



**John 1:43-51**  
*Jacob's Ladder*

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

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."

46 And 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 is no deceit!"

48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

49 Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

50 Jesus answered and said to 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, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

When it comes to the Patriarchs and the heroes of the Old Testament we can sometimes forget that they were not born saved, and that they too were sinners saved by grace. Just like every other believer, God called them and saved them out of their lost and fallen condition. A great example of that principle is Jacob son of Isaac. In Genesis 28 we find him in the midst of running off to stay with his uncle Laban in Haran. The reason he had to do that, was that his brother Esau wanted to kill him, because Jacob had deceived and lied to his blind father Isaac, and taken the birthright and blessing that Isaac had wanted to give to Esau. Certainly Jacob, although a child of the same Covenant made by God with his grandfather Abraham, was not exactly a model of saintly behavior and he had no real relationship with the God of his father Isaac. It is during his trip to Haran that we find him bedding down for the night near a place called Luz. It is there in a dream that God calls Jacob to himself,

*Gen. 28:11 "So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.*

*12 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.*

*13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.*

*14 "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

*15 "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*

*16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."*

*17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"*

It is here in this place that Jacob calls *Bethel* – House of God, that he makes His own personal covenant with God. Before then, Jacob had not been seeking God he did not even really know the God his father Isaac worshipped, neither was he any more worthy than his brother Esau to be saved. Jacob was clearly a sinner, and one in whom there was considerable guile. How then could Jacob be saved, he couldn't climb up to God, he didn't even want to. But God loved Jacob and was seeking him, and God was the one who bridged the gap between a fallen man on earth and the Holy God in heaven by means of a Mediator, symbolized in his dream by a ladder – *Jacob's ladder*.

Now that for several centuries was the last specific mention Israel had of that ladder Jacob saw. But not of the mediator who bridges the gap caused by sin between God and man, that Mediator was the promised Seed God spoke of that would be a blessing to all the families of the earth in Genesis 28:14. God promised them again and again, that the mediator Immanuel – *God with Us*, the Messiah, the anointed one was coming, God with Us. *But when would he arrive?*

In the verses in John we have just read, we see that the mediator, the bridge between God and men, Jacob's ladder is Jesus Christ. John the Baptist had been preaching for several days that he was now among them, some had heard and believed like Andrew and Peter, but like Jacob before them the majority of Israelites did not yet know that *"the Lord is in this place."* So Jesus now begins the process of calling Apostles to himself. The first man Jesus calls as He is preparing to leave Bethabara to return to Galilee is Phillip. Phillip is from the same village as Andrew and Peter, Bethsaida, which means "house of fish." And Phillip was probably also a fisherman.

Incidentally, if you ever think you have to be a man or woman of great learning and gifts to do anything for the Lord, consider that Jesus didn't call great scholars or Jewish leaders to be his Apostles he chose Fisherman and outcasts *"God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty"* (1 Cor. 1:27)

Phillip hears the Sovereign command of Christ calling him to follow, and He does. He believes, he follows, and he too tells others, he immediately goes searching for Nathanael also a Galilean from Cana, and he tells him two things, the first is true and the second is misleading. The first thing he says is that they've found the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote of, that is the Messiah. The second thing he says is misleading He says the messiah is Jesus of NAZARETH THE SON OF JOSEPH.

That misleading description of Jesus causes some problems for Nathanael, because Nathanael knows what the scriptures say about the Messiah. Where does the Old Testament say the Messiah will be from? *Bethlehem in Judea*. Not Nazareth in Galilee. And the scriptures also say that the Messiah will both the Son of God and the Son of David. Moreover he knows the reputation of Nazareth, it's a backwater hick town, how could ANYTHING good, much less the MESSIAH come from there?

The same problem will dog Christ later: *"John 7:41 Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee?"*

**42 "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"**

**43 So there was a division among the people because of Him."**

The problem is that Phillip is a brand new believer, and while he is very zealous for Jesus he doesn't yet have all the facts, He doesn't know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of the line of Joseph. And so his first report makes Nathanael skeptical about his claim. Matthew Henry notes well that "***The mistakes of preachers often give rise to the prejudices of hearers.***"

I don't know about you, but that was certainly true in my own life. Many of my original objections to Christianity were the result of my own prejudices and also of the false caricatures of Christianity that I had been exposed to first in a Catholic school and then on the rare occasions that I was brought to liberal protestant churches. Throughout my childhood, I don't believe I was ever exposed to the genuine article. It may just be that you or people you know are in the same situation. My experience has been that very few people who hate Christ and the gospel have ever been exposed to real Christianity.

Well Phillip may not have all his ducks in a row, but he does have the sense, when Nathanael objects not to enter into a dispute with him, especially when he clearly doesn't yet have all the facts, instead he just brings Him to Christ. *Come and See.*

I hope you see the winsomeness, the love of Christ in his greeting to Nathanael. In fact I hope you'll see the awesome loveliness of Christ's character more and more as we go through this gospel. Just as Jesus graciously forgave me for all the evil things I said of Him in my blindness, he also forgives Nathanael's unjustified attack, which he knew about, I love what Matthew Henry says: "***He did not retort upon him, Can any good thing come out of Cana (ch. 21:2), an obscure town in Galilee?***" – *Matthew Henry*

No Jesus greets Nathanael in a way that shows he knew him before Nathanael ever met him ***an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!*** By an Israelite indeed he reminds us of what Paul says in Romans 9:6 *For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.* Nathanael isn't just a Jew outwardly by birth, he is one inwardly by Faith. And he has that wonderful gift that all true Christians should have: ***TRANSPARENCY!***

***no guile or deceit towards men towards men*** – not a façade, or schemer, but trustworthy. How I long to be in the company of that kind of person. Don't you? Don't you get tired of trying to constantly figure out whether people are lying to you?

***No guile towards God***, he is sincere in his faith and repentance, not the man who praises God with his lips but his heart is far from God.

That surprises Nathanael, he asks, ***How do you know me?*** He probably has to wonder did Phillip tell you about me? When someone zings us, our immediate explanation is often far less than supernatural. Someone must have explained it. It's funny, I've seen a variation on this phenomenon happen more than once, a pastor goes away on vacation and a guest preacher fills his pulpit, when the pastor gets back he is greeted by an extremely angry member of the church who says "I can't believe you told him about my problem!" (or my family or something along those lines) and he says "what are you talking about?" and it turns out that the guest preacher's sermon zeroed in on that man's problem. Of course the pastor never mentioned a word to the guest preacher, he knew nothing about that man, but of course God knew everything and was using that preacher to address his heart.

Jesus replies “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” And Nathaniel is amazed, we are usually tempted to think that the fig tree was simply a reference to the last place Nathaniel was at before Phillip called him to Christ. But it obviously has greater significance than that to Nathaniel. The Fig Tree was often a place where faithful Israelites would go to pray and meditate, and I tend to think that it was there at some point that Nathaniel was alone sincerely pouring his heart out to God without any guile, confessing his sins and calling upon the Lord for forgiveness. And Jesus mentions I saw you there, and I know you, and give Him those words of assurance, fear not, I know your heart Nathaniel, your faith is true, you are a true Israelite. And immediately Nathaniel is overwhelmed, he understands, “Master YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, You are the King of Israel, the Messiah” *You are my Lord and My God!* That was the beginning of a faith Christ that lasted the rest of His life. Nathanael is likely the Apostle called by the authors of the Synoptics by his last name *Bartholomew (meaning Son of Tolmai)and always listed after Phillip*. We know that because John never refers to Bartholomew and lists Nathanael as present with the other Apostles after the resurrection.

Jesus assures Him that he will see greater things than these and then says, TRULY I TELL YOU, watch for that, in the Greek its AMEN-AMEN (“truly, truly”) and in the entire bible only Jesus speaks that way, that is because Jesus whatever Jesus says is truth. Christ is Called “The Amen” in Rev. 3:14 “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ' These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:’” – and it is at this point he speaks of himself as Jacob’s ladder. He says Nathanael, compared to what you will experience, that revelation, is nothing. You will see in me all the fullness of what Jacob saw in His dream a ladder or bridge between heaven and earth.

In Me, says Christ, You will see:

- 1) The Miracles of Heaven
- 2) The Message of Heaven
- 3) The Mediation of Heaven – “shall see *heaven opened*, that we may *enter into the holiest* by his blood (Heb. 10:19, 20); heaven opened, that by faith we may *look in*, and at length may *go in*; may now behold the glory of the Lord, and hereafter enter into the joy of our Lord”

Jesus of course doesn’t only say that to Nathanael, he gives that promise to be the mediator for every true believer. So my only question is, is he that to you today? Kids, remember that Jacob was in the covenant, but it wasn’t until that dream at Bethel where God called Him that He was Saved.