

Nathanael

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Many characters in John are repurposed from Mark; his Samaritan Woman is a remake of Mark's unsatisfactory Syrophenician Woman. Two *invented* characters in John are the good Jew Nathanael and his less convinced counterpart Nicodemus. Nathanael appears in Jn 1 and in the added Jn 21. His originally intended function was thus complete within Jn 1-20. I here attempt to see what that function might have been, and what Nathanael's reappearance in Jn 21 might have been meant to tell us.

All that is said of Nathanael in Jn 1-20 is this one passage:

Jn 1:45. Philip¹ findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. [46] And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?² Philip saith unto him, Come and see. [47] Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! [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,³ I saw thee. [49] Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel.⁴ [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. [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.*

Jn 1:51, with its "And," is manifestly an addition; that second prediction will not be fulfilled until Nathanael and others beheld the Risen Jesus in the added Jn 21. With Wellhausen 13, I see 1:51 as interpolated, and would add: at the same time as Jn 21. The stylistic investigations⁵ which follow will be based only in Jn 1:45-50.

¹In lists of the Twelve, Philip is paired with Bartholomew, and misguided efforts (Bennema **Encountering** 128) have been made to equate Nathanael with Bartholomew.

²The standard learned view, in opposition to the claims of Jesus; see Jn 7:52.

³A traditional place of Scripture study and teaching; see Brooks **Fig** 153.

⁴Jesus' demonstration of prophetic insight immediately convinces Nathanael.

⁵See Brooks **Chinese**. Passages in continuous narrative (or where one writer "has in mind" another) typically have D values from 0:00 to 0:50; separate episodes in the same series have values from 0:51 to 0:74. D values of 1:00 and up tend to preclude a common origin.

The context for Nathanael begins with the Calling of Peter (1d) and goes to the Wedding at Cana (2a), presumably the “greater thing” which Nathanael was promised, and then the Cleansing of the Temple (2b). Does Nathanael fit the context?

1d (Jn 1:35-42) Calling Peter 2a (Jn 2:1-10) Wedding at Cana
1e (Jn 4:3-50) Philip and Nathanael. 2b (Jn 2:13-22) Cleansing the Temple

<i>Jn</i>	<i>1d</i>	<i>1e</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>
	136	145	186	187
<i>1d</i>	~	0-22	0-33	0-35
<i>1e</i>	0-22	~	0-47	0-29
<i>2a</i>	0-33	0-47	~	0-51
<i>2b</i>	0-35	0-29	0-51	~

Yes, he does. The Cleansing of the Temple (2b) misses by a hair an otherwise consistent pattern; all these passages might have been written as continuous narrative. The promise to Nathanael (who, as we learn in Jn 21, is from Cana) *does make sense* as narratively fulfilled at Cana. John is now, for the moment, finished with Nathanael.

Signs. The Wedding at Cana (2a) and the Healing at Cana (4e) are called “signs,” but the Samaritan Woman is not. If we test these “signs” and everything between (asterisks mark segments below the 105-word recommended minimum), we get:

2a (Jn 2:1-10)	Cana Wedding	*3e (Jn 3:31-36)	He That Cometh
2b (Jn 2:13-22)	Temple Cleansing	4a (Jn 4:1-26)	Samaritan Woman
*2c (Jn 2:23-25)	Heart of Man	4b (Jn 4:27-38)	“I have Food”
3a (Jn 3:1-15)	Nicodemus	*4c (Jn 4:39-42)	The Villagers
3b (Jn 3:16-21)	God So Loved	*4d (Jn 4:39-45)	To Galilee
*3c (Jn 3:22-23)	John at Aenon	4e (Jn 4:46-54)	Cana Healing
3d (Jn 3:25-30)	“I Must Decrease”		

<i>Jn</i>	<i>2a</i>	<i>2b</i>	* <i>2c</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>3b</i>	* <i>3c</i>	<i>3d</i>	* <i>3e</i>	<i>4a</i>	<i>4b</i>	* <i>4c</i>	* <i>4d</i>	<i>4e</i>
	186	167	55	259	136	40	110	104	449	191	73	49	160
<i>2a</i>	~	0-51	0-88	0-78	0-98	0-51	0-73	0-69	0-82	0-69	0-81	0-80	0-77
<i>2b</i>	0-51	~	0-94	0-61	1-11	0-45	0-60	0-56	0-46	0-68	0-67	0-79	0-59
* <i>2c</i>	0-88	0-94	~	0-91	0-62	0-59	0-80	0-76	0-67	0-64	0-68	0-35	0-71
<i>3a</i>	0-78	0-61	0-91	~	0-82	0-76	0-37	0-60	0-38	0-48	0-65	0-80	0-54
<i>3b</i>	0-98	1-11	0-62	0-82	~	0-94	0-74	0-90	0-85	0-67	0-79	0-67	0-72
* <i>3c</i>	0-51	0-45	0-59	0-76	0-94	~	0-72	0-81	0-64	0-54	0-64	0-42	0-58
<i>3d</i>	0-73	0-60	0-80	0-37	0-74	0-72	~	0-67	0-44	0-48	0-41	0-76	0-54
* <i>3e</i>	0-69	0-56	0-76	0-60	0-90	0-81	0-67	~	0-39	0-71	0-66	0-61	0-78
<i>4a</i>	0-82	0-46	0-67	0-38	0-85	0-64	0-44	0-39	~	0-46	0-52	0-54	0-57
<i>4b</i>	0-69	0-68	0-64	0-48	0-67	0-54	0-48	0-71	0-46	~	0-56	0-61	0-41
* <i>4c</i>	0-81	0-67	0-68	0-65	0-79	0-64	0-41	0-66	0-52	0-56	~	0-67	0-59
* <i>4d</i>	0-80	0-79	0-35	0-80	0-67	0-42	0-76	0-61	0-54	0-61	0-67	~	0-66
<i>4e</i>	0-77	0-59	0-71	0-54	0-72	0-58	0-54	0-78	0-57	0-41	0-59	0-66	~

The two Cana miracles have a D value of 0.77, compatible with their having been separate episodes in whatever source John might here be drawing on. Reading along the diagonal of the above table, we find that the Samaritan Woman and its sequel (the arrival of the villagers, who are moved by her tale to want to know more about Jesus), make a continuous narrative. Comparing it with Mark's Syrophenician Woman, we find these contrasts: She does *not know* Jesus, who impresses her by knowing her past, just as he impresses Nathanael by prophetic awareness of a fact (the fig tree) not present. Unlike the Syrophenician Woman, who tells no one, she tells the tale to her village, who come to learn more from Jesus, just as Nathanael, on seeing Jesus, at once acknowledges him as the Messiah. The Syrophenician Woman sought a healing, but again as with Nathanael, what Jesus gives here is *teaching*. So parallel are Nathanael and the Samaritan Woman that it is tempting to compare the two of them stylistically:

<i>John</i>	<i>1e</i>	<i>4a</i>	<i>4b</i>	<i>*4c</i>
	145	449	191	73
<i>1e</i>	~	0.42	0.46	0.47
<i>4a</i>	0.42	~	0.46	0.52
<i>4b</i>	0.46	0.46	~	0.56
<i>*4c</i>	0.47	0.52	0.56	~

and we find that the Samaritan Woman story proper (the episode that concludes with the question of the disciples), and the next episode (the arrival of the villagers) all relate closely to the Nathanael segment. Does this tell us anything about the author of John? Mark's Jesus is a charismatic healer. So is John's Jesus, but chiefly in stories like the second Cana miracle, where John is reworking Mark's Jairus story. John himself is in the doctrine business. He abandons mere birth stories, and takes Jesus out of the human realm altogether (Jn 1:1-2); Jesus is foreseen at the beginning of time. In stories originating with John, Jesus is principally a teacher: a teacher *about himself*.

Like Nathanael, Nicodemus is also seeking, but with less assurance, and with less success. He comes at night to question Jesus (3:1-2), but is unable to accept Jesus' teaching, the need for rebirth, in 3:4-9. He is chided for his lack of understanding: "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?" (3:10). He retains his membership in the Jewish Establishment. In the Sanhedrin (7:50) he protests the condemning of Jesus without a hearing, but is silenced by the others. In 19:39, he assists Joseph of Arimathea by bringing myrrh and aloes to anoint Jesus' dead body, showing devotion – but Jesus is still dead. Nicodemus makes this stylistic picture:

<i>John</i>	<i>3a</i>	<i>7g</i>	<i>19g</i>
	259	109	111
<i>3a</i>	~	0.32	0.87
<i>7g</i>	0.32	~	0.83
<i>19g</i>	0.87	0.83	~

The last may diverge because it is aware of the Markan character Joseph of Arimathea. The other two are pure Johannine invention, and the hand of the author seems to show.

Now for Jn 21. There are Peter and the rest of the inner circle, unaware of what is about to happen. Nathanael is with them; here is where the Jn 1:51 second prediction will be fulfilled: “angels ascending and descending” is a Pentateuchal way of saying that he will see that ultimate miracle, Jesus’ return to life. For stylistic purposes, then, we must put 1:51 back with Jn 1:43-50, Comparing it with Jn 21, we get:

4e (Jn 4:43-51) Calling of Nathanael 21c (Jn 21:15-19) Charge to Peter
 21a (Jn 21:1-8) Seeing Jesus *21d (Jn 21:20-23) The Beloved Disciple
 *21b (Jn 21:9-14) Breakfast on Shore

John	1e	21a	*21b	21c	*21d
	145	185	93	136	90
1e	~	0·56	0·28	0·42	0·53
21a	0·56	~	0·38	0·49	0·54
*21b	0·28	0·38	~	0·38	0·60
21c	0·42	0·49	0·38	~	0·49
*21d	0·53	0·54	0·60	0·49	~

Jn 21 itself is narratively close, segment by segment. And two of those segments are *as close to the Nathanael passage as to each other*. Symbolically, the New Direction which John is taking at the climax not only includes, but is psychologically close to, its learned early convert, Nathanael. The one who came in, and remained.

Jesus was a Jew; his early followers were Jews; his message of a restored Kingdom was meaningful only to Jews. Then came the Gentiles: they got interested, they told their friends. At first, the Jesus followers rejected them. But attitudes changed, and as his last comment, Mark has Jesus say that the promised Kingdom *will not come* until the Gospel is preached to all nations.⁶ By the time of John, fifty years later, two human generations later, the Jesus movement was increasingly made up of Gentiles.

But in its Jn 21 climax, the movement remembers, and reaffirms, its Jewish roots; it showcases one who had remained faithful to a first commitment. It is this assertion of ongoing Jewish identity, against the contemporary Rabbinic rejection, the expulsion from the synagogues (Jn 9:22, 16:2), that is the final meaning of “Nathanael” in John.

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⁶For the stages in the acceptance of Gentiles in Mark, see Brooks **Time** 73-77.