

MEET THE LAMB OF GOD

The Gospel of John 1:19-34

As we look around at what is going on in the world today, we can sometimes get a feeling of hopelessness. We may feel the culture and politics are on a slippery slope, heading south. Lack of respect for human life is rampant, whether in the form of suicide/homicide bombings and stark terrorism or cloaked in the form of “quality of life” or “alleviating suffering” issues regarding disabled people, the elderly, or those in vegetative states. But hopelessness is not the proper response. Today we learn more about One who stands against all that is going on in the world, the One who not only gives hope but who personifies hope.

John 1:19-28 ESV:

19 *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.”*
24 *(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.”*
28 *These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

“Who are you?” was a logical question. Was he the promised Messiah? Was he the Prophet Elijah spoken of in Malachi 4:5 NAS?

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

Great crowds had gathered to hear John, and many people had been baptized. It was therefore possible the people thought that he was the promised Messiah.

John the Baptist told them that he was neither Elijah nor the Messiah. John referred them back to Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 40:1-3 and confirmed that he was the fulfillment of that prophecy:

1 "Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God.
 2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem;
 And call out to her, that her warfare has ended,
 That her iniquity has been removed,
 That she has received of the Lord's hand
 Double for all her sins."
 3 A voice is calling,
 "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness;
 Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God." (NAS)

John the Baptist said he was the voice of someone crying, which speaks of his genuineness and sincerity in calling people to repentance.

Proverbs 8:1 NRSV:

Does not wisdom cry out, And understanding lift up her voice?

Preachers, or anyone who testifies of Jesus, must be sincere and must underscore that sincerity by demonstrating that their lives have been changed by that message. Note also where John was crying out. It was in the *wilderness*, in a place of silence and solitude, away from the noise of the world and the hustle and bustle of its business. When we can disentangle ourselves from the concerns of worldly dealings the better prepared we are to hear from God. What did John cry out? "*Make straight the way of the Lord.*" John came to correct the misunderstanding that had developed among the people about the ways of God. In other words, God had taught the people the right ways to live but the religious leaders had changed the teaching to satisfy their own selfish purposes. They had taken the straight road that God had established and made it crooked. Now John the Baptist was calling people to return to the original plan of God. So John is calling out to people to straighten out the crooked road that the religious leaders have built, and get back on the straight and narrow road that God wants them on. That road leads them straight to repentance and trust in God, and prepares them to welcome the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and His Gospel message. It is kind of like in olden times when messengers would go before the king blowing trumpets and announcing his coming, alerting the people to receive him warmly.

Psalm 24:7 NCV:

7 Open up, you gates. Open wide, you aged doors and the glorious King will come in.

John the Baptist came to prepare people to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

Having found out who John was, these religious leaders (that is, the heads of the nation,

the members of the Sanhedrin¹) then asked what he was doing. “*Why are you baptizing?*” John got his authority to baptize, not from men, but from Heaven, because he was commissioned by God (Matthew 21:23–32). Their question to John was, in effect, “*Since you have no official title, why are you baptizing people?*”² The Jewish religious leaders in that day baptized Gentiles who wanted to become Jews; but John was baptizing Jews.

The Jewish religious leaders considered baptism a sacred ceremony. They had used it along with circumcision when allowing non-Jews to convert from paganism to Judaism. Baptism represented their cleansing from the evil of their former lives.³ They expected it would be used when the Messiah came, because it was promised that then there would be a fountain opened and clean water sprinkled upon the people. It was taken for granted that Christ and Elijah would baptize when they came in order to purify a polluted world.

Zechariah 13:1 NAS:

On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

Ezekiel 36:25:

25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

What was going on here? The question about the Prophet Elijah in verse 21 refers back to Deuteronomy 18:15–18, which was generally supposed to have reference to an end-time figure who would appear before the second coming of Christ.⁴ But many did not understand that there would be two comings of Christ. So they thought it possible that John the Baptist was the Elijah prophesied to come.

These priests and Levites who were sent to investigate John the Baptist were proud, self-righteous priests who thought they did not need to repent, and therefore could not tolerate anyone who thought it necessary to preach repentance. These priests were so conceited that they could not understand the need for a doctrine of repentance. They also were the type of men who liked to parade their authority before the people. They undoubtedly felt pretty puffed up when they called John to account for his actions in front of people who considered him a prophet. They most likely had every desire to silence John’s teaching, if they could find a justifiable reason to do so, because they were undoubtedly envious of his growing following among the people. They were also probably resentful of John’s teaching because it did not follow the rules of religion that the Sanhedrin (Jewish leaders) had established, nor did it conform to what they had come to expect of the Messiah’s kingdom. They wanted a Messiah who would be a conquering military leader and restore

¹ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A. R.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. Jn 1:19

² Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:274

³ Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 1:19

⁴ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed.* Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Jn 1:19.

Israel once again to a position of world power.

Let us insert something at this point to give you an idea of what these Jewish leaders were expecting when the Messiah came. They looked to Zechariah 12, which they interpreted to be the coming of the Messiah. Actually that chapter is predicting the second coming of Christ in the end times but these leaders did not realize that.

Zechariah 12:1-10 NLT:

1 This message concerning the fate of Israel came from the Lord: "This message is from the Lord, who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the human spirit.

2 I will make Jerusalem like an intoxicating drink that makes the nearby nations stagger when they send their armies to besiege Jerusalem and Judah.

3 On that day I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock. All the nations will gather against it to try to move it, but they will only hurt themselves.

4 "On that day," says the Lord, "I will cause every horse to panic and every rider to lose his nerve. I will watch over the people of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of their enemies.

5 And the clans of Judah will say to themselves, 'The people of Jerusalem have found strength in the Lord of Heaven's Armies, their God.'

6 "On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a flame that sets a woodpile ablaze or like a burning torch among sheaves of grain. They will burn up all the neighboring nations right and left, while the people living in Jerusalem remain secure.

7 "The Lord will give victory to the rest of Judah first, before Jerusalem, so that the people of Jerusalem and the royal line of David will not have greater honor than the rest of Judah.

8 On that day the Lord will defend the people of Jerusalem; the weakest among them will be as mighty as King David! And the royal descendants will be like God, like the angel of the Lord who goes before them!

9 For on that day I will begin to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 "Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem."

So when these Jewish leaders heard about this guy out in the wilderness who was calling people to repent and be baptized in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, they decided to go out there with the intention of discrediting an imposter.

But John the Baptist simply kept a low profile telling them that he was not anything special. He was only the messenger carrying the message of the Messiah who would soon be made known. John told them that his baptism was of water but that there was someone who was soon to come who was far greater than he. John made it clear that he was not trying to start a new religion or make himself out to be the Messiah. He was pointing people to the Messiah, the Son of God (John 1:34), their Savior. The baptism of water

was only a sign of the baptism that Christ would give them, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

There is a message here for all of us. It is our function as Christ followers to direct people to Christ. We are not to attempt to glorify ourselves in our service to our Lord, but to point others to His glory.

John tells the Jewish leaders of Christ's presence among them even though they do not yet know who He is. Christ stood among the common people and was one of them. That which is hidden in this world is often a source of excellence. Saints (believers) are God's hidden treasures and much of the world does not know them. People who love Christ with all their hearts treasure His presence in their lives, even in the most severe trial. They feel this way in spite of the fact that much of the world rejects Him. They believe it is a privilege and honor to suffer in His service and for His glory. A lowly position in the service of Christ means far more to a true Christian than great positions of power in a godless situation, as the psalmist wrote in Psalm 84:10 ESV:

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Now one would think these chief priests and Pharisees, having been informed of the coming of the Messiah, would have asked how they could find out more about Him. But no, apparently this was not of importance to them. They came to discredit John, not to receive any instructions from him. They apparently had no interest in learning anything more about Jesus even though they were told He was coming. Seems almost unbelievable does it not? But I know there are many people in the world today, including many who claim to be Christians, who would not be that interested if they heard Jesus would soon return. What about you?

John 1:29-34 ESV:

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!"

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

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

32 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.'

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

"Behold! The Lamb of God!" Jesus came to be baptized by John, and John clearly identified him as:

- The person who, as the sacrificial Lamb of God, would make final atonement for sin (1:29)
- The Messiah (1:30)
- The One who would baptize “with the Holy Spirit,” as shown by the Spirit’s descending upon Him as a dove (1:32–33). John’s own practice of water baptism was but a representation of Christ’s Spirit baptism that was to come later (1:33).
- The Son of God (1:34)⁵

This is the day after the priests had fired all their questions at John the Baptist, the second day of the week that the Apostle John is recording. (He is recording the events of this week sequentially.) No doubt some of the same religious leaders were still hanging around to hear what else John the Baptist had to say. This time, he called Jesus “*the Lamb of God*,” a title he would repeat the next day (John 1:35–36).

We might ask at this point, why would Christ present Himself as a Lamb? Why not as a Lion, which He also is? What image comes to mind when you think of a lamb? Probably you think of a creature who is gentle and non-aggressive. Perhaps you think of a sacrifice; certainly your image is of something that is non-threatening. Yet these Jewish leaders did feel threatened. Later Christ will come as a warrior, as the lion conqueror; but first He wanted to draw people to Himself in salvation. If you are in a field and see both a lamb and a lion, which one are you most likely to approach and which one will you flee from? As He was approaching the time of the cross, Christ told His disciples, “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself*” (John 12:32 NAS). The Lamb drew the weary and the burdened to Himself through His earthly ministry and through His sacrificial death. That is why the Holy Spirit led John to introduce Christ as the “*Lamb of God*.”

When John used this title for Christ he pretty much summed up what the Bible is all about. Do you remember what Isaac said to his father, Abraham, as they walked toward the place where God had instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son?

Genesis 22:7 NAS:

7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

The people of Israel were familiar with lambs for the sacrifices. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb; and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the Temple altar, plus all the other lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs could not remove the sin of a person, but the **Lamb of God**, Jesus, is capable of removing a person’s sin. The lambs sacrificed at the Temple were for the people of Israel only, but this Lamb would shed His blood for the whole world.

What does John’s baptism of Jesus here have to do with Jesus being the Lamb of God? It

• ⁵ Willmington, H. L.: *Willmington's Bible Handbook*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997, S. 607.

is believed by most scholars that baptism in Jesus' day was by immersion. It pictured death, burial, and resurrection. We see here a representation of the "baptism" Jesus would suffer when He was placed on a cross. He would then be the sacrificial Lamb of God that Isaiah spoke of in Isaiah 53:7 NAS:

*7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.*

It would be through death, burial, and resurrection that the Lamb of God would fulfill His purpose in bringing salvation to all the world.

As Jesus approached John the Baptist for baptism, the Spirit of God undoubtedly said to John something similar to what He had said to Samuel at the anointing of King David in 1 Samuel 16:12 NAS:

"Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

The sign God told John to expect was the actual descent of the Spirit upon Him in the form of a dove. John had seen this as Christ came up out of the water after His baptism (Matthew 3:16, 17). Then, hearing the voice from Heaven, John saw first hand evidence that this was the Son of God.⁶ We have here a picture of the Trinity (Father, Son., and Holy Spirit).⁷ John saw the Spirit as a dove rest on Jesus. Do you remember what Isaiah predicted about the coming Messiah in Isaiah 11:2 NAS?⁸

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

God had told John that when he saw this sign of the dove, the Person on whom the dove, in other words the Holy Spirit, landed would be the One who would baptize with that same Holy Spirit. Cleansing by water is one thing, but the cleansing produced by the Spirit of God is what cleanses one from sin forever.

Later at Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the baptism by the Holy Spirit brought in the fulfillment of God's promise of a New Covenant of salvation and eternal life for all who accepted Jesus' death as atonement for their sins. We read about this in Acts 2:1-13 NLT:

⁶ Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A. R.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. Jn 1:31.

⁷ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 1:29.

⁸ Walvoord, John F.; Zuck, Roy B.; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:275.

1 On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place.
2 Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting.
3 Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.
4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.
5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem.
6 When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.
7 They were completely amazed. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee,
8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!
9 Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia,
10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism),
11 Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!”
12 They stood there amazed and perplexed. “What can this mean?” they asked each other.
13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!”

1 Corinthians 12:1-13 NLT:

1 Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don’t want you to misunderstand this.
2 You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshiping speechless idols.
3 So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.
4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all.
5 There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord.
6 God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.
7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.
8 To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge.
9 The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing.
10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a

message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.

11 It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.

13 Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

I hope you all get what this is all about. Have you personally met the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior by the grace of God will give you salvation, forgiveness for your sins, and thereby eternal life in Heaven. When that salvation occurs by the grace of God as a result of your faith, Christ sends His Holy Spirit to dwell within you and provide you all the power of God to live your life according to His will. Your responsibility is to submit your will to His so that He might provide you with the fruit of the Spirit, which includes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. What more could anyone ask from life? And it is all yours simply by accepting this free gift of grace and allowing the Holy Spirit to reign in your life. That is why Jesus the Lamb of God came. May you all know the joy and peace that come from Him.

Begin for 3/25

John 1:35-42 ESV:

*35 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.

38 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.

*40 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).*

This is now the third day. The seventh day will bring us to the wedding at Cana (John 2:1); and since Jewish weddings were usually on Wednesdays, it would make this third day the Sabbath. So on this Sabbath Day Jesus began selecting His disciples.

The two disciples of John the Baptist who followed Jesus were John, the writer of the Gospel, and his friend Andrew. How did the Baptist feel about his followers leaving him to follow Jesus? John 3:30 records the Baptist's comments regarding this question: "*He must increase, but I must decrease*"

When Jesus asked them, "*What are you seeking?*" He was undoubtedly trying to determine what it was they were looking for in a Messiah. If they were expecting a military leader to overthrow the Roman Empire, they wouldn't want to serve Jesus. Jesus invited them to spend the day with Him (it was 10 A.M.). Jesus very likely spent this time getting to know these men, perhaps telling them some of what He planned to do, and answering question they may have had. They must have been very favorably impressed by what Jesus told them because they both went to get their brothers to introduce them to Jesus. John brought his brother, James, and Andrew brought his brother Simon, whom Jesus named Cephas (Peter), both of which mean "a rock." It took a lot of time and effort before Jesus could develop Simon into a rock. But that is what Jesus would do for everyone who followed Him.

John 1:12 NRSV:

12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

Andrew told his brother: "*We have found the Messiah!*". *Messiah* in Hebrew means "**anointed**," and the Greek meaning is "Christ." To the Jews, the meaning was the same as "Son of God."⁹ In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and thereby set apart for special service. **Kings** were especially called "God's anointed" (1 Samuel 26:11; Psalm 89:20). So, when the Jews spoke about their Messiah, they had in mind a king who would come to deliver them and establish the kingdom.

Jesus had to explain, however, even to His own followers that the cross had to come before the crown, that He must suffer before He could enter into His glory (Luke 24:13–35). The Jews of that time found it very difficult to accept that Jesus was the Messiah.¹⁰

John 1:43-51 ESV:

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said

⁹ Matt. 26:63–64; Mark 14:61–62; Luke 22:67–70.

¹⁰ John 7:26, 40–44; 9:22; 10:24.

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 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!"¹¹

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!"

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."

Jesus called Philip and Philip trusted Him and followed Him. Phillip gave evidence of his trust and faith in Jesus by sharing it with Nathanael. Philip told Nathanael that Jesus was the Promised One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.¹²

Nathanael knew that the town in which Jesus was raised, Nazareth, had a very bad reputation (Acts 24:5) and he questioned how anything good could come from there, especially the expected Messiah. It would be like saying in today's world that Jesus came from East Saint Louis. It would make sense to most Jews that Jesus would come from a place like Jerusalem or Hebron. Philip, however, gave the only sensible answer: "*Come and see.*" He knew that once Nathanael had an opportunity to meet and talk with Jesus, all his questions would be answered. "Come" in the Bible represents an invitation of God's grace.¹³

We all need to guard against prejudices and Nathanael was no exception? Though a good man, Nathanael allowed his prejudice toward the people of Nazareth to make him believe Jesus was an impostor. It did not take long, however, for Jesus to wipe away any doubts that Nathanael might have.

In verse 47 Jesus was probably suggesting that Nathanael's directness suggested he was an Israelite without any underlying motives and he was willing to check out for himself the things that were being said about this Jesus. There may be a reference here going back to Genesis 27:35 where we find Jacob labeled as an Israelite who was deceitful.

¹¹ By calling him "an Israelite in whom is no guile (deceit)," Jesus was certainly referring to Jacob, the ancestor of the Jews, a man who used guile (deceit) to trick his brother, his father, and his father-in-law.

¹² Deut. 18:18-19; John 1:21, 25; Isa. 52:13-53:12; Dan. 7:13; Micah 5:2; Zech. 9:9.

¹³ John 1:39; 7:37; 21:12.

Jacob was born holding the heel of his brother, so that he was named Jacob, meaning a combination of all of the following: “he takes by the heel” with the derived meaning “to supplant, **deceive**, attack from the rear.”¹⁴ Jesus may immediately have seen a contrast between Jacob and Nathanael that prompted Him to refer to Nathanael as a man without deceit. You can read the whole story about Jacob’s deceitful behavior toward his brother Esau in Genesis 27.

Nathanael could not figure out how Jesus knew about him. Jesus said He knew exactly what Nathanael was doing before Philip approached him; he was under the fig tree. Jesus’ ability to see Nathanael without actually seeing him convinced Nathanael that Jesus was the Son of God and the appointed King of Israel. Nathanael’s experience was like that of the **Samaritan woman** at the well. John 4:7-29 NAS:

7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."

8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water? 12 "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" 13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw." 16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come here." 17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have correctly said, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; this you have said truly." 19 The woman said* to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."*

¹⁴ Elwell, Walter A. ; Comfort, Philip Wesley: Tyndale Bible Dictionary. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library), S. 661.

24 "God is spirit , and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." 26 Jesus said* to her, "I who speak to you am He." 27 At this point His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why do You speak with her?" 28 So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said* to the men, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"*

Jesus gave Nathaniel a mild scolding here and asked whether it was just because He saw him under the fig tree that he believed. Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see greater things than this, and in the next three years Nathanael did see much greater things than these.

Then in verse 51 the reference returns to Jacob. After deceiving his brother, Esau, for his father's blessing and birthright, he had run away from home in fear that his brother would kill him. His first night away from home was spent at Bethel where God appeared to him in a dream. A ladder was let down from Heaven on which the angels were ascending and descending. At Bethel Jacob learned that God would always be with him. This is what Jesus wanted Nathanael and the other disciples to know about Him. Just as Jacob received supernatural communication with God, so would Nathanael and the others. The Son of Man (Jesus) replaced the ladder in Jacob's dream. The angels would minister to Jesus and they would be subject to Him. Here Jesus was given charge over the angels. He could send them as messengers to Heaven, and they would return with messages for Him and to care for Him. So Jesus is saying that Nathanael will see Heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

The ladder is Christ and only through Him can you and I make contact with God. Jesus said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus is the ladder, the kind that you climb, but One that you trust and also rely on..