

The concept of "Bible time" can often feel elusive. John does not present this narrative with the intention that it be understood as a *literal* sequence of consecutive days. Nevertheless, some scholars attempt to harmonize these events into a strict chronological timeline.

If Jesus decides to go "to Galilee," where was He coming from? According to [v. 28](#), John the Baptist's ministry is taking place in *Bethany beyond the Jordan*. This refers to the region of *Batanaea*, located northeast of the Jordan River and within the tetrarchy of Philip. It is important not to confuse this with the village of Bethany near Jerusalem. *Batanaea*, along with the broader area east of the Jordan River and northeast of the Sea of Galilee, was a hotspot for the Zealot movement. To understand the importance of this, see our lessons on the Zealots: <https://youtu.be/I5I47CP64KQ>

Though Bethsaida is a small fishing village, it plays a significant role in God's plan of redemption. Remarkably, it was home to several key disciples, including John, James, Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

Bethsaida was located near the village of [Gamla](#), the headquarters of the Zealot movement. This proximity may offer insight into the zealot-like tendencies observed among Jesus' disciples. For example, Peter's act of cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant reflects a tactic commonly employed by zealots to intimidate the Sadducees.

Philip is mentioned 12 times in John's Gospel but appears only once in each of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For more on Philip's role in John's Gospel, see our lesson on [John in Ephesus](#). After his time in Israel, Philip relocated to Asia Minor, specifically to the city of Hierapolis, which is near Ephesus.

**43** The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."  
**44** Now Philip was from [Bethsaida](#), the city of Andrew and Peter.  
**45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathanael is only mentioned by John and is from the [village of Cana](#) (Hebrew: *Kana*) a neighboring village of Nazareth. His comments about Nazareth likely has to do with neighboring village rivalries and not anything about Jesus since he has not met Jesus at this point.

The Rabbis expected *two* Messiahs: a suffering Messiah and a conquering, kingly Messiah.

The suffering Messiah, who comes first, is *Messiah Son of Joseph*. He is followed by a kingly, reigning Messiah, is *Messiah Son of David*.

John may be alluding to suffering Jesus will endure.

[b. Sukkah 52a](#)

**46** Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

"Come and see"—a phrase [also used by Jesus in v. 39](#)—is a Jewish idiom commonly employed by rabbis to mean "pay attention" or "gain new insight." Both Nathanael and John's audience would recognize this as a cue to prepare for a profound revelation. What follows offers fresh insight into Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, urging us to open our spiritual eyes and truly "see."

The following discourse between Jesus and Nathanael is highly complex as it is spoken in a type of “Rabbinic Code.” Jesus quotes [Psalm 32:2](#) and connects that Psalm to Jacob, the first Israelite. When he does this, Nathanael is prompted to question *where* Jesus saw him.

The Rabbis also connect Psalm 32 with Jacob and the story of the angels ascending and descending in [Midrash Tanchuma](#). [Genesis 25:7](#) presents a textual difficulty, which we will explore in our attempt to decipher what is being communicated.

Nathanael’s question isn’t so much *how* do you know me but from *where* do you know me? *What place* did you see me?

Nathanael’s question is directly linked to Jesus quoting Psalm 32:2, which scholars believe Nathanael may have been studying at the time Jesus saw him.

“Son of God” and “King of Israel” are both Messianic titles. At this point, Nathanael isn’t declaring anything about the nature of Jesus or his birth, rather he is affirming what Philip had already told him about Jesus being the Messiah.

Here Jesus quotes [Genesis 28:12](#) - the story of Jacob, the first to receive the name Israel.

**47** Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!”

**48** Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

**49** Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

**50** Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”

**51** And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

[Psalm 32:2](#) – Why does Jesus quote this Psalm?

Symbolically, Fig Trees carry multiple meanings.

First, Fig Trees represent the Messianic Age ([Joel 2:22](#), [Micah 4:4](#), [Zechariah 3:10](#)).

Second, based on [Proverbs 27:18](#), the Fig Tree is connected to the Torah, to Torah study, and even [studying the Torah with a Rabbi](#), as the Rabbis and their disciples would sit in the shade of the fig tree to study.

[Genesis 28:12](#) is difficult to interpret, and the Rabbis debated its meaning. The same Hebrew word can mean either “*it*” or “*him*,” leading to two possible readings: “ascending and descending on *it*” (referring to the ladder) or “ascending and descending on *him*” (implying that Jacob himself is the connection between heaven and earth). In this passage, Jesus appears to affirm the latter interpretation but redirects it to Himself as the Son of Man, presenting Himself as the ultimate connection between the two realms. In doing so, Jesus establishes that He is *greater* than Jacob.