

Chapter 11

The first disciples of the Lord Jesus

John 1 vv 19-28

We must now go and have another look at John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. So we go again to the Jordan, where he has now been preaching for many months. He is still surrounded by a great crowd of people, who listen intently to his solemn preaching.

Suddenly he is disturbed. Some men push their way through the tightly packed multitude, until they stand right in front of John.

Who are they? - Why have they come? - Listen, and I will try to explain it to you. You know already that the Jewish people were educated by the scribes and Pharisees. They taught the people the laws of the Lord. They were, therefore, the teachers of the Jews.

And now, suddenly a new teacher, a prophet has appeared, who daily preaches before a great multitude. This prophet has not asked the Pharisees if he may do this, no, he has started just like that, unasked. Moreover, this new prophet preaches so differently.

They required the people to do precisely according to the laws of the Lord. The new prophet preached "Repent ye"!

The Pharisees become uneasy. If it goes on like this, then the Jews will no longer listen to them, but they will all listen to the wonderful preacher near Jordan. They are worried.

So they call an assembly in Jerusalem. This assembly of the Pharisees and Sadducees is called "The SANHEDRIN". You must remember that name, children, because we shall

frequently refer to the Sanhedrin. Well then, this assembly of Pharisees and Sadducees comes together in Jerusalem.

Look, there they sit, these distinguished Jews, the teachers of the people, with solemn faces. We can easily see that they are in a difficult position.

"Men, what are we to do?", asks one of them, "It cannot go on any longer."

At length they decide to send a few men from their midst to the Jordan, to John the Baptist. They are to ask John, on behalf of the whole Sanhedrin, who he really is.



The Pharisees ask John who he is

They set out at once, and now they stand before the preacher of repentance who in spite of his rough dress, commands respect.

John remains silent, and awaits their questions. The people too are silent. Many crane their necks, in order to hear what is said.

"Who art thou?" ask the representatives of the Sanhedrin. What will John answer? - Will he tell them of his wonderful birth, and of the signs which then appeared? - No, he does not boast of himself. He answers quietly "I am not

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

the Christ".

He says this for a reason, because some of the Pharisees and many of the people thought that he was the Messiah. "O no", he says truthfully, "I am not the Christ". "If you think that, you are mistaken."

Immediately these messengers from Jerusalem continue "What then? Art thou Elias?"

Now you must know that among the Jews the belief still remained that Elijah would return once more to this earth. Calmly John replies "I am not".

"Art thou that prophet?" they persist. Moses had foretold that one day a prophet would arise. By that he meant the Messiah.

But the answer of John is short and forceful "No!".

The messengers of the Sanhedrin look at each other. They are getting nowhere at this rate.

So they ask "Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?"

John must give a plain answer. That is why they are so persistent. Well, good, John will give an answer.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness", he says. It is just as though he says "Why do you ask my name? Why do you want to know who I am? I am just a voice, nothing more. A voice, which cries, a voice which warns.

O, John wants them to forget him. Who he is, has nothing to do with it. They must only listen to the message which he brings. What message does he bring then? — Well "The King cometh!".

Pharisees, don't look at John, but look out longingly for the coming of the King. John is only the forerunner.

Yes, John tells them that the King has already come, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not". In other words, "You do not know who He is".

The visitors from Jerusalem depart. They are not much wiser. They cannot understand John. They shrug their shoulders and make their way back disappointed. They have never met such a peculiar man.

Look, there they go. The people make room and those important men slowly disappear from view.

John 1 v 29-34

The next day, while John is preaching by the Jordan, he sees all at once the Lord Jesus coming towards him. He has come away from the desert, where he has been tempted of the devil for forty days and forty nights, and now walks quietly along the banks of the river in the direction of John the Baptist.

Immediately John points to Him and says to the multitude "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Here then John calls the Lord Jesus "the Lamb of God".

Yes, but why does he do that? He must have some reason for this. Lambs were frequently being sacrificed in the land of Canaan. Just as these lambs were sacrificed in the temple, so too would the Lord Jesus be sacrificed, or in other words, He would be crucified to pay for the sins of His elect people. He tells them that this is the Son of God, the long awaited Messiah. "This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me".

Yet we do not read in the Bible that the

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

many listeners believed him. Why did most of them not believe John? - Why did those people not follow the Lord Jesus? Because they did not need a Saviour. That multitude was not looking for a Saviour from sin, they were only hoping for a King who would save them from the Romans. There was no room in the hearts of these people for the Lord Jesus, no room for "the Lamb of God".

John 1 vv 35-43

"Behold, the Lamb of God" says John the Baptist to two of his followers. All three of them stand near the Jordan.

Another day is ended. Near the Jordan walks the Lord Jesus just as He had done the day before. Then too John had said "Behold, the Lamb of God". Then not one from among that great multitude had followed the Lord Jesus.

Now, one day later, John says again "Behold, the Lamb of God". Yesterday he had said it to the crowd which stood around him, but now he says it to two of his disciples

And look now! Immediately those two men leave their master and follow the Lord Jesus, hut why do they do that? Why don't they stay with John?

Listen. John the Baptist had repeatedly preached "Repent ye". He had again and again pointed out to the multitudes their sins. All of them had heard this, but most of them had given it very little consideration.

These two had also heard that solemn preaching. But for these men God had used that word as a means of their conversion. Oh, these men had sorrow for sin. Their sins had been discovered to them. They felt that they were

guilty, that they had angered and grieved God by their sins. They sincerely repented of their sins. These men had need of a Saviour. In their hearts, by God's Spirit, room was made for the Redeemer, for the Lamb of God.

And now John shows them the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour. They follow the stranger at once, who walks on there so calmly. They draw nearer to the Lord Jesus, for whom their hearts are longing.

Who are these two men? - No, they are not rich and prominent men. They are John and Andrew, two fishermen.

In the North of the land of Canaan lies the lake of Gennesaret. On the shores of that lake there were at that time several cities and towns. One of the smallest cities was called Bethsaida.

John and Andrew lived in that city. They too had heard about John the Baptist and they too had one day gone out of curiosity to hear him. But when God blessed the preaching to their hearts, they had remained with John the Baptist. They became followers, or disciples of John.

You notice, boys and girls, that there are two Johns. You must not get them confused. The one is John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, and the other is a fisherman from Bethsaida also named John. They were then two different persons.

Well now, these two fishermen follow the Lord Jesus. Suddenly, He turns and asks "What seek ye?" We might say "What are you after?" "What do you want from me?"

Maybe John and Andrew blushed a little. They answer softly "Master, where dwellest thou?" what a strange answer, don't you think so?

Their real meaning, however, is "Master, we would like to talk with Thee". Kindly the Lord

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

answers them "Come and see!".

Oh, He knows what is going on in the hearts of those two men. And now he invites them to come with Him. That evening John and Andrew talked with the Lord Jesus. What was spoken then, we do not know, but one thing we do know, and that is that they believed that the Lord Jesus was truly the Messiah, the Son of God. They stayed with Him. They are the first disciples of the Lord Jesus. Through faith they saw that Jesus was the Saviour, the long promised Son of David.

Andrew had a brother, named Simon. Immediately, Andrew finds his brother and tells him with a happy, beaming face "We have found the Messiah". Yes, Andrew brings his brother Simon to the Lord Jesus.

Now that Andrew has found the Messiah, he does not rest until his brother too has come to know the Son of God. When Simon comes to Jesus, the Lord gives him a new name. He says, "Thou art Simon: thou shalt be called Peter!"

Peter too, stayed with the Lord Jesus. Peter too believed that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah.

John I vv 44-52

Among the many Jews who had gone to the Jordan to hear the new prophet, John the Baptist, there was yet another simple fisherman from Bethsaida. His name was Philip. Philip then lived in the same city as John, Andrew and Simon Peter. Philip too becomes a follower, a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

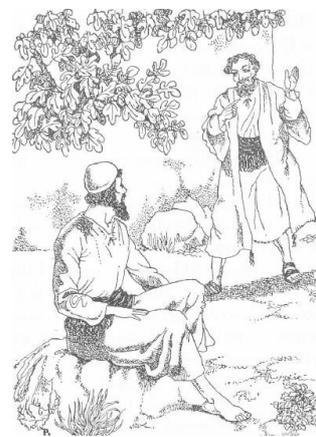
Did he then, of his own free will, go to the Lord? No, the Lord Jesus called Him. The

Son of God spoke but two words - "Follow me".

Nothing more was needed, for Philip obeyed at once, and never regretted it, for he too had found the Saviour.

Now

Philip had a friend with whom he associated daily. This was Nathaniel. He goes at once to look for his friend, and at last he finds him under a fig tree.



Philip finds Nathaniel

These two, Philip and Nathaniel have undoubtedly spoken to each other often about the promised Messiah. Philip knew that his friend also looked longingly for the coming of the King.

Joyfully he calls to Nathaniel "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph".

But just look! Nathaniel isn't at all happy. He shows signs of disbelief. He answers gloomily "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is as though he would say "O come now, that cannot be; the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, surely? How can someone from despised Nazareth be the Messiah? No Philip, I'll not be deceived. You are mistaken. It can't be so!" Sadly he shakes his head.

Well, what must Philip say to that? Will he defend himself? Will he try to take away his friend's unbelief? - No, Philip cannot do that, God alone can. That is why he just says "Come and see". He means, "Come with me then, and you will see for yourself".

THE BIBLE HISTORY TOLD TO OUR CHILDREN

- NEW TESTAMENT -

Nathaniel follows his friend hesitantly. But as he approaches the Lord Jesus, he hears the Lord saying to the others "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile".

O, the Lord Jesus knows Nathaniel. He knows what is going on in the heart of that man. He knows that Nathaniel is afraid of deceiving himself. No, it is not indifference with Nathaniel, but fear of deception.

Nathaniel hears what Jesus says of him. Amazed he asks "Whence knowest thou me?"

Now the Lord Jesus will take away the unbelief from the heart of Nathaniel. He will show him that He is in truth the Son of God, the Omniscient (or all-knowing).

"Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". He means "You thought no-one had seen you, but my eye was upon you".

Nathaniel looks at Jesus in complete amazement. A sacred awe fills his soul. Yes, this stranger must be the Messiah, otherwise He

would not know that. Now Nathaniel perceives that Jesus of Nazareth is truly the all-wise Son of God. Unbelief is banished from his heart. Though every question is not yet answered, yet he doubts no more, he now believes.

Hear what he says, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel". Of himself he could not believe, but the Lord Jesus gave him faith. Nathaniel was also known as Bartholomew. Remember that!

It is still the same now. We too, will never be able to believe of our own strength. It must be given us through grace. Pray that the Lord Jesus will give you too that true, saving faith. Ask Him to give you a new heart, ask if He will take away the unbelief out of your heart. The Lord did it for Nathaniel. He can do it for you too.