

# Be A Nathanael

By Stephen C. Kanski

When we look at the ministry of Jesus as related in the gospel accounts, it is evident that He did not bestow compliments lightly. Jesus knew full well what was in the hearts of men, and His communications generally came in the form of admonitions, attitude adjustments and course corrections. There is, however, a striking exception to this pattern. On the day that He first laid eyes on Nathanael, a young man who was to be one of His hand-picked disciples, Jesus said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:7)

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “guile” as “the use of clever and usually dishonest methods to achieve something.” We’ve all met persons of guile. One example that springs to mind is the slick used-car salesman who will lie, deceive, and generally say anything to get you to buy. His typical line is, “What do I have to do to get you into this car today?” Other examples are the office back-stabber or the corrupt politician or the ambulance-chasing lawyer. In fact, we’ve all probably resorted to guile ourselves at some point to manipulate others or to try to wangle circumstances to align with our own self-interest.

But Nathanael was described as a man without guile. Jesus said of him, “Behold an Israelite indeed”. What did He mean by this? God’s desire for the nation of Israel was that they should be a light to the rest of the world, set forth as an example of piety, justice, integrity and compassion- a moral and ethical standard for the rest of the nations to follow. Jesus set Nathanael forth as a shining example of what a true Israelite was intended to be, pure, and undefiled in thought and deed.

Nathanael wasn’t born a superman, impervious to the deceitful human nature the rest of us possess. He, too, was a son of Adam, a full-fledged member of the fallen human race. He was not sheltered from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune any more

than his compatriots, and yet, Nathanael chose to keep his heart free from bitterness, resentment, envy and, yes, guile.

It is evident that, at some point in his childhood, Nathanael resolved to avoid yielding to the deceitful impulses that surfaced in his heart. Instead, he resisted them and struggled to become the better man. He firmly embraced the moral teachings of his elders, especially those that emphasized love, compassion and integrity in dealings with his neighbors. He was so successful in this endeavor that Jesus was able to bestow upon him an accolade few others received.

Over the centuries, in accordance with His plan to reveal righteousness to the world, God sent many teachers, wise men and prophets. Finally, God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ to implement a new model for service and communion with God, a model based on grace, forgiveness and love. In Christ, God draws near to our hearts, indwelling us and empowering us to become His sons and daughters. Jesus became our example of righteous behavior. The apostle Peter wrote:

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: (1 Peter 2:21-23)

With Jesus as our example and our helper, we are all empowered to become like Nathanael, a people in whom is no guile.