

JOHN 1:43-51

“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Yeshua said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Yeshua of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Yeshua saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

Within John’s record of the calling of the Twelve Disciples (John 1:40-44), Yeshua’s encounter with Nathanael does beg a few questions (John 1:45-46). While Nathanael’s question of Yeshua, “Nazeret? Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46, CJB/CJSB), is then countered with Yeshua’s own declaration, “Look, a true Israelite! There’s nothing false in him” (John 1:47, TLV), the dialogue which follows merits some closer observations.

Nathanael asks how Yeshua knew of him. Yeshua was likely at prayer under a fig tree, and saw Nathanael and his friend Philip interacting with one another, as Yeshua states, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you” (John 1:48, NIV). Yeshua had a perceptiveness about Him, which caused Him to declare Nathanael “truly an Israelite in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47, LITV). All that this required, on the part of Yeshua, was an internal discernment or ability to ascertain character. It was not as though in this scene Philip and Nathanael were on the other side of the country, or even the other side of town, making it impossible for Yeshua to view their actions only by unique supernatural means.

The supernatural dynamics in play, however, had wooed Nathanael far enough for him to recognize that just as his friend had declared Yeshua to be “the One that Moses in the Torah, and also the prophets, wrote about” (John 1:45, TLV), so could he too exclaim, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Isra’el!” (John 1:49, CJB/CJSB). Here, Nathanael’s calling Yeshua *Ben-Elohim* (TLV; בֶּן־אֱלֹהִים, Delitzsch), probably has less to do with Yeshua’s Divine origins, and more to do with “Son of God” as a regal or Messianic title (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:6)—although with the definite article “the” appearing in the source text of *ho huios tou Theou* (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), Yeshua’s status as *the* Son of God highlights an importance which requires further evaluation and inquiry. Yeshua informs Nathanael that if he believed in Him because He saw Him from the fig tree, that he will see even greater things (John 1:50).

Yeshua informs Nathanael about some of the greater things which will be witnessed: “Amen, amen I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man!” (John 1:51, TLV). Here, the Genesis 28:10-12 scene of Jacob’s ladder is invoked:

“Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:10-12).

In John 1:51, Yeshua the Messiah has told Nathanael that He is *the means* by which Heaven will be opened, just as Jacob had seen a “stairway” (NIV) or ladder going up into Heaven, and

angels of God going down to Earth and up into Heaven and vice versa. But it is not enough for Yeshua to just say that He effectively is *the ladder*, which would affirm a unique supernatural nature for Yeshua—which His Disciples would obviously not have. Yeshua specifically says “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man!” (John 1:51, CJB/CJSB), as the Messiah refers to Himself by the Danielic title of “the Son of Man” employed in Daniel 7:13-14 (discussed previously):

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (NIV).

Yeshua could have just said something to the effect, “you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on *Me*” (John 1:51, NASU modified), and this would be Yeshua representing Himself as a supernatural and powerful entity, but one which could ultimately be created. Instead, the severe Danielic title “Son of Man” is employed, which examiners have had to note here is supportive of a high Christology. As Kruse indicates, “this expression was indeed Jesus’ preferred self-designation, and...in many places he used it to present himself as a person of sovereign authority like the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14.”⁴⁸ Gary M. Burge further notes, “In Daniel 7:13-14 it appears as the title of a heavenly personage who is give ultimate authority by God. Jesus likely picks up this term and uses it extensively in order to avoid titles such as Messiah, Son of David, and King of Israel, which were loaded with political ideas.”⁴⁹ Köstenberger also summarizes, “What Jesus claims is that he is that Son of Man prophesied in Daniel, the one who has seen God and given a full account of him (cf. John 1:18), the one who was ‘lifted up’ at the cross (3:14; cf. 8:28; 12:32), and the one who will return in all his glory (Matt. 26:64).”⁵⁰

When it can be properly recognized how Yeshua as the Son of Man is the One to whom the entire Creation must give an account, and who has been granted the supreme authority by God the Father (Daniel 7:13-14)—the gravity of Yeshua telling Nathanael that he will see angels ascend and descend via Him, can be probed and weighed. Readers of John’s Gospel have to continue reading, as this Yeshua will make even more profound statements about Himself and His origins.

⁴⁸ Kruse, *John*, 90.

⁴⁹ Gary M. Burge, *NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp 79-80.

⁵⁰ Köstenberger, 85.