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~ **First Encounters with Jesus** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read the text in which we find the story. This story is found in John 1:19-51.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story from the New Living Translation.**

New Living Translation (NLT)

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**John 1:19-51 – NLT**

<sup>19</sup>This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup>"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"

"No."

<sup>22</sup>"Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

<sup>23</sup>John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
'Clear the way for the LORD's coming!'"

<sup>24</sup>Then the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup>asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

<sup>26</sup>John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. <sup>27</sup>Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

<sup>28</sup>This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

<sup>29</sup>The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' <sup>31</sup>I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."

<sup>32</sup>Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. <sup>33</sup>I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God."

<sup>35</sup>The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup>As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup>When John's two disciples heard this, they followed

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Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

<sup>39</sup> “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup> Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”).

<sup>42</sup> Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” <sup>44</sup> Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

<sup>45</sup> Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

<sup>46</sup> “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

<sup>47</sup> As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

<sup>48</sup> “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

<sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

<sup>50</sup> Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” <sup>51</sup> Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

## 2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- No one knows where Jesus was staying, but in light of John 4, it was most likely in Cana. In John 4 Jesus is in Cana, apparently at a home when the royal official comes from Capernaum to request that He heal His Son.
- Nathanael wonders if any good thing can come out of Nazareth. Nazareth was only a few miles from Cana where Nathanael grew up.
- Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, in the Apocrypha, Josephus, or the Talmud. This is because it was part of southernmost Galilee which was outside the mainstream of Galilean life. It was sort of like a frontier town. But it did have contact with the outside world because several major trade routes crossed close by and the city of Sepphoris was close by which was heavily influenced by Greek and Roman culture.

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- Galileans were loyal to the Torah and there were large numbers of synagogues in this region attested by Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:39 and Luke 4:14-15.
- Galileans were regarded as backward by the more sophisticated inhabitants of Jerusalem because of their dialect (Mt. 26:73). This would especially be true of people from Nazareth who were on the edge of Galilean society.

*These insights were taken from Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, p 253 and The New Bible Dictionary, 871.*

### 3. Answer these reflective questions.

Jesus first question to the disciples was, “What are you seeking?” This is a good question for us. We must ask ourselves what it is we are seeking from Jesus. What do we want from him? Describe what it is you are seeking in your discovery of Jesus.

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John’s two disciples spent the day with Jesus. If you spent the day with Jesus, what would you like to hear Him talk about?

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Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter – Rock – demonstrating the kind of person Peter would become. Do you believe Jesus is able to “change your name” and make you a different kind of person? What kind of qualities would you like Him to build in your life?

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**When Jesus saw Philip he said, “Follow me” and Philip left everything and followed him. Do you believe Jesus is challenging you with anything? What is this challenge?**

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**Jesus said that Nathanael was a man of integrity? What do you think Jesus would say about you? What would you like Him to say about you?**

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**Jesus told Nathanael that he would see greater works? What greater works do you think He was referring to?**

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**When Jesus referred to the angels ascending and descending he was thinking of the story in Genesis 28:10-17 and Daniel 7:13-14 which speaks of the Son of Man. Read these two passages of Scripture. Why do you think Jesus chose those stories and passages to illustrate the greater things Nathanael would see?**

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