 2:23-25** *“23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 **But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,** 25 **And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.**”*

Our text shows the Lord’s declaration to Nathanael as He approaches.

**v47** *“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”*

**What do you think the Lord’s intent was by saying this to Nathanael and those around Him?**

First, we are thrust back to the roots of the Israelite people. Jacob was a man **full of guile** until the Lord broke him at Jabbok. Jacob was the trickster; he was the supplanter. And the Lord seems to be arousing this contrast by saying, Here is one that is of Israel and not Jacob.

Secondly, we see again the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Light. There is no way to trick the Lord. We are exposed and shown who we are and our needs.

Thirdly, we see that the Lord’s intentions are made manifest.

Fourth, I want you to see that God and His Word do the exposing work in an individual's life.

Notice with me in **verse 48** Nathanael’s response.

*“Nathanael saith unto him, **Whence knowest thou me?** Jesus answered and said unto him, *Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.*”*

There is something inexplicable about the convicting power of God’s Spirit and His Word in our lives. We see in full color the eyes of Nathanael’s understanding being opened. The Lord Jesus Christ reveals His deity to Nathanael, whose name, by the way, means “gift of God.”

The Lord tells him, **v48**, *“Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.”*

The fig tree is mentioned much in the Scriptures. The fig tree was held in high regard and was a staple for the ancient Mediterranean world since the earliest times. They can reach heights of 10–20 ft. The trees themselves can produce two, sometimes three crops in a year. Fruit could typically be found about ten months out of the year. There were the first ripe figs in June, the matured crop in August, and often a tiny winter crop that remained until spring. It is generally used as a reference to peace, prosperity, and God’s blessings. (Mic. 4:4; 1 Kgs. 4:25; Hag. 2:19; Zech. 3:10; 1 Macc. 14:12; cf. 2 Kgs. 18:31; Isa. 36:16; Joel 2:22)<sup>1</sup> Fig trees and other places, such as large trees that provided shade and seclusion, were used as places of **contemplation and prayer**.



It is not too far a stretch to think that Nathanael could have been very well contemplating the Scriptures, the story of Jacob, and what we call Jacob’s ladder based on the Lord’s response in **verses 50-51**. We gather this assessment from the truth that our God **does nothing arbitrarily**. There is purpose in all that He says and all that He does. We see Nathanael was stricken by this and declared his faith in the Lord.

**Verse 49** tells us this: *“Nathanael answered and saith unto him, **Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.**”*

John Philips said, *“Nathanael had made what modern physicists would call the quantum leap. In one burst of revelation, he had seen a man from Nazareth as God manifest in the flesh.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, “Fig Tree,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 461.

At this, **the Lord acknowledges His faith.**

**v50-51** *“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. 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.”*