

Explaining The Chosen: Season 2, Episode 2: I Saw You

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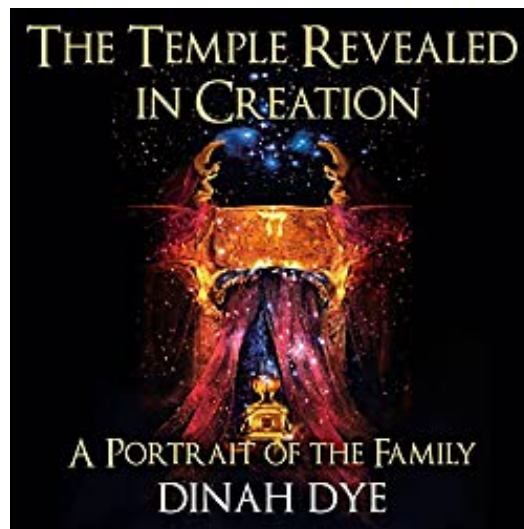
The second episode in The Chosen's second season introduces us to the prophet Nathanael and Philip in their pre-disciple days. I love that the writers of The Chosen strive to be true to the Jewishness and cultural context of the Bible. We see this context reflected again in this episode and can also appreciate the creative license the writers take as they show the characters' humanity.

Haven't seen it yet? [Click here to watch!](#)

[Click here to read my other posts Explaining The Chosen.](#)

Nathanael Building the Temple

In the opening scene, we see Nathanael, a passionate architect and follower of the one true God. Thought to be the same person as Bartholomew in the Bible, we're not sure of Nathanael's occupation. The Chosen's writers probably decided to make him an architect so they could explain Jesus's later interaction with him in John 1:43-51.



[The Temple Revealed in Creation](#)
[by Dinah Dye](#)

At first meeting in the Book of John, Jesus knew that Nathanael was of trustworthy character and said he "saw him under the fig tree." In The Chosen's interpretation, this is explained by Jesus knowing Nathanael's dedication in designing the building in service to God and knowledge of his despair in his failure. We'll be further introduced to Nathanael later in this episode.

Philip Emerges from the Bashan

The Bashan is an area of land East of the Jordan River, and it's the location of the Kingdom of Og in the Old Testament. It's described as a fertile area, producing strong bulls and oaks, among other things.

When Philip emerges from the forest, he tells Simon to say "hello" to his friend, Andrew. Although there is more than one Philip in the Bible, this Philip came from the same area Simon and Andrew did – Bethsaida. And, though we know little about him, some believe he was a disciple of John the Baptist before he was one of Jesus's twelve disciples.

Prophecy Against Gog and Magog

When Matthew collects wood from the ravine, which turns out to be wet, the disciples quote Ezekiel 39:9-10 in unison. In this prophecy, the inhabitants of Israel would not need to cut wood because they would make their fires out of the weapons of their enemy – Magog, and Gog, Magog's leader.

"Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out and make fires with the weapons and burn *them*, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears, and for seven years they will make fires of them. They will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 39:9-10, (NASB)



[Detailed Eilat Cross Necklace](#)

Spoiler alert – in this war between Magog and Israel, Magog loses because it's God that's doing the fighting for Israel. This war is still in the future, in the End Times. The context describes a time when the people of Israel have returned to the land of Israel and the surrounding countries united against them. But, as any of us who have studied Revelation know, there will be challenging times, but God and His people will come out victorious in the end!

Nathanael and the Bartender

In his conversation with the bartender, Nathanael describes the death of the architect in him. He tells of his struggle to rise to that position and his passion for building synagogues out of his devotion to God. We don't find this part of the story in the Bible, but it's a creative interpretation to explain Jesus's response to Nathanael as having "no deceit" in him.

Hebrew School

Jewish boys start attending classes to learn the Biblical Hebrew language and the foundations of their faith at eight years old. Jewish girls attend Hebrew school now as well, but Jewish boys have been participating in this tradition for thousands of years.

Because of Hebrew school, most Jewish boys and girls have a solid knowledge of their faith and their Bible by their teen years. What an excellent way to intentionally pass on their faith to the next generation! I'm sure Hebrew school has enormously contributed to why Judaism has survived so much persecution throughout history.

If you're a parent or grandparent or even know any children, passing your faith on is your responsibility too! **The Shema**, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, tells us what we should be doing with our lives as God's people. Verse 7 clearly tells us that we should be diligent in teaching God's truths to our children.

Nathanael Under the Fig Tree

We're not sure what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree when Jesus mentions it in the Book of John. Biblical scholars have even suggested Jesus's referral to Nathanael under the fig tree may be symbolic language rather than a physical occurrence. But whether he was under a real tree or Jesus was using an idiom, we can be sure the meaning of Jesus's words has great significance and reveals Philip's key character traits.

In the fig tree scene, Philip cries out to God in despair and quotes Psalm 102:1-2.

Hear my prayer, O LORD!

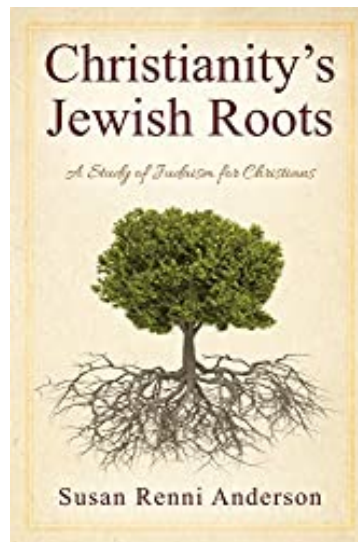
And let my cry for help come to You.

Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my distress;

Incline Your ear to me;

In the day when I call answer me quickly.

Psalm 102:1-2 (NASB)



[Christianity's Jewish Roots: A Study of Judaism for Christians](#)
[by Susan Renni Anderson](#)

Out of his mourning, we see Nathanael putting handfuls of ashes on his head. Like Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:19, he demonstrated his deep despair in this way. Ashes were placed on the head or elsewhere out of mourning and were often accompanied by putting on sackcloth as a humble garment.

"He's proud of you, like a father"

When reminiscing with Andrew, Simon, and Thomas about his days with John the Baptist, Andrew interrupts to ask how John is. Philip then tells Andrew that John is proud of him – "like a father."

So, how do Andrew and John the Baptist know each other? Andrew was once a disciple of John, and he even witnessed an interaction between John and Jesus during his time following John. We can read about this in John 1:35-41. We tend to think of these men as

having no connection with Jesus before their calling to follow him, which came out of nowhere, but that's not the case, at least with some of them.

John was Jesus's cousin and recognized something special about Jesus, even in the womb (Luke 1:41)! He probably had many disciples throughout his ministry and baptized Jesus, being a first-hand witness to God publicly declaring Jesus His son (Matt 3:17, Mk. 1:11, Lk. 2:14). Because of this history between the two of them, you can be sure that John taught his disciples and others in his audience, who Jesus was.

Prayer

Thaddeus comments that prayer is like Matthew's writing. At first, it begins as a chore but becomes a habit.

Prayer doesn't seem like a chore, though, does it? I'd be curious to see how many of us thought prayer seemed like a chore when we first began. Often we're eager to pray when we first acknowledge God as someone we can talk to. Praying isn't so much a chore as a way to experience and build a relationship with the God we've heard so much about.

But, being a regular Jewish guy, this type of prayer isn't likely what Thaddeus is referring to. He's likely referring to Jewish prayers, which are deep and meaningful and are said routinely throughout the day or during specific activities.

Here are a few examples of these types of prayers:



[Shema Mobius Silver Bracelet](#)

[The Model Ani](#) (Said later in this episode by Ramah, also in the [previous episode](#))

[The Shema](#)

The Aaronic Blessing

Blessings on the eve of the Sabbath

The Amidah

The Hand Washing Blessing

While it may seem strange and robotic to say prescribed prayers throughout your daily activities, these prayers and their various customs and traditions have kept the Jewish people connected with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for thousands of years! Many argue that the process of repeating the same prayers could result in a cold, rote, and disconnected prayer life, and it could. But, like so many aspects of our faith, it depends on where your heart is. Having a disciplined prayer life can be a tool to bring you closer to God, as long as you approach it honestly and humbly, listening for what God truly has to say to you.

My family and I say some of these prescribed prayers regularly, and I have to say I agree with Thaddeus. It does seem like a chore at first (especially if you try to memorize them in Hebrew!), but then it becomes a habit – a way of staying connected with God throughout the everyday rhythm of life. If you don't already, I challenge you to include some of these prayers in your prayer life and see how it changes!

Shalom, Shalom

While traveling, Andrew leaves Jesus and Simon to take his turn pushing the cart. As he goes, they all say "Shalom, Shalom" to each other. Repeating "shalom" is a greeting, taking the place of both hello and goodbye, in Israel and among Jewish people even today. Why?

The word "shalom" is usually translated into English as "peace," but, **as I've written**, peace isn't its only meaning. There's so much more! In short, shalom encompasses perfect completion. It's a concept where everything is as it was meant to be, and true peace has been achieved universally.

Repeating shalom also has meaning. In Hebrew writing and culture, repetition strengthens the message. Here are a couple of examples:



"Shalom Y'All" Door Plaque

Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem,

You who have drunk from the LORD'S hand the cup of His anger;

The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs.

Isaiah 51:17, (NASB)

My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart!

My heart is pounding in me;

I cannot be silent,

Because you have heard, O my soul,

The sound of the trumpet,

The alarm of war.

Jeremiah 4:19, (NASB)

Repeating Shalom, Shalom when greeting someone not only extends all the word shalom encompasses to them. It doubles that and heaps even more of that extreme blessing onto them. What a fantastic way to greet others!

Soon

In Jesus's conversation with Simon, Simon wants reassurance that Jesus will have the conversation about him not always being there "soon." Jesus replies, "Ahh, There's that word, "soon." It's the most imprecise thing in the world."

The impreciseness of "soon" is confirmed by both our current culture's definition and the Biblical use of the word. In both Revelation 1:1 and 22:6, it says that these things (described in the Book of Revelation) will "soon take place." However, these words were written thousands of years ago, and many of those events have still not occurred. How can we make sense of this?

While we may not know precisely what the Bible means by "soon," there are two things we can be sure of. The first is that God's timing and ours are not the same. Time, as we understand it isn't the same as the eternal, supernatural view of time held by our Creator. "Soon" on an eternal scale means something entirely different than what I mean when I tell my children that dinnertime is "soon."

The other thing we know is that God does fulfill all He says He will. If it was prophesied in His Word, we know it's trustworthy and can be confident that it will come about. So, if God told John to write that the things that happen in Revelation will happen, they will. Knowing that we can take God at His word, we can also say that, even though we don't know how close, we do know we're closer to the time of the events in Revelation than we were yesterday and, indeed, more so than they were in the time John wrote his vision down.



[Set of 2 Pewter Messianic Mezuzah Case with Scroll](#)

"Soon" is very imprecise and may mean very different things in different situations, but we know it means things are imminent on some level.

The Bet Midrash

Mary tells Matthew that she wants to teach Ramah to read because she and Ramah want to study Torah. She tells Matthew that women aren't allowed in the Bet Midrash. Bet Midrash literally means "house of investigation." It was here that members of the Sanhedrin and common people gathered to study the Torah (the first five books of the Bible).

At that time, women weren't permitted in the Bet Midrash, so they depended on the faithful men around them for that part of their faith. There are still some Bet Midrashes around today, and some even include women in their studies. For Ramah and Mary to study Torah, they'd have to find a way to do it outside the Bet Midrash.

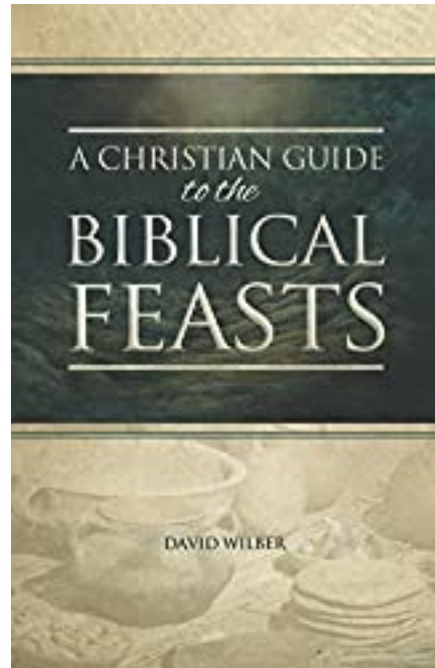
A bit later, when talking to Thomas, Ramah says, "It's not like we're trying to be teachers or anything." Women were not permitted to be in positions of leadership or judges. Some synagogues hold this belief today as well, while others allow women to be rabbis.

Philip the Tetrarch

As they're approaching Caesarea Philippi, Philip jokes about the city being named after him. Then he explains its true origin - that it was instead named in honor of "Philip the Tetrarch, brother of Herod Antipas" and says that this was a family that "does not take kindly" to his former rabbi, John the Baptist.

He's referring to the tentative relationship with Herodias, Herod, and Herodias's daughter on one side and John the Baptist on the other. We read in Mark 6:14-29 that Herod had gone against the Torah in marrying his sister-in-law (who was also his niece) while his brother, Philip, was still living (Leviticus 20:21) and that John had publicly called him out on it. Because of this, Herod, Herodias, and her daughter all held a grudge against John, resulting in him being beheaded.

In *Antiquities of the Jews*, historian Josephus also recorded that John was imprisoned and killed by Herod because of the influence John had over his followers. Josephus stated that Herod feared a rebellion and punished John to prevent this. Josephus's account and Mark's account explain Philip's comment to Matthew. John the Baptist would have had a bad reputation with Herod and his family for sure.



[A Christian Guide to the Biblical Feasts](#)
[by David Wilbur](#)

Gehenna

“...a cold day in Gehenna before they hire another Jew”, says Nathanael to Philip after Philip roused him and they discussed Nathanael’s circumstances. It sounds similar to the saying in our culture, “It will be a cold day in hell before...”. This phrase is usually followed by some situation the speaker finds implausible or something they refuse to do. Replacing the word “hell” with “Gehenna” is just another way the writers of The Chosen create exciting and realistic dialogue in the series.

The concept of Gehenna is like the concept of hell in that it’s a place of punishment for the souls of the unrighteous. Gehenna differs from hell in that the duration of punishment is usually considered temporary instead of eternal. Gehenna (or Gehinnom in Hebrew) is a Greek term for the valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. Biblically, this was where some horrific things were done in honor of idols. Among these was when Manessah made his sons pass through fire (2 Chronicles 33:1-9).

Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Here, we again find someone scoffing at the possibility that the Messiah could have possibly come from humble Nazareth. Nathanael laughs when Philip suggests that Jesus of Nazareth is “The One.”

Nazareth wasn't highly looked upon at this time, as I wrote about in Explaining The Chosen: Season 1, [Episode 2](#), and [Episode 5](#). To think that the Messiah could have come from a place such as Nazareth was unheard of. This conversation between Philip and Nathanael is recorded in John 1:44-46.

Also in this chapter of John is the interaction between Jesus and Nathanael, depicted in the next scene. Verses 47 through 50 describe when they meet and return to Nathanael's desperate moments under the fig tree.

And that brings us to the end of another great episode of The Chosen. I'll get to work on the next one, so keep an eye out for Explaining The Chosen: Season 2, Episode 3!

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