

# Gospel of John: 1:19-51

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Coming out of the Prologue (1:1-18) we now move into the first of the two major sections of the Gospel. The first section is called the book of Signs and will extend from 1:19 to the end of chapter twelve.

Throughout these chapters we will explore Jesus' public ministry through the eyes of St. John the Apostle and his theology. This first subsection (John 1:19-4:54) could be identified as the call to faith since what we will be studying is a series of incidents and dialogues as individuals are being called to "come and see"; to come and meet Jesus.

As we get into today's study some scholars suggest that this section is divided up into four different moments each leading to a different revelation about an aspect of Jesus' identity. These revelations crescendo at the Wedding Feast at Cana (2:1-12), which we will study next week, where Jesus' glory is revealed in His first miracle.

## **Day #1 Through the Testimony of John the Baptist 1:19-28**

**1:19 And this is the testimony of John:** As we begin the narrative of Jesus' public ministry St. John the Apostle introduces us to St. John the Baptist who is giving a *testimony* to the truth of Jesus. The Aramaic word used for testimony is important because what St. John the Apostle means to communicate is that the Baptist is not just "talking about Jesus" but he is "witnessing". The Aramaic word used not only means to have personal, firsthand knowledge of what you speak but one risks their life in communicating what they know. And as we know the Baptist will literally lose his head for telling the truth.

Over the course of the Baptist's public ministry word of his proclamations have reached all the way to **Jerusalem**, and a delegation of **priests and Levites** were sent to investigate. There are two points I want us to be aware of:

1. Who were these men/priests and Levites? Back in the time of Moses, God gave the Israelites the Tabernacle that held the Ark of the Covenant. Remembering that there were twelve tribes God, choose one tribe to be the "priestly" tribe (Numbers 8:5-26; 17:1-12), the tribe of Levi (Levites). Only from this tribe could the men become priests of the Temple. Not all Levite men became priests but all priests of the Temple must be from the tribe of Levi. SEE HANDOUT.
2. Why were they so interested in the Baptist? After the building of the second Temple (518 BC) theological conversations started to become popular speculating as to who the Messiah might be and when the Messiah would come. With the Book of Daniel (written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) which is prophetic in nature, these conversations took a fevered pitch. These men came to the Baptist wondering, expecting, trying to figure out if he was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. It is this reason they ask the Baptist: **Who are you?**

Finally point, it was the **Jews** that sent this delegation to investigate John the Baptist. This term “the Jews” occurs more than 50 times in the Gospel of John. In John’s Gospel he makes a distinction between the crowds that gather and “the Jews”. These crowds were most probably Jews themselves. St. John is making a distinction between the character of true Israelites who hunger and thirst for the truth possibly seeing that in Jesus and those Israelites, the hostile leadership mostly in Jerusalem, who have given into sin and their own blindness.

**1:20 he admitted:** The Baptist is unafraid to admit the truth, ***I am not the Messiah***. Some translation will read *I am not the Christ*. Christ is the Greek translation for Messiah, the Anointed One.

**1:21 So they asked him:** The more literal translation of this section would be: *They questioned him further*. This delegation asks two specific questions: **“Are you Elijah?”**, to which the Baptist answers, ***I am not***. They then ask: **“Are you the prophet?”**, to which John again says, **“No”**. These theological conversations I spoke of earlier, have their basis in certain texts of the Old Testament. These scriptures prophesied that Elijah the prophet would return before God’s intervention in human history.

*I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents...*  
Malachi 4:4-5

The prophet Malachi is describing the role of the prophet Elijah as the end times are coming upon us. The Jews of Jesus’ time believed then, as they do today, that the Messiah, the Anointed One of God will come to bring God’s people (the Israelites) back into ownership of the Promised Land. Before the Messiah comes the prophet Elijah will come to herald his arrival. John the Baptist, in both physical appearance and voice, fit what they would have expected Elijah to look like and sound. (What did Elijah look like? Take a look at 2 King 1:8 and Matthew 3:4.)

The next thing to think about is why did John the Baptist say “No” to their questions. There is much discussion among modern scholarship as to the reason with no definitive answer. Some reasons might be:

1. Maybe John the Baptist sense the hostility of the delegation. To have answered “yes” quite possibly could have been a death sentence for him. The Baptist could have been charged with the very same issues Rome had with Jesus – blasphemy (For Rome Caesar was their god) or inciting a riot.
2. Perhaps John is saying no because he believes they are asking if he is the “reincarnation of Elijah”. Reincarnation was not consistent with Old Testament theology for the same reason that we as Catholics don’t believe in reincarnation. Once someone dies there is their judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
3. Some scholars point to Matthew chapter eleven using John’s question to Jesus as a basis to suggest that maybe John didn’t fully realize his prophet role. What did John ask Jesus? When in prison the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him: *Are you the one who is to come, or*

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*are we to expect another?* If the Baptist understood completely his role why would he think Jesus was the prophet.

At this point we have no definitive understanding as to why John the Baptist denies the question of his role in this moment of history.

**1:22 So they said to him:** The delegation press the Baptist further. **Who are you... What do you have to say for yourself?** This group of men had a job to do and they cannot go back empty handed.

**1:23 He said:** John the Baptist responds paraphrasing the words of Isaiah (40:3):

*A voice cries out:*

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

This passage from Isaiah which originally offers the prophesy of the forgiveness of both the Northern tribe of Israel (conquered in 722 BC and basically destroyed) and the Southern tribe of Judah (conquered in 587 BC and taken into Exile). The full message is a promise not only of God’s forgiveness but the return of all the Israelites through the desert whose hills would be leveled and valleys filled which was done whenever a royal person traveled. *John’s call for repentance and his baptizing of the multitude in the desert was opening up the hearts of men, leveling their pride, filling their emptiness and preparing them to receive the Messiah.* Michel Hunt

**1:24 some Pharisees:** Depending on your translation what we read at the beginning of verse twenty-four, we either have among this delegation was a group of *Pharisees; or that the delegation was sent by the Pharisees.* Either way we need to add this politically strong group into the mix. Who were the Pharisees? The best way to understand them is as a contrast to their opposition group the Sadducees. Both were very active political/religious groups within the Temple leadership in the first century and both had strong active voices against Jesus. (There were some, such as Joseph of Arimathea, a Pharisee, who supported Jesus.) While there were many differences between the two groups, the slide to the right gives us the basic breakdown. See HANDOUT for more information.

<b>PHARISEES</b>	<b>SADDUCEES</b>
Law	Temple
Interpretations of the Torah	Torah Alone
Middle Class	Upper Class
Resurrection of the Dead	No Resurrection
Belief in Afterlife	No Afterlife
Rejected the Jewish Leaders	Supported Jewish Leaders

**1:25 They asked him:** The delegation is looking to know and understand the basis of John the Baptist’s authority. **Why then do you baptize?** could easily be restated, Who sent you?

**1:26-27 John answered them:** The point of the Baptist’s answer is as a direct response to their question of who sent him. John the Baptist points to the **one who is coming** and in humble understanding that he, John is beneath the status of the Messiah as he continues to say **whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.** It is important that the baptism that John offers is different than the baptism offered through Christ. John’s baptism is **with water** meaning that it is a process of ritual purification, symbolic action of cleaning so as to prepare for Jesus. With Jesus the baptism offered through him and through the Catholic Church

**1:28 This took place:** John the Apostle now offers a location as to where this all happened: **Bethany beyond the Jordan.** This is not the same place as the home town of Lazarus and his sisters. The name “Bethany” translates to mean: “place of grace”. Scholar, while they have their guesses, are uncertain as to it’s exact position.

### Day #2 The Baptist Testimony to Jesus 1:29-24

**1:29 The next day:** In the prologue of this gospel (1:1-18) we learned that the Baptist's primary role was to testify to the truth, to bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God (1:6-8, 15). On this second day Jesus appears for the first time, **he saw Jesus coming toward him**, and the Baptist gives his direct witness about Him. What John says no one would consider a normal greeting, especially between cousins. In the same way that the gifts of the Magi (gold, frankincense and myrrh) proclaim who this infant is to become (king, priest and sacrifice), the Baptist's greeting identifies Jesus not as a personal relationship but His primary role in this moment of history. In other words, what Jesus has come to do. **Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.** The title **Lamb of God** is an important one not only for St. John's Gospel but for our understanding.

1. **New Passover:** In the book of Exodus, God directs the people, on the night of their liberation, to offer an unblemished lamb. They are instructed to take the "blood of the lamb" and to paint the outside frame of their doors so that when the angel of death came through Egypt it would know to "pass over" their home and leave their first-born son unharmed (Exodus 12). In the Baptist's proclamation he is identifying Jesus to this sacred moment in the Israelite's history.
2. **Sacrifice for Sin:** Throughout the history of the Israelites from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus is was religious practice of the Israelites/Jews to offer animal sacrifice. Once a year, at Yom Kippur, that sacrifice was offered to atone for all the sins of the people. The Baptist is recognizing that with Jesus all of this is about to change. No longer will the people need to rely on the Temple because Jesus becomes that sacrificial lamb whose purpose is to purge the world of the sin that separates humanity from God. Personal Note: If in the moment of Jesus' death no one ever sinned again we would be all fine and waiting for paradise but sin continues in the world and in our lives and we must do the hard work to purge that personal sin ourselves. Difference is there is now a bridge and nothing can separate us from God but our own ignorance, selfishness...sin.
3. **Suffering Servant:** Less obvious idea in this proclamation is that Jesus has come to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 53) of the Messiah as one who would not only bear our sin but would bear the suffering required to bring about the healing of the world. As we know how Jesus' story goes, He will suffer and die but not because of any wrong doing on His part but to take our pain upon Himself.

One final comment: This statement--*Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world*, is one that each one of us should be familiar with. It is said just before we receive begin our movement to receive communion. These words on the lips of the priest are meant not only as a declaration but as an invitation of faith--*Happy are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb*. You and I are called to participate in that supper, in the grace of God. We are called NOT because we are worthy. It's the exact opposite. We are called because of the mercy and love of God who wants us to be one with Him. Our accent to this statement is not just in our "Amen" as we come forward but much more importantly in how we choose to live our lives.

**1:30 He is the one:** Once again this verse recalls the Prologue as the Baptist proclaims Jesus' divine dignity as he states – **a man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.**

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As we have discussed with the Prologue, Jesus as one with the Father has existed for all eternity, before the creation.

**1:31 I did not know him:** Most scholars are silent as to why the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus, would seem to deny knowledge of him. Whether the Baptist had never meet Jesus until this moment or whether in his awareness of his cousin, Jesus he did not see him as the Christ until this moment; the few scholars who offer something are not in harmony. They are all in agreement that the Baptist's vocation was to speak out proclaiming the coming of one so that he **might be made known to Israel**. With our 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities and knowledge we know that Jesus came for all peoples. That said we must remember, in God's plan Jesus came first to "convert" the Jews so that they might fulfill their commitment to become a priestly people and bring all people to salvation. When that failed then Jesus turned to the world.

**1:32-34 John testified further:** The Baptist may not have known Jesus as "the one" when Jesus walked into the Jordan but there was no doubt in his mind after because, **I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him**. The narrative of Jesus' baptism is a bit different from what we read in Matthew (3:13-17) or Luke (3:21-22) but all four gospel testify to this moment (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10 and Luke 3:22). So, while we have no narration of Jesus in the water we can understand from this statement that Jesus did receive the waters of Baptism from the Baptist. In that moment the Baptist understood the truth and now he wants all to hear and know: **On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one**. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed this promise of God in regard to the coming Messiah: *The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him* (11:9). This is one of the "signals" or signs that the Jews were waiting for to know their coming Messiah. The Baptist goes on to say that Jesus, the Messiah is different that him because while John baptizes with water, Jesus **will baptize with the Holy Spirit**. The Baptist ends his testimony with one more definitive statement: **He is the Son of God**. One final comment, back in verse 32 John the Apostle uses a word in Aramaic which most English bibles translate to "remain" which means permanence. St. John very much likes this word and uses it throughout his gospel to show there is permanence, there is an eternalness between the Father and the Son.

### Day #3: The First Disciples of Jesus 1:35-42

**1:35 The next day:** Where the Baptist was in this moment we do not know but he was **with two of his disciples**. We forget that John the Baptist had disciples of his own. They had their own rules of fasting (Mark 2:18; Luke 7:29-33), their own style of prayer (Luke 4:33, 11:1) and some remained with the Baptist until well after his death (Mark 6:29; Acts 19:3). We learn in this section that St. Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples (1:40) and most scholars believe that John the Apostle could easily have been a disciple of the Baptist's before becoming an Apostle of Christ's.

**1:36 and as he watched:** John the Baptist sees **Jesus walk by** and once again identifies Him as divine by saying: **Behold, the Lamb of God**.

**1:37 The two disciples heard:** We should note that St. John the Apostle tells of the gathering of the Apostles very differently, from an evangelistic point of view. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus calls the

Apostles to His side. (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16:20; Luke 5:1-11) In the Gospel of John what we experience is not Jesus calling directly but others introducing friends and family to meet Jesus. Here these two disciples (Andrew and probably John) hear the Baptists proclamation **and followed Jesus**. St. John the Baptist prepared these disciples well for this moment.

**1:38 Jesus turned:** We need to stop a moment and put ourselves into this scene for most scholars will agree that these first words St. John the Apostle gives us from the mouth of Jesus are not just meant for these two disciples of the Baptist. They are meant for every listener to this Gospel for they are a question that in our own spiritual journey we must answer: **What are you looking for?** Jesus is asking that of everyone who dare to say they are a follower of Jesus.

The two disciples conversion is only just beginning because their response has them identifying Jesus as **Rabbi (which translated means Teacher)**. St. John offers the meaning of the Hebrew word Rabbi because he knows that many throughout his Churches in Asia Minor will be Gentile converts. The two disciples then ask, **Where are you staying?**

**1:39 He said to them:** Jesus response both an invitation, **Come**, not just to this one moment but to join him on this missionary journey, a promise as well **you will see**. This short phrase is not about Jesus' accommodations but come and see, come and experience the mystery of Christ. The Two disciples did respond and **stayed with** Jesus all **that day**, until **four in the afternoon**. The word "stayed" will be translated in some bible editions to the word "remained". In both the Aramaic and Greek this verb translates to mean not just a physical presence but denotes the idea of an intimate relationship. St. John uses this verb often especially when speaking of the relationship between the Son and the Father. It is into this divine communion between Father and Son that Jesus is inviting the disciples to. When the disciples **saw where he was staying**, again in the Aramaic and Greek it conveys the true meaning in that this moment was not about a physical place but an invitation to discover who Jesus really was, his spiritual reality. I find it interesting that what is written next can be very different in regard to bible translations. You will either have that it was **four in the afternoon** or **it was the tenth hour**. The second translation is probably more accurate only in that it would have given the disciples more opportunity to talk with Jesus. Please see the Handout for further explanation.

**1:40-41 Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter:** This is the way of evangelization. The Baptist introduces Jesus to Andrew and John who in turn introduce others who will themselves introduce others. In this case, Andrew **found his own brother Simon**. When we just come to Christ without doing the work of bringing others the Church dies. What little we know of Andrew we get from the Gospel of John. Some scholars believe that he was a closer disciple of Christ but not the inner circle (Peter, James and John). It was Andrew who brings the boy with loaves and fishes to Jesus (6:8), and he was present at the Last Supper. After the resurrection scripture is silent. Tradition has it that St. Andrew preached around the Black Sea in present day Turkey and Greece. He was martyred through crucifixion but in proclaiming his unworthiness was asked to be bound to the cross with ropes and cross was in the form of an "x" which today is known as St. Andrew Cross

**1:42 When he brought him to Jesus:** Naming is a very spiritual biblical thing. daughter and her husband are going through the process now of picking the

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baby's name and feel the weight of the responsibility. In scripture there are several times in the Old Testament that God, in claiming someone as His own, changes their name. Abram became Abraham and Sari becomes Sarah (Genesis 17:5), and later Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 32:29). Here we experience another moment as **Simon, the son of John**, becomes **Cephas** (Peter) which we learn in Matthew (16:16-18) means "rock". An appropriate name for one who is to become the foundation of the Church. The word *cephas* is a derivative of the Aramaic word *kepha* which means rock. This word was not generally used as a name until Jesus renamed Simon. Peter is the Greek equivalent.

### **Day Four: The Calling of the Disciples 1:43-51**

1:43-44 The next day: Jesus now turns north **to Galilee**. Unlike Andrew, John and Peter this next calling of a disciple fits into the pattern of the other Gospels as Jesus **found Philip** and calls him to **"follow me"**. We then learn that Philip is from the city of **Bethsaida**, a larger community on the northeast tip of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was also the home of **Andrew and Peter**.

**1:45 Philip found Nathanael:** Ah, we are back to the evangelization model. Philip experiences the Christ and now must go and share his joy with others. He tells them **We have found the one...** meaning the Messiah. Philip realizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament and goes on to identify some of them: **about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets.**

*Behind and above all the great figures in the history of God's people, there is a unifying reality, foreshadowed in the lives of the patriarchs and prophets, hinted at in Israel's "poor" ones who are especially faithful to and reliant upon the Lord (Psalm 10:17; 14:6), and glimpsed in the righteous kings. He is the one to come, the object of mystical longing. He is the one described in prophecy, anticipated in prayer, and praised by sinners for his mercy.* The Gospel of John by Francis Martin and William Wright

**1:46 But Nathanael said to him:** Philip ends his statement with **Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth**. But Nathanael's response is a bit of a let down since he judges Jesus not by who he is or what he says, but by where he comes from: **Can anything good come from Nazareth?** Not a very pleasant comment but some scholars suggest that Nathanael (who is identified as Bartholomew in the other three gospels and Acts), is reacting to the fact that Philip is identifying Jesus as the Messiah and the prophet Micah (5:1) foretells of the Messiah coming from Bethlehem. Philip's response echoes the words of Jesus: **Come and see.**

**1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael:** As the Son of God, Jesus can see into the heart and knows right away that Nathanael is a **true Israelite**. Jesus is speaking here less of Nathanael's genetics and all about how Nathanael has chosen to live out his life, as a faithful and devoted son of Israel living close to the Torah, **There is no duplicity in him**, meaning no deception, no double-dealing. Nathanael deals with honesty and integrity.

**1:48 Nathanael says to him:** Nathanael is surprised that Jesus, a stranger, would know who he was so he asks, **How do you know me?** Now some might see Jesus' response as simply an observation on Jesus' part, but as with much in scripture there is a deeper layer. Jesus had seen

Nathanael *under the fig tree* but this was *Before Philip* had called him. A fig tree is symbolic in the Old Testament. Sitting under the fig tree is a symbol of the peace of the messianic age (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). The fig tree is also a symbol of a fruitful Jewish nation and Rabbi's often taught in the shade of a fig tree. Some ancient scholars suggest that Jesus saw Nathanael studying the scriptures.

**1:49 Nathanael answered him:** Nathanael responds with a proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah: **Rabbi** (which we know means "Teacher"), **you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.** This moment of revelation may seem rather sudden and out of nowhere. Simply by Jesus seeing Nathanael under a fig tree to Nathanael believing!?! Seems a little farfetched, but then we don't know what was in Nathanael's mind and how he was captured by the Holy Spirit. Some scholars suggest that Nathanael was reading the prophet Zechariah under that fig tree because in that book there is a connection made between the Messiah and fig tree.

**1:50-51 Jesus answered and said:** As with most of the written word in scripture and especially the words of Christ, what is offered on the lips of Jesus here is meant for the ears of all disciples, not just for Nathanael. But especially so here because in the writing of this response St. John uses a plural "you" meaning not just you Nathanael but you as in all who wish to be my disciples. For those who have the eyes to see Jesus as Lord and savior, as the Messiah Jesus makes a solemn promise: **You will see greater things than this. Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.** The reference of *angels ascending and descending* refers to Jacob of the Old Testament who has a dream of a ladder which reached to heaven and angels were ascending and descending. (Genesis 28:10-19) Three years later Nathanael will be standing watching as Jesus ascends into heaven.

As we bring a close to this week's study what we have walked through today is, as Jesus' public ministry begins, a personal call in faith and a recognition that we who do believe have a responsibility to bring others to "Come and See" what we know to be true and lifegiving.

With that we end today's study with a few questions to ponder:

1. Following Jesus should be life changing. How has your life changed over the years directly corresponding to having meet Christ in your own life?
2. We are all called to be evangelist. Who have you brought to "Come and See" Jesus? What was their response?

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Angels: 328-36

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Baptism of Jesus: 535-37, 1223-1225

Christ's Death as Definitive Sacrifice: 613-614

Desire for God: 27-30

Grace of Baptism: 1262-1274

Jesus, Only Son of God: 441-445

John the Baptist: 717-720

Reincarnation: 1013

Title of "Christ": 453-457

## **Bibliography:**

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- The Navarre Bible: St. John.
- New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According To Luke
- Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John by Scott Hahn & Curtis Mitch
- Bible Study: Gospel of John by Michal Hunt. [Agapebiblestudy.com](http://Agapebiblestudy.com)