

PHILIP

In our study of the twelve disciples we are moving on to the second ‘group’ of four. The first ‘group’ consisted of [Lk. 6:14](#) Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, ... The second ‘group’ consisted of Philip and Bartholomew, [15 Matthew and Thomas](#). Peter was the leader of the first group, and Philip was always at the head of the second group. The first four was closer to Jesus than the second four, who were closer than the third four. Nevertheless, they were all specially chosen to serve Jesus as disciples so that He would shape them into being apostles, - messengers, ‘sent ones’, - to continue the preaching of the Gospel and establish the Church, following His return to His Father in Heaven.

Ernest Best was a Professor of New Testament Studies in St. Andrews University. He had previously been a Presbyterian minister in Northern Ireland, and a faithful preacher of God’s Word, - born in Belfast (1917), he died in St. Andrews in 2004. In his study on Ephesians he discussed the Jewish term *shaliach* which described a certain type of job during the time of Jesus. It wasn’t so much a religious profession, but more a legal one, - it was akin to our ‘power of attorney’. In other words, the *shaliac* acted on behalf, - with the full authority, - of the person he was representing. He could carry out any task, - such as signing a document, or speaking on behalf of, - the person who had sent him ... as if it was the person themselves.

Now, Ernest Best taught the concept of the Jewish *shaliac* contributed to a fuller meaning of ‘apostle’. In other words, just as the *shaliac* acted on behalf of someone else, so the apostles acted on behalf of Christ, - they were the *shaliac* of Jesus. For example, when the disciples spoke, they spoke on behalf of Christ, - as if it was Jesus Himself speaking. ... When they healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, they did these things on behalf of Christ ... *as if Christ was actually there*. They were His official representatives, - His *shaliac* ... disciples, and that is what He was referring to when He told them, [Jn. 13:20](#) He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me.

And so the popular Jewish term *shaliac* would have been very familiar to the disciples and to the people with whom they ministered in their capacity as disciples. Consequently, when they spoke their words bore the authority of Jesus. This is illustrated in Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, [1 Thess. 2:13](#) For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the

word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. Similarly, **1 Cor. 11:23** For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you

So Philip belonged to the disciples who had this responsibility of speaking and acting on behalf of Christ ... Now, he always was at the head of the second group of disciples. That is significant, and not without meaning for it meant he had the immediate oversight of Nathanael/Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas.

His name is Greek, and it means ‘lover of horses’ (Φίλιππος). He would also have had a Jewish name, but we don’t know what it was for Scripture does not give it. ... We could speculate ... ‘Philip’ was a name associated with honour, for example, Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great ... and indeed, it was used by many of the Greek ruling classes. Maybe he had some connection with the Hellenistic Jews, who had been scattered across the Gentile nations (see Acts 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, **10** Phrygia, and Pamphylia ...).

In Palestine, Herod the Great called his son Herod Philip I ... and there was also Philip the evangelist (a different Philip to Philip the disciple), **Acts 6:3** Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. **4** But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. **5** And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch

Church History describes Philip the disciple as the apostle who preached in Greece, Syria, and Phrygia. The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates his feast day on 14th November.

We know for certain he came from Bethsaida, **Jn. 1:44** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter ... This seems to suggest he knew Andrew and Peter ... and by virtue of Andrew’s name being mentioned first, he may have been particularly friendly with Andrew. Also, since Andrew and Peter were friends with James and John, all five of them probably knew each other ... especially in the fishing business. Most commentators believe Philip was one of the two unnamed disciples (Andrew being the other) in Jn. **21:3** There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of

Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. ... They would have gone to the same synagogue, and they probably had much in common ... coming from the same city/town.

... In his Gospel, Matthew says nothing about him, neither does Mark nor Luke ... except that he is always named next to Nathanael-Bartholomew. John says more about him though ... in fact, as early as the first chapter, **Jn. 1:43** The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. ... The day following refers to the previous day when Jesus had called Andrew first and then Peter (v.40), after they had been listening to John the Baptist preaching. *They*, - both Andrew and Peter, - followed John the Baptist, who pointed them to Christ, and then they followed Him ... So, it was the *next* day Jesus met and called Philip, and he was actually the first one to whom Jesus said the actual words, **Follow me**.

Continuing on ... **44** Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. **45** Philip findeth Nathanael ... and Philip and Nathanael were always linked together ... and [*Philip*] saith unto him [*Nathanael*], We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. ... Philip was amazed that he had *found* Jesus, but he was convinced! ... We have found Him! We have found Him! **46** ... Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Incidentally, there is an illustration of how sometimes, - at the beginning, - we don't always get our theology right. As far as Philip was concerned, *he* had found the Lord ... It was as if he got to the Lord before the Lord got to him, while in actual fact it was the Lord who had found Philip first, for the Lord had specifically gone to the banks of the River Jordan to find him. ... That is a beautiful illustration of Sovereign election and human responsibility working in tandem ... Philip found the Lord only because the Lord found him first, **Jn. 15:16** Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

Notice also, **We have found him** ... in other words, Philip was like Anna and Simeon in the temple ... for like many others he was actively looking for redemption in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:38). ... And Jesus graciously came to where *they* were, and He also came to where *Philip* was. In fact, Jesus spelt it out so clearly, **Jn. 6:37** All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ... And Philip, - on his first meeting with Jesus, - embraced Jesus as the Lord.

I quoted from John chapter six ... let's go there. Philip was a student of the Old Testament, especially from the perspective of searching out the prophetic, as Jn. 1:45 (We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph) explains ... **Jn. 6:1** After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. **2** And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. **3** And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. **4** And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. **5** When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? Why did He pick out Philip to ask? Verses six tells us, **6** And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do ... Philip, it seems, was the kind of fellow who you could rely on to tell you about the problem, and to express his views in such a way as to discourage you doing anything about it and going any further. "Oh, we would never be able to do that ... Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? ... It is an impossible task!" ... And he was right for they did not have the facilities to feed all those people!

But Jesus was testing him so that Philip would come to understand the Saviour's power. Jesus knew what he was like ... but Jesus wanted Philip to admit what he was like! Philip was in the presence of Jesus ... not some ordinary man ... but Jesus, the Son of God, the *Messiah!* ... *him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write.*

You see, knowledge is no good to you if you do not act upon it and believe ... and that is what was happening to Philip. And often we are the last people to recognise our own failings! ... And true-to-form, **7** Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. ... Where are we going to get such an amount of money to feed such an amount of people?!

He had Jesus standing in front of him though ... Jesus, the Son of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the One Who sustains all things by His Sovereign power ... Jesus, - God, - of Whom the Psalmist recorded, **Ps. 50:10** For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. **11** I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. **12** If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. ... And still Philip asks, How are *we* going to feed them? It cannot be possible, Lord!

Instead of thinking to himself, Here is a great opportunity to prove the power of Christ. Here are all these people listening to Jesus ... This is fantastic, -

they are going to see how He can miraculously meet their need. ... But instead of looking at it like that ... and seeing the *power*, he saw the *problem*.

Yes, he had seen the suffering healed, the demon-possessed freed, and all manner of wonderful works carried out by Jesus ... and yet, Philip continued to be distracted by the problem! ... I could see him sitting with a spreadsheet, looking at a few different accounts ... and moving money around so as to pay the bills. But that is not what Jesus wanted him to do. Jesus simply wanted Philip to believe in and trust in His mighty power to answer the needs of those hungry people. ... Whereas Philip measured the impossible, Jesus was the Master Who taught His disciples, **Mt. 19:26** *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

And we know how the story developed. Along came Andrew with a boy who had five small loaves and two fish ... Both Andrew and Philip were in the same position, - they were both there with Jesus facing that same hungry multitude, but Andrew by faith brought the opportunity to the Lord whereas Philip saw the problem.

We see him do this again in John chapter twelve, **20** *And there were certain Greeks [i.e. proselytes] among them that came up to worship at the feast [i.e. of the Passover]:* **21** *The same came therefore to Philip [possibly because of his Greek name], which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.* **22** *Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. ...* **21** *Sir, we would see Jesus, - why did Philip need to go and get Andrew? Surely he could have brought the Greeks/Gentiles to Jesus himself, especially since they had come to him first?! However, Philip wasn't sure ... He had to check. This probably went back to such times when Jesus was sending out His disciples, and He commanded them specifically, **Mt. 10:5** *Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6* *But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ... Maybe the Gospel wasn't for the Gentiles? ... Did Jesus mean 'don't ever go to them'?**

Well, of course, we know Jesus had a particular order for the extension of the Gospel, - it was to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. But that was the priority and order in which it was to happen, - the Gospel was to be brought to the Jew first, and *afterward* the Gentile ... but Philip wasn't too sure, and just in case he wouldn't have been right bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, he went to Andrew. After all, Andrew was the disciple who brought *everybody* to Jesus.

In other words, Philip seemed to be indecisive. He didn't want to make a decision in case he made the wrong one. And yet, at the same time, there *was* a little 'niggle' in his heart that yes, probably these people ought to be introduced to Jesus, - in fact, he would have known it would have been good, - but he wasn't sure he was the one to do it. ... I'll call Andrew, and then if it's the wrong thing to have done, then it won't have just been me who got it wrong.

At least, though, it *is* good he *did* go and get Andrew. But he simply wasn't all that decisive. He could see the problems where there weren't any! Of course, Jesus would have welcomed those Gentiles ... why wouldn't He?! ... But Andrew could not go and get Jesus on his own because, - as it were, - ... 'it did not make it plain in the book'!

The last time we see Philip is in John chapter fourteen, - this is about two years after he had been chosen as one of the twelve disciples, so he should have known by now. Jesus was consoling and giving strength to His disciples in the upper room, where He told them, **Jn. 14:6** *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* ... And then Philip asks, - again somewhat *stupidly*, **8** *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.* ... You are the *way* ... then show us the *way* to how we can know Your Father, and then we will be happy/satisfied.

... But what did Philip think Jesus was doing throughout those past couple of years? Surely that is what He *was* doing, - showing the way to His Father! No wonder Jesus reacted with frustration, **9** *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* ... Where have you been, man?! ... Has it not *dawned* on you?! What do you think I *have* been doing! ... **9** *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?* **10** *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.* **11** *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

And then Jesus took Philip from **10** *Believest thou not* to **11** *Believe me.* ... You are a believer, so *believe!* ... Jesus did not give up on him ... You see, the problem with Philip was that he was still doing his calculations based upon earthly configurations, - he wasn't working with the spiritual formulae that

had its total and correct result in Jesus. Basically, - at this time in his life, - he was a man of limited faith who allowed the constraints of the world to limit the Saviour's power. There is nothing wrong with being analytical, and practical, and sensible, and adding up the pros and cons ... but Philip was not taking into account what Jesus could do. And that is where he was going wrong.

... Circumstances did not control Jesus ... Philip would have done well if he had remembered what Jesus had previously said, [Mt. 10:33](#) *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* ... All things, no matter how hard or impossible they may seem ... our God can overcome them for He is altogether powerful!

Imagine the Lord, - out of all the hundreds of potential disciples, - choosing someone like Philip ... whose faith was obviously not always 'up to the mark'! We would not have chosen him! ... Yet, at the same time, if Jesus would only have chosen those who were considered to be 'up to the mark' ... He would not have anybody in His band of disciples!

How many of us *did* measure up to what Christ deserves to have following Him? How many of us were suitably qualified to become Christians, and to serve Christ? ... The simple answer is, there were *none* of us. There is something, - even many things, - that would disqualify us all ... if it were not for God's grace. And His grace, - and choosing, - is something we could never have attained by ourselves. In fact, we have not even contributed one iota towards God having chosen us for we are in the family of God because He wonderfully planned it in eternity.

The Lord uses people others would not use, but no matter who He chooses He always equips. He takes them from what they were and makes them into what He wants them to be. ... With regards to Philip, Church History records that he became so faithful and loyal to the Lord Jesus that ultimately he was persecuted for Christ by the Romans at Hierapolis, in Phrygia (Asia Minor). They tried to make him recant his faith and renounce Jesus, but he wouldn't. And because he wouldn't, they stripped him of his clothes, and they put steel rods through his ankles and through his thighs. Then they hung him upside down. Before he died, he told his friends he did not want to be wrapped in a linen garment because he was not worthy to be treated the way His Lord was treated in His death.

He obviously overcame his former tendencies that so often hindered his faith, and he stands as proof, ²⁷ God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence.