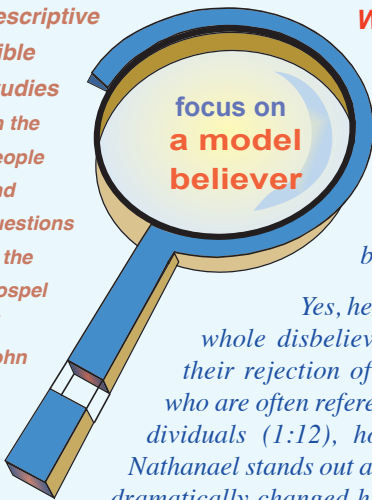


descriptive
Bible
studies
on the
people
and
questions
in the
Gospel
of
John



Who believes in Jesus in the Gospel of John?

Obviously many people do, but does John focus on any particular person, type of person, or group of people who believe or disbelieve?

Yes, he does. The Jewish nation as a whole disbelieved (1:11, 12:37-43), led in their rejection of Jesus by the religious elite who are often referred to as “the Jews.” Many individuals (1:12), however, come to faith and Nathanael stands out as one of the first and one who dramatically changed his mind (repented) about the Lord in doing so.

Some theologians object to describing the character of those that came to faith, but how can they totally reject such when Jesus, himself, pointed to Nathanael as an Israelite without guile?

Peter called

1:40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. **1:41** He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. **1:42** And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

Philip and Nathanael called

1:43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. **1:44** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **1:45** Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. **1:46** And Nathanael said unto him, **Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?** Philip saith unto him, Come and see. **1:47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! **1:48** Nathanael saith unto him, **Whence knowest thou me?** Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. **1:49** Nathanael answered and saith unto him, **Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.** **1:50** Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. **1:51** And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

Let’s describe . . .

Nathanael

* In describing Nathanael in John 1:45-51 note that he is mentioned again in 21:2. Otherwise he only appears as Bartholomew in lists (Mat. 10:3).

* Though Peter is mentioned earlier (in 1:40-42), the interaction with Nathanael (in 1:45-51) is longer.

* Pay special attention to what Jesus said about Nathanael in 1:47. The key term in this, guile or deceit, is also found in Mat. 26:4, Mark 7:22, 14:1, Acts 13:10, Rom. 1:29, 2 Cor. 12:16, 1 Thes. 2:3, 1 Pet. 2:1, 22, 3:10, and Rev. 14:5.

* There seems to be special stress upon Israel in this passage, as Nathanael is the only individual referred to as “an Israelite” in the four Gospels and he in turn acknowledged Jesus as “the king of Israel” in 1:49.

* Note that 1:51, which is addressed to all the disciples, closely connects them to Jacob (Israel) in Gen. 28:12. Also remember that Jacob deceived his own father in Genesis ch. 27.

* The first use of the verb “believe” (Strong’s #4100) with a specific individual (Nathanael) is found here in 1:50. (Also see 1:7, 12, and 2:11.)

* Nathanael is often compared to Thomas. Note the similarities between 1:50 and 20:29. See special Quest 20.3.

and make applications.

* How should I be like (or unlike) Nathanael in character, faith, and action? Include in this not being like the Jewish rulers who, unlike Nathanael, steadfastly refused to change their mind about Jesus.

“What do you think is the best term or phrase to describe Nathanael in 1:40-51?” With this question Dr. Quest asked seminar participants to write a short note and place it in an “answer box.” Then, as their notes were randomly drawn, each one explained his or her statement.

Unlike in the Syn-
optics, I believe
that Nathanael is
prominent and very
important in John.

Jack

“Nathanael isn’t even mentioned in the other Gospels except in lists, where his name is **Bartholomew**, but in John chapter one he is **given more space than Peter**. Simon Peter is mentioned first in 1:40-42 and so is, undoubtedly, more important, overall, as a **disciple**, but Nathanael is probably dealt with in more detail in 1:45-50 because he was a **more typical Jewish believer than Peter**. The older disciple apparently believed more quickly, but Nathanael’s scepticism probably served John’s evangelistic purpose better, just **like Thomas** did in chapter 20. It’s no accident that Nathanael and Thomas are named together at the end in 21:2.”

I like Nathanael’s
independence. He
didn’t just go along
with Philip and the
other Galileans.

Indy

“Did the crowd believe in Jesus in John’s Gospel? No, individuals did and Nathanael is **the first example of an independent minded Jewish believer**. We don’t know why he was so **prejudiced** against Nazareth, but in being so he became living proof that “the Jesus movement” of the day was not Galilean led messianic hysteria. John stresses individuals, starting with Nathanael, rather than groups, crowds, or mobs. It was the Lord’s opponents, not the disciples, who acted in politically-correct unison, just like we saw in the last study with those that questioned John the Baptist (1:19-28). Praise God for independent individuals like Nathanael.”

Nathanael was
sceptical, but he
was, also, willing
to change his mind.
He repented!

Wes

“I’m tired of hearing that there is no repentance in the Gospel of John. Just because the word repent, itself, doesn’t appear that doesn’t mean that individuals didn’t change their minds about Jesus. Isn’t changing one’s mind what repentance in the New Testament is all about? Some wrongly argue, based on John, that a person can truly believe in Jesus, without changing their minds about the Savior, sin, and self. Isn’t Nathanael in chapter one, not to mention the Samaritan woman in chapter four, up-front proof that true belief always includes repentance? Nathanael was **without guile** (1:47), but he, also, was **repentant**. He changed his mind about Jesus!”

Nathanael had
nothing to boast
about, simply being
foreknown & fully
known by the Lord
Jesus.

Cal

“Nathanael was **not as independent as many think**. Even humanly speaking he didn’t come to Jesus all by himself. First the Lord called Philip and then Philip in turned called Nathanael. Sure, he was willing to “come and see” and the passage contains one of the greatest confessions of faith in John (1:49, cf. 11:27 and 20:28). Even so, Nathanael had nothing to boast about. In addition to showing the Lord’s gracious outreach at the time, this passage is one of the greatest texts in John on foreknowledge and omniscience. So why put all the stress on human will and so-called independence? Let’s describe Jesus more!” [See Quest 12.6.]

The Messiah said it
best. Nathanael
was an Israelite in
whom there was
no deceit.

Dan

“We can’t improve on Yeshua’s description of Nathanael in 1:47; he was **an Israelite in whom there was no deceit**. That doesn’t mean that he was sinless, of course, but it does mean that he was **like Jesus** (1 Pet. 2:22), **unlike the Jewish leaders of his day**, and **unlike Jacob**, the first Israelite, one who deceived his own father (Gen. 27). However, Nathanael and all the disciples would soon be **like Jacob** in that they would see heavenly revelation regarding the Messiah, much like Jacob saw via the heavenly ladder in Genesis 28. (John 1:51 was addressed to all the disciples, not just to Nathanael.)”

At the end of the discussion period two of the seminar leaders presented diagrams to help explain and summarize some of the main points about Nathanael and the biblical nature of his faith.

cautious, independent (1:45-46)	honest & open, not deceitful (unlike Jacob)	foreknown by Jesus (1:47-48)
willing to change his mind (unlike legalists)	As a model Israelite Nathanael was...	convinced by evidence (unlike priests)
taught by Jesus (1:50-51)	submissive, not selfish, (unlike rulers)	a believer and follower (1:49-50)

Dr. Ed (comments on Nathanael as a model Israelite)

"This symmetrical diagram may look like a quilt or even a checker board, but it's really a summary diagrams with many of the points that others just shared. The most **important** point, Nathanael being an **exemplary Jewish believer**, is in the center and other supporting truths are placed around it." [For other similar summary diagrams see Quest 6.4, 9.3, and 15.2.]

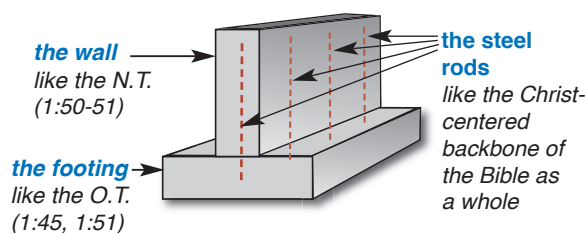
"As a **sceptical seeker** Nathanael was **not easily deceived**. Likewise, since he was **not deceitful**, as Jacob (Israel), had been, he was **not greedy for power or wealth** like the Jewish leaders of his day. So he was **willing to change his mind** and become a **submissive follower of the true King** of Israel (1:49). His dramatic change of mind is the first clear example of repentance (mind-change) and genuine faith in John."

"Like all true believers, Nathanael was **paradoxical**: an **individual believer**, yet, **evangelized by others**; **emotional**, yet, **theologically sound**; **submissive to God's authority** (1:49), yet, **sceptical of most religious authorities**; and **elect and foreknow**, yet, personally **willing to believe**. These paradoxes are seen in the discussion and the diagram, as well."

Dr. Theophilus (comments on biblical foundation)

"When I was in Bible college I worked with a construction crew on concrete foundations. Every foundation began with a horizontal "footing" below the winter frost line. This is like O. T. truth mentioned by Philip in 1:45 and the Lord in 1:51. Then the vertical walls were added which remind me of the greater things revealed about God and salvation in the N.T. Binding the two sections together were steel rods, partly embedded in the footing and then fully enclosed by the walls. These are like the Messiah, himself, as revealed in various ways in the O.T., but much more fully revealed in the N.T. (Heb. 1:1-3). The drawing below depicts these **foundational** truths, as seen in how the Lord dealt with Nathanael."

"John is full of vertical rod like connections between the O.T. and the N.T. The first, of course, is the incarnation of the Creator in 1:1-14. A more subtle connection is made here, at the end of the chapter, in 1:51, which goes back to the preincarnate Son manifesting himself to Jacob in Gen. 28:12 as the way to heaven. A similar association is made through the brazen serpent of Num. 21:5-9 in 3:14-15. And, then, there are the many miracles and "I AM" statements." [See Quest 6.3.]



"I like to use this illustration to show that we [like Nathanael] have one foundation for our faith, one Bible consisting of two parts, the O.T. and the N.T., each centered on Christ. Some like to stress its unity, while others prefer to stress the distinctions between the parts. Both can easily be overstated." [See the epilogue in *Continuity and Discontinuity* edited by John S. Feinberg.]

<i>the people Nathanael</i>	<i>the principles (general principles)</i>	<i>to the point my personal applications</i>
Nathanael was foreknown and called by the Lord Jesus and became an exemplary Israelite believer.	We should personally submit to God's call rather than remain in rebellious, collective disbelief.	