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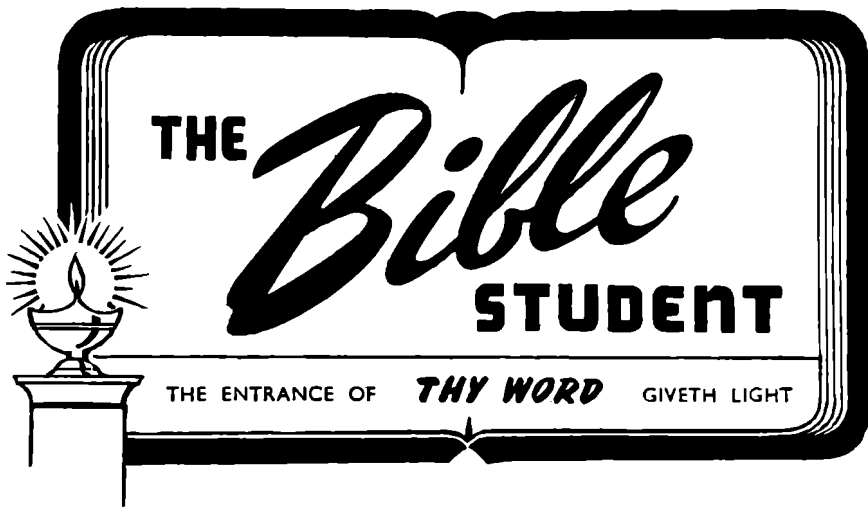
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New Series
Vol. XXV. No. 4

OCTOBER
1954

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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19—12:50)

(a) The witness of John the Baptist and the call of the first Disciples (John 1:19-51)

iii. *The First Disciples* (vv. 35-51)

v. 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.*—Thus the number of Jesus' followers has gone on increasing to this day, as one has found another and told him the good news. The other early disciples mentioned in these verses reappear in the lists of the Twelve given by the Synoptists; it has therefore been commonly and reasonably supposed that Nathanael also appears in those lists under the patronymic Bartholomew (=the son of Tholomai, i.e. Ptolemy), which follows immediately after Philip in Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14 (contrast, however, Acts 1:13). What Philip says to Nathanael means much the same thing as what Andrew said to Simon in v. 41; but instead of calling Jesus 'the Messiah' he describes Him as the One 'of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write'. Jesus is the One who has come to fulfil Old Testament Scripture: He is the Prophet spoken of by Moses in Deut. 18:15 ff. (see note on v. 21 above); He is the Anointed One foretold by the prophets, by whom righteousness, peace and the knowledge and fear of God are to be established worldwide. Philip's testimony summarizes one of the recurrent themes of John's Gospel: it is in a notable degree 'the Gospel of fulfilment'.¹ When Philip refers to our Lord as 'Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph', he gives Him the full designation by which He was known at the time. In law and by repute He was Joseph's son (cf. Ch. 6:42; Matt. 13:55; Luke 3:23); that in fact He was

¹ *The Gospel of Fulfilment* is the title of a study of John's Gospel from this point of view by R. A. Henderson (London, 1936).

not the son of Joseph was probably a carefully guarded secret so long as the Virgin Mother lived.

v. 46—*And Nathanael said unto him, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, come and see.*—Nathanael himself was a Galilaean from Cana (Ch. 21:2), and the form of his question suggests that among Galilaeans Nazareth enjoyed no high repute. (Ch. 7:52 similarly reflects the uncomplimentary view that people in Judaea took of Galilaeans as a whole). We have no other evidence that Nazareth was regarded unfavourably, but that is not surprising, as Nazareth was an unimportant place, and is mentioned but seldom in our early Jewish sources. People who live in country districts know how frequently one small place will have an exceptionally poor reputation among its neighbours, but such a local reputation does not usually find its way into literature. At any rate, Nathanael's bantering question received the only adequate answer: 'Come and see'. Honest inquiry is a sovereign cure for prejudice. Nazareth might be all that Nathanael thought, but there is always an exception to prove the rule; and what an Exception these young men had found!

v. 47—*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*—To Nathanael's surprise, Jesus greeted him on his approach as if He knew all about him. And what an encomium Jesus gave him! 'Here is a true son of Israel, who is all Israel and no Jacob!' In spite of Nazareth's unenviable notoriety, Nathanael's transparent generosity of heart made him willing to come and see this Man from Nazareth whom Philip had declared to be the One foretold by the law and the prophets. Jacob, for all the overreaching deceit of which his name was eloquent, had received a vision of God, and received the new name Israel to mark his change of character (Gen. 28:10 ff.; 32:24 ff.). While Israel is actually derived from Heb. *sarah*, 'contend', 'persevere' (cf. Gen. 32:28 with R.V. margin), there was current at this time (as we may see from Philo of Alexandria) a popular etymology which explained the name by the Hebrew phrase '*ish-ro'eh-'El*, 'the man who sees God'; and

there may be some allusion to this etymology in these closing verses of Ch. 1. For now Nathanael, this typical member of the true believing Israel, receives a promise that he too will have such a vision as was granted to Jacob.

v. 48—*Nathanael saith unto Him, whence knowest thou Me? Jesus answered and said unto him, before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee*—In response to Nathanael's astonished question how He knew him, Jesus assures him that He saw him under a certain fig tree before Philip came with his invitation. The fig tree was obviously well known to Nathanael himself, but we can only surmise what its significance was. Certainly it was a real tree and should not be allegorized. It was probably a place where he had recently sat in meditation and received some spiritual impression; the shady foliage of the fig tree made it a suitable tree to sit under. Readers of Augustine's *Confessions* will remember that it was under a fig tree that he sat meditating when he heard the voice chanting 'Take up and read' and found his soul flooded with divine light as he took up and read the closing words of Romans 13.

v. 49—*Nathanael answered Him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art King of Israel*—All Nathanael's doubts vanish: He who manifests such knowledge of his movements and his thoughts is certainly the One to whom the Old Testament pointed forward. He therefore acclaimes Jesus as the Messiah, using two messianic titles conjoined in the Old Testament Scriptures. For it is to the anointed King of Israel, enthroned on the holy hill of Zion, that God speaks in Ps. 2:7, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'. To the Evangelist as he wrote, the title 'Son of God' had a much greater depth of meaning than this, but we need not suppose that Nathanael at this early stage meant by it more than 'Messiah' or 'King of Israel'. Yet the fuller significance of the title is implicit in this theocratic significance.

v. 50—*Jesus answered and said unto him, because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these*—Has Nathanael come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah simply because of His words about the fig tree experience? Whatever degree of supernatural knowledge

these words might have evinced, Nathanael would see much more wonderful and conclusive tokens of Jesus' Messiahship than any such words as these.

v. 51—*And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the Heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*—Nor would these promised tokens be witnessed by Nathanael alone, but by his fellow-disciples too (as the transition from the singular 'him' to the plural 'you' and 'ye' indicates). And in declaring the nature of one of these 'greater things' Jesus uses, for the first time in this Gospel, His characteristic word of solemn affirmation, 'Amen, amen, I tell you'. This locution appears in the Synoptic Gospels with the single 'amen'; the repetition of the word is distinctively Johannine. 'Amen' is a loan-word from Hebrew; it comes from a root whose basic sense is 'steadfastness', from which come also the ordinary Hebrew words for 'belief', 'faithfulness' and 'truth'. Our Lord's use of the term, whether uttered once or twice, confirms the certainty and trustworthiness of what He says. The same note of authority is manifested in His 'I say unto you'; the prophets of the Lord said 'Thus saith the Lord', but here is the Lord of the prophets.

With the words which He now speaks we may compare such Synoptic sayings as Matt. 16:28; Mark 13:26; 14:62, which speak of the day when the Son of Man will be manifested on the clouds of heaven. But here the imagery is taken from the story of Jacob's vision at Bethel, when he saw 'a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it' (Gen. 28:12)¹. Here however, the ladder uniting earth to heaven is the Son of Man Himself; He is the Mediator between God and men. But what is the occasion to which our Lord's words point forward? None other than His crucifixion. 'When ye have lifted up the Son of man', He said

¹ It is possible to render the Hebrew: 'the angels of God ascending and descending on *him*' (i.e., on Jacob). In that case the Son of Man would be the antitype not of the ladder but of Jacob; He would be denoted as the true Israel of God in His own person. In either case the person and work of Christ constitute the fulfilment of Jacob's vision.

on a later occasion in Jerusalem, 'then shall ye know that I am he' (John 8:28). For His 'lifting up' is His exaltation, although men intended it for degradation; the cross is the supreme manifestation of His glory; by the cross heaven is thrown wide open, God draws near to man, and man is reconciled to God.

As to the exiled patriarch
That wondrous dream was given,
So seems my Saviour's cross to me
A ladder up to heaven.

The title 'Son of Man' as used by our Lord of Himself may be associated with various Old Testament usages. It marks Him out as the Second Adam, in terms of Ps. 8:4; as the champion of God's people, in terms of Ps. 80:17; as the commissioned spokesman of God, as in Ezek. 2:1. But chiefly it marks Him out as the 'one like unto a son of man' of Dan. 7:13, who comes with the clouds of heaven, draws near to the Ancient of Days, and receives from Him the authority to exercise universal judgment and eternal dominion. All these strands of meaning were interwoven in our Lord's assumption of the title, and the whole was interpreted in terms of the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53. We shall see how later occurrences of the title in this Gospel illustrate the various aspects of meaning which belong to it.

(To be continued)

THE GLORY OF THE UNASHAMED

A. MCD. REDWOOD

Having referred to the 'Unashamed Witness' and the 'Unashamed Workman', we must consider next.—

The Unashamed Warrior

(c) *'Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner'* (2 Tim. 1:8).

The reference here is to that more aggressive, even 'militant', propagation of the Gospel so wonderfully illustrated in St Paul's own life as a 'warrior herald' in many and wide-spreading spheres.