

Notes on John 1

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Jesus' Public Ministry - Chap. 1-12

John's Introduction — John 1:1-18

John begins by identifying his claims regarding who Jesus is. The introduction of John's gospel immediately introduces the major themes that John intends to discuss. Then he spends the rest of the book proving and demonstrating these themes from the life and teaching of Jesus.

Major doctrines or truths regarding Jesus stated in John 1:1-18:

1. Jesus is eternal and uncreated, existing before the world began (1:1-3).
2. Jesus possesses Deity (absolute authority and rulership over created things — 1:1).
3. Jesus is a separate Being from the Father (1:1,2,18).
4. Jesus is the Creator — the active force through Whom all things were made (1:3,10).
5. Jesus is the source of truth and understanding of God's will (1:4,5,14,17,18).
6. Jesus is the source of life by which men have a relationship with God and hope of eternal life (1:4).
7. Jesus became incarnate in the flesh as a man (1:14,9,10).
8. Jesus was rejected by men (1:10,11).
9. Jesus is the One who can give people power to become children of God (1:12).

Verses 1,2

1. List 4 things you know about the apostle John.
2. Who is "the Word" (cf. v14), and what does v1 tell us about Him?
3. List and explain two passages elsewhere that express the Divine nature of Jesus (that He is called "God" or possesses Deity).
4. Find and list two passages that show the Son is a separate individual from the Father (i.e., the Father and Son are two separate beings).
5. Special Assignment: Explain how the Son could be with God and **be** God at the same time.

The "Word" refers to Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, as shown by vv 14,17.

"In the beginning" must refer to the beginning of creation, as in Genesis 1:1. That this is the meaning is confirmed in v3 showing that Jesus is the Creator. So Jesus existed from eternity with the Father. Note that the use of "was" shows that Jesus already was in existence when the Creation occurred.

This simultaneously proves both that Jesus possesses Deity and He is a separate and distinct living Being from the Father.

The Word was "with God" in that Jesus was present in the beginning with the Father (see v3; Cf. 1 John 1:2) — hence, He is a separate individual living Being from the Father. But also He "was God" in that He Himself possessed Deity.

To say there is one God is not necessarily to say there is only one individual Being that possesses Deity. Jesus affirmed that He and His Father are "one" as all believers are to be one (John 17:20,21) — not one individual, but one in purpose, goal, doctrine, etc.

The term "god" refers to that which possesses all the characteristics of Deity and therefore deserves to be worshipped and honored as God. The true God of the Bible is one God, but consists of three separate and distinct individual Beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They all possess unlimited power over the created things, all are eternal and unlimited in wisdom, goodness, love, etc. There may be some differences among them as regards their relation-

ship to one another, but as regards their relationship to us the creatures, they are all the same. There is no difference to us whether it is the Father who tells us a matter, or the Son, or the Spirit.

These three are “one” in contrast to the heathen deities that possessed different characteristics, different wills, different degrees and areas of power, and often even warred and contradicted one another.

Some claim Jesus is “a god,” but not God like the Father is God.

Some, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, argue that the Greek “was God” has no definite article before “God,” whereas there is a definite article in “with God.” So it is claimed that Jesus is god in a lesser sense, different from the Father. Hence, the “New World Translation” says, “the word was a god.” However,

(1) **All major standard translations say, “the Word was God.”** None say “a god.” Hence they contradict the NWT. (See NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NIV, etc.).

(2) **If Jesus is “god” in a lesser sense than the Father, then we would have two different true gods!** Clearly Jesus is not a false god; hence He is true God. But if He is “god” in a different sense than the Father, that would violate the passages saying there is one true God!

(3) **Many Scriptures use “God” (Gk. θεος) without an article to refer to the true God.** See Matthew 5:9; 6:24; Luke 1:35,78; John 1:6,12,13,18; Romans 17:17; and many others.

(4) **Many Scriptures use “God” both with and without an article in the same context, yet both uses clearly refer to the true God.** See Matthew 4:3,4; 12:28; Luke 20:37,38; John 3:2; 13:3; Acts 5:29,30; Romans 1:7,8,17-19; 2:16,17; 3:5,22,23; 4:2,3; etc.

(5) **The context of John 1:1-3 shows that Jesus is eternal and created all things.** (See our later discussion on the character and works of Jesus). To call Him “God” in such a context must surely mean He is God in the same exalted sense as the Father.

(6) **We will soon see other passages referring to Jesus as “God” using the definite article.** If the NWT distinction is valid, then these passages must prove conclusively that Jesus is God in the same sense as the Father.

So John 1:1 refers to both Jesus and the Father as “God” in a context that affirms the eternal existence of Jesus and that He is the Creator of all (v1-3). This would be blasphemy if He does not possess Deity as the Father does.

[Marshall, Vine, Vincent, Lenski, Robertson, and other Greek scholars contend that the article is absent from “was God” in John 1:1, not to imply that Jesus was a “lesser god,” but simply to identify “God” as the predicate nominative despite the fact it precedes the verb for emphasis (Colwell’s Rule). If it had the definite article, that would imply that “the Word” and the Father are the same person. In any case, the Scriptures listed above clearly show that the lack of the article does not prove Jesus is God in a lesser sense than the Father.]

Other passages affirming Jesus’ Deity

Colossians 2:9

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (NKJV, KJV, ASV). Or: “For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (NASB, RSV, NIV is similar).

Hebrews 1:3

Jesus was “the express image of His [the Father’s] person” (NKJV, KJV) or “the very image of his substance” (ASV), “the exact representation of His nature” (NASB), “the exact representation of his being” (NIV). The context describes Jesus as the Creator, far above the angels so that He deserves to be worshipped. But only God is properly worshiped, hence Jesus is God in the fullest sense of the word.

God possesses certain characteristics that are so unique that no one but God can possess them (eternal, all-powerful, etc.). If no one but God possesses these, yet Jesus is the exact repro-

duction of the essence of God's nature, then He must possess these qualities. But if Jesus possesses all qualities that are unique to God, He must be God, He must possess Deity.

Philippians 2:6-8

Before coming to earth, Jesus existed in the form of God (v6). This is so translated in KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV. NIV says: "being in very nature God." This must mean that Jesus truly possessed Deity before He came to earth.

V7 uses the same word "form" to say that He took the form (μορφή) of a servant. Was Jesus really a servant on earth? Of course He was (Matthew 20:28; John 13:1-6; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Acts 4:27,30 ASV). It follows that, before He came to earth, He really possessed the nature of God.

John 20:28,29

After he saw proof of Jesus' resurrection, Thomas addressed Jesus as "my Lord and my God" (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB, NIV). Clearly Thomas is here calling Jesus "God." Consider:

The word for God is θεός *with the definite article*. According to their argument on John 1:1, even Jehovah's Witnesses must admit that this means the one **true** God, in the same sense as the Father.

If Jesus did not possess Deity, Thomas' statement would have been blasphemy, and Jesus should have rebuked Him. Instead, Jesus praised Thomas and pronounced a blessing on everyone who believes the same (v29)!

Hebrews 1:8

The Father said to Son, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NEB, NIV). This is a quotation from Psalm 45:6,7, which is translated exactly the same (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NIV).

Note that God the Father Himself is here addressing Jesus as "God" (cf. vv 1-9).

Further "God" here has the definite article so even Witnesses must admit it refers to the one True God.

Psalms 102:24

"I said, O my God, Do not take me away..." Hebrews 1:10-12 directly quotes Psalm 102:25-27 and says that it was spoken "to the Son" (v8). The context of Psalm 102:24 shows it is clearly addressed to the same person addressed in vv 25-27.

Hence, in v24 Jesus is addressed as "O my God."

Isaiah 9:6

Jesus' name would be called "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God..." This is clearly a prophecy of the Son, as seen in the beginning of the verse. Hence, Jesus is called "Mighty God."

John 1:1 states a truth repeated throughout the New Testament: Jesus possesses Deity and all the characteristics of Deity as fully as does the Father. And He possessed such Deity from eternity.

Other passages affirming Jesus is a separate individual from the Father

A father and his son must be separate individuals

Consider the following references:

Matthew 3:17 — This is **My** beloved **Son**.

Matthew 16:16,17 — **You** are ... the **Son of the living God ... My Father** in heaven revealed this.

Matthew 17:5 — This is **My** beloved **Son** (spoken by God the **Father** — 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

John 3:16 — **God** gave **His** only-begotten **Son**.

John 5:17 — **My Father** has been working, and **I** work.

Hebrews 1:5 — I will be to **Him** a **Father** and **He** shall be to **Me** a **Son**.

1 John 1:3 — Have fellowship with the **Father** and with **His Son Jesus Christ**.

2 John 3 — Grace from God the **Father** and from **Jesus Christ the Son of the Father**.

2 John 9 — Abide in the teaching and have **both the Father and the Son**.

A father and his son are necessarily two separate and distinct individuals. A single individual can be both a father and a son at the same time — a father to one person and a son to another person. But no one can be the same person as **his own** son, and no person can be the same individual as **his own** father!

The Father prepared a body for the Son — Hebrews 10:5

When Jesus came into the world, He said, “a **body You** have prepared for **Me**.” “You” is God the Father (v7). “Me” is Jesus the Son (v10). The “body” is the body in which Jesus came into the world (vv 5,10).

Again, “you” and “me” necessarily refer to a plurality of individuals. Jesus was the “me,” not the “you” (the Father).

And Jesus is not just the “body.” The body was **prepared** for the “Me” (Jesus). Here are two separate and distinct spirit beings discussing the body in which Jesus came to earth.

Judgment given by the Father to the Son — John 5:22

The **Father** does not judge any man, but has given all judgment to the **Son**. If the Father and Son are the same individual, then when Jesus judges someone, the Father **is** judging them. But the Son judges and the Father does not judge. Therefore, they must be separate individuals.

Jesus prayed to the Father — John 17:1-5 (Matthew 26:39; John 11:41)

Jesus lifted His eyes to Heaven and prayed to the Father (v1). He said, “I have glorified **You** ... **I** have finished the work **You** have given **Me** to do” (v4). **I** and **you** make plural individuals. But if the Father and Son are the same individual, then Jesus prayed to Himself!

Jesus was WITH the Father before the world began — John 17:5,24

He (Jesus) said “**Father**, glorify **Me** together with **Yourself** with the glory which **I** had **with You before the world was**” (17:5). Further, the **Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world** (17:24).

You and **Me** implies separate individuals. The Father was one “**self**,” but Jesus was **with Him**. All this was before there ever was any fleshly body.

The Son is on the Father’s right hand — Ephesians 1:17,20

The **Father** raised **Jesus** from the dead and made Him sit at **His right hand**. Clearly this describes a relationship between two separate individuals. If Jesus and the Father are the same individual, then Jesus is sitting at His own right hand! (See also Acts 2:33; 7:55,56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22.)

Jesus and the Father had independent wills — Matthew 26:39

Jesus prayed, “**Not as I will but as you will**.” **My will and your will** make two distinct minds each capable of making its own decisions. The Father’s will and the Son’s will agree and are united, but each has individual power to choose and to will. Each has His own mind and intelligence separate from the other.

(See also John 6:38-40; 8:28,42; 5:30; 7:16; 12:49; 14:10,24.)

The Father and the Son make TWO witnesses — John 8:13,16-18,29

Jews accused Jesus of testifying of **Himself** (v13). Jesus said the law required **two** witnesses (v17; cf. Deut. 19:15). He claimed He was **not alone** because “**I am with the Father** who sent me” (v16). Further, **I am One** that bears witness of **Myself** and the **Father** bears witness of **Me** (v18). That fulfills the requirements for **two** witnesses (v17). So, **He** who sent me is **with Me**; **He** has not left **Me alone** (v29).

Again, ***I and My Father*** make a plurality of individuals. If Jesus and the Father were the same individual, then Jesus would be ***alone*** and would have only ***one*** witness. But Jesus said He was ***not alone*** and He and His Father fulfilled the requirement of ***two*** witnesses. This can only be true if they constitute two separate and distinct individuals.

Jesus and His Father are “WE” — John 14:23; 17:20-23

Jesus (“me”) and “my Father” love those who obey. “***We***” will come and dwell with them (14:23). The Father and Son are an “***Us***” and a “***We***” (17:21,22). How can “we” and “us” be one individual?

Jesus had a spirit separate & distinct from that of His Father — Matthew 27:46,50; Luke 23:46

When Jesus was on the cross, the Father ***forsook*** Him (Matt. 27:46). Clearly the Father’s spirit was no longer with Jesus. Yet Jesus continued to live awhile, having ***His own spirit***, which then departed when He died (v50). When He died, He commended ***His spirit*** into ***His Father’s*** hands (Luke 23:46). Did Jesus commend His own Spirit into the hands of His own Spirit, and then give up His spirit? No, Jesus had His own Spirit separate from His Father’s spirit.

The fact a person has his own spirit, separate from the spirit of other beings, is what makes him a separate individual. But Jesus had his own spirit separate from the Father’s spirit, therefore He must have been a separate and distinct individual from His Father.

Jesus & His Father are one as His disciples are one — John 17:20-23

Again, the Father and Son are described as ***You*** and ***Me, I*** and ***You***, clearly identifying separate individuals. They are also called ***we*** (v22) — ***plural*** individuals.

Further, Jesus and His Father are one ***even as*** His disciples should be one. How should disciples be “one”? Do we all become ***one and the same individual*** — one living being? No, we remain separate individuals, but we are one in purpose, faith, goals, character, doctrine, practice, etc. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-20, 25-27; Eph. 4:1-4; etc.)

If the Father and Son are one individual, then this passage says all His disciples must become one individual — an impossibility! But if we are not all one individual, but the Father and Son are one ***even as*** we are one, then the Father and Son cannot be one individual.

All three Beings were present at Jesus’ baptism — Luke 3:21,22

Jesus was on earth, having been baptized, and He was praying. The ***Holy Spirit*** descended in a bodily form like a dove (He is not a dove but took a bodily form ***like*** a dove). A voice from heaven said, “***You*** are ***My*** beloved ***Son***.”

The voice was clearly the Heavenly Father. So in this story all 3 are present and are presented as being 3 separate individuals.

Baptism in the name of the three — Matthew 28:19

The apostles were commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is clear from our studies that the Father and Son are two separate individuals. Surely then the “Holy Spirit” must also be a living individual separate from the other two.

John 1:1 states a truth also repeated throughout the New Testament: He and His Father are two separate and distinct individual living spirit Beings, even though both possess Deity.

For further discussion of the Deity of Jesus and the number of individuals in the Godhead, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 3

6. What did “the Word” make (v3)?

7. List other passages showing the Universe was made through Jesus.

8. Case Study: Suppose a friend asks whether Jesus was eternal or was a created being. How could you use John 1 to answer the question?

Jesus is the Creator

Since Jesus existed in the beginning (vv 1,2), He is before everything that was created. In fact, Jesus created everything that was created, without exception. Nothing was made without Him (cf. v10; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

The passage does not affirm that Jesus was the only Being involved in the creation. Rather, it says all things were made “through Him.” He was the active force who actually brought all created things into existence. But He was also acting on behalf of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 1:2,3; Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Genesis 1:2). The fact that all three Beings of the Godhead were present at the creation is what explains the use of plural pronouns for God in Genesis 1:26,27.

It follows necessarily that Jesus Himself is eternal.

He cannot be a created being, as Jehovah’s Witnesses argue. He created everything that was created. This necessarily means that He Himself was not created or else He created Himself. But He could not have created Himself. Therefore, He must be eternal (cf. Colossians 1:17).

This also affirms His Deity, for if He is the eternal Creator, then He must be God. He is not classed with the created things, but stands apart from us being classed with the Father and the Spirit.

Any view that presents Jesus as less than the active Creator of all Creation or less than an eternal Being in the Godhead is a view that contradicts Scripture and denies the exalted truth regarding the nature of Jesus.

Verse 4,5

9. What two characteristics did the Word have according to vv 4,5?

10. For each of these characteristics, find another passage showing Jesus possessed it.

(Thought question: In what sense did Jesus possess these qualities?)

Jesus inherently possesses the power of life.

Jesus had life in Himself in that He was alive from eternity, from the beginning (vv 1,2). This enabled Him, as the Creator, to give life to all living things including man. It also enabled Him to arise from the dead and to give men eternal life. Being the source of life physically (v3), demonstrates that He is also the source of life spiritually in the new birth (v12; 1 John 5:11,12; John 17:3).

Jesus as the source of life is another of the major themes of the record of John. He is the way, the truth, and the life. The only way men can have spiritual life in relationship with the Father is through Jesus (John 14:6). Therefore, He is the one who can give men truly abundant life (John 10:10). Because He has life in Himself, men must go to Him to have life (John 5:26,40). He has the words of eternal life; His words are spirit and life (John 6:63,68).

John will return to this theme and enlarge on it through the book.

Jesus is the source of spiritual light.

John then connects the life in Jesus to the light that He gives to men. Jesus created both physical life and light on earth. He made the sun to rule the light (Gen. 1). Physical light is essential to life. There had to be light in order for life to exist and continue.

But in John’s statement, Jesus as the life is also the source of light. Only the all-powerful living God could create light. But John uses Jesus as the source of life to introduce Him as also the

source of spiritual light. Jesus as the source of light is another major theme of John (cf. John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

The connection between life and light comes through the word, the revelation of truth through the written word. As “the Word,” Jesus reveals God’s will to man (v18), and authoritatively declares God’s commands. He has the words of eternal life; His words are spirit and life (John 6:63,68). This revelation is the source of man’s enlightenment (Psa. 119:105; Matt. 28:18; Proverbs 3:18; 4:20,22).

The truth of Jesus’ message gives light in that it reveals the true meaning and purpose of life, showing us how to live. The God who gave us life had a purpose for our lives. To know that purpose, we need light – understanding of what He wants us to do. The same Creator Jesus who gave us the life at creation also gave us the light of His word to show us how to live life.

John will also return frequently to the theme of Jesus and His word as the source of spiritual light.

Light is given to dispel darkness.

Light and darkness are opposites. Or more specifically, darkness is the absence of light. Darkness exists where light does not exist, but the coming of light eliminates darkness. Just as Jesus is the source of light, He is the One who dispels darkness.

As on v4, light represents truth and the proper understanding of the meaning of life and how to please God to receive eternal life. So darkness represents the ignorance of men who do not understand the purpose of life and how to please God. So darkness comes to represent evil and wickedness that leads to eternal death instead of eternal life.

Just as light dispels darkness, so the truth of Jesus can eliminate wickedness from the lives of men and lead them to eternal life instead of eternal punishment (see again the other passages listed under v4).

Yet the light sent from God was not comprehended by the darkness.

When this light from God shone into the darkness, it was not comprehended (see also notes on vv 9,10). This would appear to state that the people in darkness did not accept or understand the light that God had sent them. Physical darkness has no power to resist light. But, in the case of men, darkness is sometimes a matter of choice – they may reject the light, because they don’t want to live by it (John 3:19ff).

This is the first of several statements from John showing that, though Jesus is so incredibly great, yet people did not appreciate Him for what He is. They rejected Him. I believe this refers primarily to His life on earth and subsequent crucifixion, though of course it is still true for many people today. Though He was the great Creator and source of life, when He came to live on earth the world did not know Him (v10). They did not receive Him (v11).

Just because light is present does not mean men will benefit from it. Some may close their eyes and stay in darkness. Some prefer to avoid the light and go where darkness reigns (3:19ff). This is what men did with Jesus’ revelation (Matt. 13:13ff).

King points out that the word for “comprehend” does not necessarily mean to understand. It can mean to overcome. So darkness cannot successfully resist and defeat light. It may have seemed at times, while Jesus was on earth and especially when He died, that the darkness would defeat the light; yet in the end the light of Jesus’ truth prevailed over darkness. This, of course, is a true fact. But John returns to discussing light in vv 9-11 and shows that men rejected Jesus. This leads me to lean toward the explanation I have given above. Both ideas, of course, are true, and perhaps both of them fit the passage.

Verses 6-8

11. Define “witness,” and tell who bore witness in vv 6-8.

(Thought question: Note the expressions “witness,” “testimony,” etc., throughout John. What does this tell you about the purpose of John’s book?)

12. Why did this witness give his testimony?

John the Baptist as a witness for Christ

Here the apostle John cites his first witness to give testimony to the truth of John’s proposition regarding who Jesus is. John the Baptist was sent from God to be a witness to the light. He himself was not the light, but he was a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe.

Note the emphasis, especially in the gospel of John but also throughout the New Testament, on the concept of testifying or giving evidence (witness). God does not expect men to just accept Jesus and His message as being true without evidence. John is writing to provide us evidence, and he begins the book making this point. We will see the concept of evidence again and again throughout the book.

The writer affirms that John the Baptist was sent from God. He was a prophet, a spokesman and representative of God. He did not speak on his own initiative or from his own opinions. He was guided by God. This is exactly what the New Testament repeatedly affirms regarding John. See on Matthew 3:1-22 and other passages. Note especially that these references repeatedly affirm that John’s work was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5 of one who would be sent to prepare the way for God. So John was sent by God to do a special work. See also notes on John 1:19-34. If John was sent from God, then of course his message should be taken seriously as Divine revelation.

Not the light, but a witness to the light

Not only was John sent from God, but he was specifically sent to prepare the way for the Christ. This means that his work as a witness would be especially important. He came for the express purpose of preparing the people so they could believe on Jesus when he came. If anyone should recognize the Christ and be able to accurately point them to the Christ, it should be John. Many of Jesus’ first disciples were people who had first been followers of John (see examples later in this chapter).

However, although John was a witness to the light, he was not himself that light. The light refers back to vv 4,5. Jesus came to give the light of truth and understanding to men. John was not himself the Christ, but he was a witness to point men to the Christ.

In v20 John expressly denied that he was the Christ. Apparently there were some then – and there still are some today – who hold too highly exalted a view of John (cf. Luke 3:15). Yes, he was a prophet who had the special job of pointing the way to Christ. This work should be appreciated. But he should not be exalted to a position anywhere near that of Christ. The Christ was not just a prophet but the one unique Son of God and Savior of the world – Matthew 16:13-18. He was the Creator, God in the flesh - see on John 1:1-3. Neither John nor any man can even approximate Jesus’ position. John should neither be over-exalted or under-appreciated.

The implication of the verse is that the Light is someone, not just an inanimate thing. Whoever it was, it was not John but, by implication, it was someone else.

Verses 9,10

13. How did the world react to “the light”? Why was this an improper reaction?

The light was not recognized.

Though John was not the true source of light, yet the light did exist and did come into the world. It made light available to every man. However, though the light came into the world and had in fact made the world, yet the world did not know Him (see on vv 3-5).

Note that, if men are ignorant, it is ultimately man's fault. Physical darkness has no choice but to give way to the light. But men in darkness do have a choice whether or not they will recognize and accept spiritual light. The problem is not that truth was unrevealed or cannot be understood. The light *did shine*. The problem was that men chose not to accept it (cf. John 3:19-21).

There is no excuse for people who do not know truth and do not recognize Jesus. He is the Creator, the One who made us all, and yet men don't recognize or honor Him! Note the great irony that the Creator of the world was not recognized by His own creation (cf. Romans 1:20). Imagine a created work that becomes so egotistical that it somehow denies and even rejects its own maker. That is how the world treated Jesus.

John writes this having the benefit of the historical knowledge that Jesus eventually was killed. Since people ended up rejecting Him, John sets out to prove that He really was who He claimed to be and people therefore should not reject Him.

Verses 11,12

14. How did "his own" treat Him?

(Thought question: Who were "his own," and how should they have treated Him?)

15. What blessing did He give to those who believe on Him?

16. Case Study: Suppose a friend claims that, whenever anyone believes, he immediately becomes a child of God. Is this what the passage actually says? Explain.

Even His own did not receive Him.

Not only did the world in general not recognize Jesus, though it had been made by Him, yet even His own people did not recognize and receive Him. This includes especially the fact that the Jews killed Jesus (though even more may be implied).

Beginning with Abraham and following through his descendants and the prophets, the Messiah had been promised again and again. He was the promised blessing on all nations to come through Abraham's seed. He was the great Christ promised to come as David's descendant. The Jewish people were all looking for Him. But when He came, they did not recognize Him, but rejected and killed Him. This fact had been predicted in many Old Testament prophecies and was the point of many of Jesus' own parables (cf. Luke 24:46).

The irony increases! The world was made by Jesus, yet the world rejected its own Creator. And the special people of God who, of all people, ought to have recognized the Christ, yet killed Him! The builders rejected the chief cornerstone (1 Peter 2:7).

The importance of receiving Jesus

Though many did not receive Him, however, some did receive Him by believing in Him. To these He gave a great blessing. He gave them the right to become children of God. This is another way of saying they could be spiritually born again (see notes on 3:3ff for a deeper discussion of being born again). Jesus has power to give people a new birth because life is in Him (v4). See notes below on v13 for a continuation of this idea.

What an incredible blessing! We can be made children of God by being born again into His spiritual family, which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15). No founder of any other religious system can make good on such a claim. Only Jesus can make children of God (John 14:6). Without Him every man is powerless to enter God's favor. But we must believe in Him. It follows that those who do not believe in Jesus as the one true Savior cannot be born again – they do not have power to become children of God, but will die in their sins (John 8:24; Mark 16:16).

For other passages about the new birth, see: John 3:1-7; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Romans 6:3,5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26,27. For other passages about the need for believing in Jesus, see: Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16.

However, contrary to popular belief, the verse does not say that a person automatically and immediately becomes a child of God at the point of faith or simply because he believes. Other passages show that, in order to be born again as a child of God, one must also obey God. In particular, one must be baptized. For passages about the importance of obedience, see: Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6. For passages about the need for baptism, see: Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21. In particular, for passages that tie the new birth to obedience or to baptism, see 1 Pet. 1:22-25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3-7; Gal. 3:26,27; see notes on John 3:3-7.

What this passage actually says is that believing gives one the **right to become** a child of God. He is not yet a child of God, but he has the right to become one if he exercises his right. Buying a ticket to an event gives you the **right** to attend, but it does not by itself alone automatically put you at the event and make you a spectator. There are other additional things you must do after buying a ticket.

I once bought a ticket to a college football game, but when the day came the weather was so terrible I chose not to go. Likewise, believing in Jesus gives one the right to become a child of God, but does not by itself alone automatically make one a child of God. There are other things one must do after believing, and tragically many people fail to do them.

For further discussion about salvation by faith alone vs. obedient faith and the importance of obedience and baptism, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 13

17. What information does v13 add about being born to become a child of God?

18. List and explain two other passages showing how people become children of God or are born again.

Becoming a child of God requires spiritual birth.

One becomes a child of God (v12) by being born into His family – born again by a new birth (see on v12 and especially on 3:3ff). This new birth is not a physical birth of flesh and blood. In particular, one is not born again just because he wills to be so, like a man has a child because he chooses to have a relationship with a woman. Nor did man's planning design the way or make the means available whereby man can become a child of God. The plan is from God, originated in His mind and revealed by Jesus in the gospel (see 1 Pet. 1:22-25 and verses listed on v12 above). (For other passages about flesh and blood, see Matthew 16:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Ephesians 6:12; Galatians 1:16.)

In particular, one is not born again as a result of physical ancestry. That is, one is not a child of God simply because he was born into a particular family or nation. This is a major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Law of Moses put one immediately into covenant relationship with God simply because he was born a descendant of Abraham (through Jacob) and was circumcised. This did not mean one would be saved eternally, but it gave covenant relationship with God and many accompanying blessings. But the blessings of salvation and a relationship with God under the New Testament is determined by the terms of the gospel, regardless of who ones parents may be. Salvation is for Jew or Gentile without respect of persons. See Romans 1:16; 2:1-11; Acts 10:34,35; Mark 16:15,16; Galatians 3:26-29; etc.

This does not mean man has no power to choose whether or not he will receive the new birth. Other passages (such as those listed under v12) show that God has given us the power to choose to believe and obey or not do so. But the will of God designed the plan and made it available. Without this, there would have been no hope for us, and nothing we could do could make it possible.

Verse 14

19. v14 identifies the “Word” as being who? (Thought question: What does it mean that He is the “only begotten of the Father”?)
20. What did the Word do according to v14? (Thought question: According to other gospel accounts, how and when did the only begotten of the Father become flesh?)

God in the flesh

This verse clearly identifies who “the Word” is as discussed in context. The Word was introduced in vv 1ff, but here finally we are told that this Word is “the only begotten of the Father.” He is not named until v17, yet here v14 identifies Him to be Jesus. Verse 18 refers to Him as the “only begotten Son” (cf. John 3:16). This is confirmed by vv 19ff, which show that Jesus is the one John testified about.

This One became flesh and dwelt among us. Here is a clear statement of the incarnation of Christ. Though He was God from the beginning (v1), yet He took on Him the form of man and was born in the flesh (cf. Phil. 2:5ff). This explains how the “Light” came into the world (v9).

The concept of God coming to earth as a man is an incredible doctrine and in many ways beyond our comprehension. Yet it is clearly taught here and in many passages. This is the consequence of the Virgin Birth, as Jesus was born as the fleshly son of Mary (human), yet conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit – Deity uniting with man in Jesus Christ. See Luke 1:26-38, especially v35; Matthew 1:18-25.

In particular, there were apparently some (perhaps Gnostics) who denied that God ever could or over did take on the body of a man. John here and elsewhere, especially in 1 John, clearly identifies this belief as false doctrine, even the anti-Christ. It is serious error to deny that Jesus possessed the full nature of Deity, but it is also serious error to deny that He came in the flesh as a man.

For other passages showing that Jesus truly came in a bodily form as a man see Philippians 2:5-8; 2 John 7; 1 John 4:2; Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18; 4:1; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 1:21,22; Hebrews 2:9-15. This concept is often called the Incarnation.

He dwelt among us and we beheld His glory.

King points out that the word for “dwelt” actually carries the idea of “tabernacled.” So this is an allusion to the fact that God’s presence in the Old Testament dwelt in the tabernacle, where men could come and see His glory (Exodus 25:8; 2 Samuel 7:6; Exodus 16:7,10; 29:43; 40:34,35; Leviticus 9:6,23; Numbers 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6). So likewise in the New Testament, Jesus came to earth and dwelt in a physical body where men would behold His glory. Deity manifested itself so men could be overwhelmed by the evidence of His greatness.

John then affirms that he and others beheld Jesus’ glory. Here is a claim that John himself was an eyewitness. He did not just hear about Jesus’ glory as a rumor or legend handed down for many generations. But he personally examined that glory for himself. This is the strength of Bible evidence for Jesus: personal eyewitnesses testify what they saw. John will reaffirm this personal testimony several times in the book and in his other books.

Glory as of the only begotten of the Father

John 17:5 says that Jesus had glory with the Father before the world began, and that He would return to that glory after He left earth. So the glory that Jesus showed while on earth, great as it was, did not appear to men in the full glory of Deity that He truly possessed. He often appeared simply as a man; though the greatness of His real nature sometimes showed through, such as in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5). Yet on earth he humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation so He could serve as a man (Philippians 2:5-8ff). So the glory John and others saw while Jesus was on earth is, even so, just a partial revelation of His full greatness.

“Only begotten” does not mean God created Jesus or brought Him into existence, as some claim. V3 showed Jesus Himself is eternal and created everything that was created; hence, He must be eternal (see notes on v3). The phrase could refer to Jesus’ begetting when he was made incarnate in the virgin birth. But the term primarily refers to a father-son relationship which is so close it is unique, shared by no one else (v18; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9).

John has just said that other people can be, in a sense, begotten and born as God’s children (v12). But vv 14,18 then contrast this to the sense in which Jesus is His Son. He is the **only** begotten — a unique relationship as a son by fundamental nature of Deity. Compare this to Hebrews 11:17 where Isaac was the unique or only begotten son of Abraham because of the special promises to be fulfilled through him, yet he was not literally the only one to be begotten by Abraham. As such, Jesus can reveal the Father (v18) in a way no one else can do, and He Himself possesses glory that belongs to no one else (John 17:5; cf. Hebrews 1:3).

Full of grace and truth

He was also full of grace and truth (see notes on vv 16,17).

Verse 15

21. What did John (the Baptist) say about Jesus (v15)? Explain. (Thought question: How could the “Word” have been both before and after John — cf. v1?)

John the Baptist taught Jesus’ preferred position.

This only-begotten Son is the One John bore witness of. John said that the One who was to come after John was before John. How can He be both before and after John?

John was preparing the way for the ministry of another prophet and teacher (see notes on vv 6-8). But this One, Whose earthly ministry would follow John’s, had actually existed long before John. In fact, He is eternal (vv 1-3). Because of His eternal existence and Deity, He has priority or preferred position. He has a more exalted position with far greater authority and honor.

From physical birth, John was older. But Jesus was pre-eminent, and John humbly recognized this (cf. vv 20,26f,30ff,36). This statement from John is directly applied to Jesus in v30 (cf. v36).

Despite the claims of some then and now, John at no point made any effort to seek for himself a position above or even equal to that of Jesus. The author here makes clear that John himself knew his proper position. He came to prepare the way for another, who was greater than He was. Yet the One for whom He prepared the way had preeminence because of pre-existence, as well as because of His exalted position.

Verses 16,17

22. What have we received from Jesus (v16)?

23. What contrast is made between Moses and Jesus (v17)?

24. List other passages showing the gospel offers men grace.

25. List other passages showing the gospel requires obedience to commands or law.

26. Case Study: Suppose a preacher says Jesus brought grace and truth, so we don’t have to obey commands to be saved. How would you respond? Did Moses reveal any truth? Then does the gospel include any laws? (Thought question: In what sense did Jesus reveal grace and truth, in contrast to Moses?)

What we receive comes from that which filled Jesus.

We have just been told that Jesus was full of grace and truth (v14). Now we are told that we humans can receive that which comes from or made up this fullness (that which filled Him). He was filled with grace, and we may partake of that grace. He was filled with truth, and we may partake of that truth — see more on v17. For other references to the fullness that filled Christ, see Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Ephesians 3:19; 4:13; 1:22,23.

In particular, we have received “grace for grace.” Grace is favor, blessing, or kindness bestowed on one who does not deserve it. Because of our sins, we do not deserve God’s favor. But Jesus has provided grace upon grace — multiplied favors that we do not deserve. God has not skimmed in His blessings to us through Jesus. He has not given of His leftovers or lesser blessings. He has given us favors multiplied by and heaped upon favors.

The law through Moses contrasted to grace and truth through Jesus

The law was given through Moses at Mt. Sinai. This includes the Ten Commands and all the law. But Jesus, who is filled with grace and truth (v14), is the one who brought grace and truth to us. This is the first time Jesus is mentioned by name in the book. Clearly He is the Word, the Light John has been describing.

Jesus brought light into the world and revealed the Father by the **message** He delivered — the gospel (vv 18,4-9). Because Jesus delivered this message, He is called “the Word.”

Moses’ message is contrasted to that of Jesus. Each man was a great leader who revealed a major religious system. Moses revealed the Old Testament; Jesus revealed the New Testament. The characteristic of Moses’ message, which is emphasized here, was **law** — commandments to guide men’s conduct. The features of Jesus’ message, which are emphasized here, are **grace and truth** (cf. v14).

Does this mean there was no grace under Moses’ revelation and that Jesus’ revelation contains no law? Well, did Moses’ revelation contain “truth”? Surely it did. So the point of the passage is not to deny that Moses’ law contained grace and truth, nor is it intended to deny that Jesus’ message can be characterized as law. The point of the verse is to contrast unique or dominant features of each revelation, which result in a different emphasis between the two.

To use this verse to deny that there was grace in Moses’ law would be a perversion. Likewise, it perverts the verse to use it to claim that Jesus’ revelation is **not** a law and contains no commands we must follow! That the New Testament is a law containing commands we must obey to be saved is made clear in Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

The difference emphasized here is that Moses’ law showed men they were sinners but never gave permanent forgiveness, whereas Jesus’ message is able to provide complete forgiveness of sin (grace). Moses’ law was true, but not all of the truth. It was not the complete and final revelation of God’s truth. Jesus’ gospel contains many commands we must obey to receive its blessings, but its unique character compared to the law is that it shows how men can receive grace by Jesus’ sacrifice (cf. Heb. 10:1-18). This explains why the New Testament was needed. If the Old Testament provided all men needed, the New Testament would never have been needed. But more was needed, which is why God sent Jesus to reveal the gospel.

For other passages emphasizing the grace revealed in the gospel, see Acts 15:7-11; 20:24,32; Romans 4:4-7; 5:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 1:5-11; 2:5-10; 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Hebrews 2:9.

For an in-depth discussion of grace in the gospel and how it relates to works, law, and obedience see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Grace and truth – both are needed.

Note that the verse does not say we are saved by “grace alone,” as taught in some human creeds. It says, not that Jesus brought grace only, but that He brought grace **and truth**. Truth is equally emphasized in the gospel, even in this passage that contrasts the gospel to the Old Testament. But truth itself implies the need for knowledge and application of that truth. What good is the revelation of truth to man unless a man studies that truth, learns it, and uses it in his life?

To be made free from sin, we must know the truth and abide in it – John 8:31,32. We purify our souls in obeying the truth – 1 Peter 1:22,23.

So even this passage emphasizing grace in the gospel, when understood in light of the gospel teaching about truth, necessarily implies the necessity of obedience. For other passages on the importance of truth in the gospel, see John 1:14; 8:32-36; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17; Romans 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:13; 4:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 1 Timothy 3:15; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15,25,26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 1:22,23. Study of these passages will confirm the need for truth to be learned and applied.

Verse 18

27. In what way can we **not** know about God? Then how can we know about God?
(Thought question: Why is Jesus qualified to declare God to us?)

Jesus came to reveal God to man.

Jesus was able to reveal God and His will in a way neither Moses nor any other man could do. No man has ever seen God personally. No man (since perhaps Adam) has had a personal relationship with God to know His will first-hand apart from the Bible (John 6:46; Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:11; 1 John 4:12; Col. 1:15).

Jesus was the only begotten Son (see notes on v14; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). He possessed Deity Himself, and He was “in the bosom” of the Father – He had the very closest possible relationship to the Father (this is the significance of “in the bosom” – see 13:23). He was able to do what no one else could do – He could reveal from first-hand knowledge what God’s will and character are like. Further, He was able to show us by His own life what God is like (John 14:9).

Because Jesus partakes of the nature of God and understands first-hand what God is really like, one reason He came to earth was to live a life and present teachings which only He could do. Men could hear directly from the teachings, and could observe from the very life of who possessed Deity, what God is like and what He wills for us. What an incredible concept! God was so determined that man know God and His will in the fullest way possible, that God was willing even to come to earth and live as a man among men.

This is why the emphasis in these introductory verses has been on Jesus as the revelation of God and His will. He is the Word (vv 1ff), the Light (vv 4ff), the truth (vv 14,17).

John has introduced his account with an amazing picture of Jesus. One who appeared to be “just a man” - and in fact **was** a man - was yet far more than a man. He was God, the very Creator, the only-begotten Son of God, come in the flesh. This is the view of Jesus that John has introduced and that He intends to give evidence for throughout his account of Jesus’ life.

John’s Testimony and People Who Subsequently Follow Jesus – 1:19-51

John’s Answer to Questions about His Work – 1:19-34

Verses 19,20

28. Who questioned John the Baptist, and what did they ask (v19)?

29. Who did John say that he was not (v20)? (Think: What does this tell you about John?)

John the Baptist testifies that he was not the Christ.

The rest of John 1 discusses, directly or indirectly, the preaching of John the Baptist and his testimony about Jesus. As usual, John’s account adds some information not found in the other accounts, which helps support the claims of Jesus. John’s testimony regarding Jesus can be found in John 1:6-8,14,15,19-36; 5:31-33; 3:22-30; 10:40,41; Acts 19:4,5, as well as Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3.

The Jews in Jerusalem (Pharisees – v24) sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. The very fact that they sent to ask about him indicates that his preaching had caused a great stir

among the people. If he was having no effect at all, why would the leaders bother to be concerned about him? But they were interested enough to investigate. Their manner does not appear to be either favorable or unfavorable at this point; they appear to simply be investigating the facts.

John readily admitted he was **not** the Christ. “Christ” means the anointed one. It is equal to the “Messiah” prophesied in the Old Testament (see further notes on v41). John knew this was not his position, so he did not make false pretensions nor exalt himself to that which he did not deserve. This shows his honesty and humility. The author here again takes the opportunity to show the error of those, then and now, who believed John was the Christ (cf. Luke 3:15). John himself knew better and openly denied having that position.

Note that the fact the people wondered about this shows they were looking for the Christ. Also note that the ideas about who John might be were similar to those about who Jesus might be (Matt. 16:13ff). Apparently, the Jews understood prophecy well enough to be looking for these people to come. This also shows the significant impact John made on the people that some might wonder if he were the Christ.

Verse 21

30. Who else did John deny that he was (v21)? (Think: Was there any sense in which John was Elijah? Who was “the prophet”?)

John was neither Elijah nor “the prophet.”

They wondered if he were Elijah. Elijah was expected to come before the Christ (cf. Matt. 11:14; 16:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17; Mal. 4:5). But as with many prophecies, this reference is figurative or symbolic, not literal. Many other passages show that, in the symbolic sense meant by the prophecies, John **was** Elijah — see Mal. 4:5; 3:1ff; cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13. John’s preaching actually was the fulfillment of the prophecies that Elijah would come again.

Why then did he deny being Elijah? Because he was not **literally** the same person as Elijah. He came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). His character and work were similar to Elijah’s and this is what the Malachi prophecy meant. However, he evidently concluded that the men were asking whether or not he was literally Elijah. Since he was not literally Elijah, he answered correctly according to physical reality.

“The prophet” probably refers to the prophet Moses predicted, who would be like Moses — Deut. 18:15; Matt. 21:11. This was fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22ff), who was like Moses in many ways. In particular, both revealed completely new systems or covenants. But the prophecy was not fulfilled in John, so he said it did not. He was a prophet, but not that prophet.

Once again, note John’s humility. He refused to pretend to hold a position or to seek a position, which was not given him by the Lord. He was a great and godly man. That should be enough, and he sought no more.

Verses 22,23

31. What further question was asked of John, and how did he reply (vv 22,23)?

32. What Old Testament passage was the basis of John’s statement, and what does it mean?

John explains his work as preparation for one to come later.

John had told who he was not, but that did answer the question of who he was, so they asked him again. They needed to know what information to give to those who sent them.

John responded by quoting Isaiah 40:3,4. He understood and directly stated that his work was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. For more about this, see our notes on vv 6-8 above.

John preached in the wilderness. His work was to prepare the way for one coming after who was greater than he was. He made His paths straight in the sense of making the way easier for him.

Jesus' work would be difficult and so God prepared the people for Him by the preaching of John. John developed a good following, taught the people to repent, and then taught his disciples to follow Jesus. This helped people have right attitudes, and helped Jesus get a much larger following, more easily than otherwise would have happened. Later in this chapter we learn of some followers of John who became followers of Jesus.

Once again, John showed an understanding of his proper role in relation to Christ, and the author of the book explains this to any who might seek to give John a higher or lower position than God intended him to have. Anyone who sought or who seeks to give John a different position, needs to reckon with the statements of John himself.

Verses 24-27

33. What question did the agents of the Pharisees ask next?

34. How did John compare himself to the one to come after him, and what does this mean (vv 26,27)?

Question about John's baptism

The representatives of the Pharisees then asked John why he baptized, if he was not one of these various people whom they had asked him about. Evidently, they realized there was special significance in the fact John baptized people.

Some have claimed that the Jews had begun baptizing Gentile proselytes to the Jewish faith sometime before this. But Johnson points out that there is no evidence for this except in the Talmud which was written two or three centuries after this. So baptizing followers would be a new practice, unknown to these who questioned John.

It is evident from the baptisms done by both John and later by Jesus (4:1f), that baptism was an initiatory rite for disciples. One who was baptized became a follower of the one whose baptism he received. So they wondered why John would baptize, and by what authority he would introduce such a new practice, unless he was one of those great men whom he had denied being.

John's explanation of his baptism

John acknowledged that he baptized with water (literally "in" water). However, he gave no further explanation except to elaborate on his claim that his work was a preparation for someone else to come later. Someone stood among them – someone whom they did not recognize - who was coming after John and yet was pre-eminent over him. He was so much greater than John that John could not even unloose His sandal strap. This would be the work of a menial servant, but John said he did not deserve even that menial task compared to the greatness of the One who would be his successor.

John was baptizing the people to prepare them for the coming of One who would be truly great. (See Matt. 3 & Luke 3 where John discussed the nature of the baptisms Jesus would administer). John appears to be appealing to his work of preparation as the basis of his authority to baptize. He was baptizing, not for the ultimate goal of making disciples for himself, but as a means of accomplishing his work of preparing for Jesus. Those who became his disciples ought eventually to become disciples of the Christ (see notes on 3:25-30).

Verse 28

35. Where was John baptizing, and what is meant by "beyond Jordan"?

These events occurred in Bethabara.

The things recorded here occurred in Bethabara beyond the Jordan (i.e., east of the Jordan, across it from Jerusalem and the main area of Israel). Some translations have "Bethany." The exact location is unknown. It appears that John moved from place to place in his work (3:23).

Testimony of John the Baptist Regarding Jesus

Verse 29

36. How did John describe Jesus in v29, and where else is Jesus referred to as a lamb?

37. What Old Testament practice does John's expression refer to, and what does it mean as applied to Jesus?

The Lamb of God

John's testimony of Jesus continued the next day when he saw Jesus. This is the first actual appearance of Jesus as a man on earth in the book of John. Whereas the synoptic accounts describe Jesus' birth, early life, baptism, etc., John's gospel skips all this. Jesus' first appearance occurs after He has been baptized, and John the Baptist is testifying about the significance of who Jesus is. This implies that this account was written long after the other accounts, so it is assumed that the facts of Jesus' early life were already well known from the other accounts.

John called Jesus "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Lambs had special significance as sacrifices for sin under the Old Testament (Leviticus 4:32; Exodus 29:38-42) and as the Passover lamb that died in the place of the first-born sons of Israel (Exodus 12:11-13). Since Jesus died as the sacrifice to give forgiveness and to spare us from dying for our sins, He is often compared to a lamb (Isa. 53:7; John 1:29,36; Acts 8:32; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6,8,12f; 6:1; etc.).

However, the New Testament reveals that Old Testament sacrifices could not accomplish permanent forgiveness, but sins were remembered every year. Those sacrifices were shadows or symbols of the greater sacrifice to come — the sacrifice of Jesus — which sacrifice could completely take away sins (Heb. 10:1-18; 1 Pet. 2:24).

This also illustrates Jesus' sinlessness. To be an acceptable sacrifice, the lamb had to be without blemish. And to be our sacrifice, Jesus had to be without sin, otherwise death would be the penalty for His own sins. He could pay the penalty for the sins of others only if He Himself was without sin (1 Peter 2:22-24; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus is also, in some passages, presented as being meek and harmless like a lamb.

Who takes away the sins of the world.

Note that Jesus can take away the sins of the world. His sacrifice is so perfect, not only can it permanently forgive sins, but it can take away the sins of everyone. This contrasts to animal sacrifices, which only pertained to the particular people who offered them. If other people wanted forgiveness, they had to offer other sacrifices.

But of equal significance is the fact that, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament law pertained only to the nation of Israel. It was a national law, never intended to be universal in application. Gentiles were essentially excluded (though they could chose to subject themselves to the law by becoming circumcised and, in effect, joining the nation of Israel).

John's statement here anticipates the fact that the gospel of Christ would be a universal covenant, equally available to people of all nations. While this was not understood by the Jewish disciples till much later, it was clearly prophesied in many passages like this. For other passages about the universal nature of the gospel, see Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:4,6; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 2:9; John 3:16; Acts 10:34,35; Matthew 11:28; Luke 2:10.

This fact also demonstrates that Jesus must necessarily have intended from the beginning to give a whole new covenant system, different from that which Moses gave. Moses' system was limited in application to the nation of Israel. If Jesus' system was to include salvation for all, it would have to be an entirely different covenant with a different sacrifice. This too is eventually made clear as the gospel is further revealed. See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

For further discussion of the old law as compared to the gospel, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 30

38. What statement, previously made by John, is applied directly to Jesus in v30?

John identifies Jesus as the One for Whom he came to prepare.

In v15, John had spoken of one who came after him but was preferred before him, etc. This was the one for whom John came to prepare the way (v23-27). The author applied this to Jesus, showing that He was the One John came to prepare for (vv 15-18). But John the Baptist himself does not identify Jesus as the One he was preparing for until v30. John then said that Jesus is the very One that he had been testifying about and preparing the way for. All that has been said about John's testimony up to this point (cf. vv 6ff) has been speaking about Jesus.

Verses 31-34

39. What sign was used by God to identify to John the one for whom he was preparing the way? According to other accounts, when did this sign occur (give b/c/v)?

40. In what would Jesus baptize people? List other passages about this practice.

41. Special Assignment: Explain at least three facts you know about Holy Spirit baptism.

42. In v34, who did John say Jesus was, and what does this term mean?

John describes how he knew Jesus to be the One he was preparing for.

At first, John himself did not know exactly whom he was preparing the way for. He knew he was preparing the way for someone who would eventually be revealed to Israel, so he came baptizing as He was guided to do. But he did not know exactly whom he was preparing the way for. That would be revealed to him later.

This does not mean that John did not know anything about Jesus as a person before he baptized Him. John and Jesus were cousins, whose mothers knew one another and became pregnant about the same time by special blessings of God and who knew the sons they would bear would be special servants of God (Luke 1). It is highly unlikely that John knew nothing whatever about Jesus or had never met Him before. Matt 3:13-17 says that, when Jesus came to be baptized, John said, "It is you that should baptize me." This would also appear to indicate that John did know Jesus and even knew Him to be a greater teacher than John was.

Vv 10,26 also speak of Jesus saying that people did not "know" Him, yet those people surely knew of His existence. The point is that they were not aware or did not believe in His nature as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. This, most likely, is what John also did not know about Jesus until it was revealed to him.

Though John did not know what individual he was preparing the way for, yet He had been informed that there would be a sign to indicate to him who the individual was: the Spirit would descend like a dove and remain upon Him. This would be the One to come. This sign was fulfilled at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3; Luke 3).

John concluded that Jesus is the One he had been preparing for and the one who would baptize in the Holy Spirit (whereas John himself baptized in water).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Note these passages regarding Holy Spirit baptism: Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-21,33; 10:44-49; 11:1-4,15-18 [Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33]

From these passages we learn the following points about Holy Spirit baptism. Note how these points distinguish Holy Spirit baptism from water baptism.

*** Element**

This baptism immersed or overwhelmed people in the Holy Spirit. Note that water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism are here shown to be two separate and distinct baptisms. John contrasts

them. But only one baptism is in effect today (Eph. 4:3ff). Most people who claim Holy Spirit baptism today also practice water baptism. According to this passage, that would be two baptisms; but Ephesians 4 says only one is in effect today.

*** Action**

The word “baptize” means to immerse, overwhelm, engulf. This is a spiritual baptism, not physical, in which the subjects were to be overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit.

*** Administrator**

Jesus Himself would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. This baptism required someone greater than John to administer it. Only Jesus is great enough. No man can or ever has baptized others in the Holy Spirit.

*** Promise**

Holy Spirit baptism was something God promised to do for certain people, not something they were required to do for Him. There was no command to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

*** Subjects**

John’s statement promising Holy Spirit baptism was fulfilled upon the apostles on the occasion of the first Jewish converts (Acts 1:4,5, cf. chap. 2), and on the first Gentiles to be converted (Acts 10,11).

*** Choice**

God Himself decided who would receive Holy Spirit baptism (the apostles), when (not many days hence) and where (Jerusalem) - Acts 1:3-8. It was not a blessing offered to all, such that anyone could have it if they chose. God made the choice independently of any man’s desire to receive it or not receive it.

*** Purpose**

Holy Spirit baptism gave the apostles **power** to bear **witness** throughout the world (Acts 1:8). And it gave miraculous power of tongues (Acts 2:1-13; 10:46). In the case of Cornelius’ household, it was necessary to convince the Jews that God was willing to receive Gentiles as His children (10:45; 11:17,18), so Peter would baptize them in water (10:47,48). [Cf. Acts 15:1-11]

This shows that Holy Spirit baptism was not the same as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling is available to all who wish to be saved, but it does not involve miraculous powers (see the link below for further information).

*** Duration**

Holy Spirit baptism began at **Jerusalem**, “not many days hence” after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:4,5). There were only two recorded instances of Holy Spirit baptism — the apostles when the first Jews were converted, and Cornelius’ household when the first Gentiles were converted. No other event in the Bible is described as Holy Spirit baptism. There are other instances of baptism, and other references to the Holy Spirit. But no others are called Holy Spirit baptism.

Holy Spirit baptism ceased. The subjects to receive it were just a few. It was never for all men. Its purpose was fulfilled and it is no longer needed. The message it guided men to receive has now been fully delivered and recorded (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16,17). It is not to be repeated (Jude 3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22f). The written word gives all the evidence we need that Gentiles may be saved by the gospel. Miracles confirmed the new revelation as it was delivered (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:3f). Since revelation is no longer needed, miracles are no longer needed (John 20:30f; 1 Cor. 13:8-13). Holy Spirit baptism fulfilled its purpose and ceased soon after the gospel was first preached. Today, there is only one baptism – water baptism for remission of sins (Ephesians 4:4-6).

For more details regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit, miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as compared to water baptism

of the gospel, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

The Son of God

Based on this evidence, John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Son of God (see vv 14,18 regarding Jesus as the only begotten Son). This confirms the relationship with God that Jesus claimed to have, which in turn confirms His Deity.

Five Men Who Become Disciples of Jesus – 1:35-51

Verses 35-37

43. On the next day, who did John again identify Jesus to be (vv 35,36)? Where else had John said this about Jesus?
44. What happened as a result (v37)?

John introduces two of his disciples to Jesus.

On the next day John again testified regarding Jesus. He was with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus and again called Him the Lamb of God (see notes on v29). These two disciples in turn followed Jesus.

One of these disciples turned out to be Andrew, the brother of Peter (v40). There is good reason to believe that the other disciple was John the apostle, who wrote this book. This conclusion is based on the fact that the apostle John often describes stories at which he was personally present but does not name himself (cf. 13:26; 19:26,35; 21:7,20,24; see introductory notes).

Andrew and Peter were fishing partners with James and John, so it is very possible that John was with Andrew on this occasion. It is almost certain that, whatever Andrew and Peter knew about John the Baptist and Jesus, their partners would soon know it too.

Note how the remainder of the story mentions a total of five people who became disciples of Jesus. The other four are all named and all became apostles: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael (assuming Nathanael is the same as the apostle Bartholomew – see on vv 45ff). This strongly implies that this account is intended to introduce us to five of Jesus' first disciples, all of whom became apostles. In that case, the unnamed disciple must surely be John the apostle.

There can be no doubt from other accounts that John was one of Jesus' earliest disciples, and it is entirely possible that He was one of John's disciples. If so, then he witnessed directly or indirectly everything he records in this book.

Note that the effect of John's teaching, as it ought to have been, was that it made followers for Jesus. The ultimate goal was not to make followers for John, but for the One for whom John was preparing the way.

Verses 38,39

45. What request did John's disciples make and what happened as a result (vv 38,39)?

The two disciples spend time with Jesus.

As the two disciples of John followed Jesus, He asked what they were looking for. They asked where He was staying and He allowed them to come and see for themselves. They went and spent the day with him, it being about the tenth hour at the time (4:00PM, assuming John was using Jewish time). We are told nothing about the place where He was staying, which shows that the place was not the important point of the story. What was important was that the disciples had the opportunity to be introduced to Jesus and His teaching.

The two addressed Jesus as "Rabbi," a term meaning teacher. It was commonly used in that day (and yet today) by Jewish people to refer to their teachers.

The result was the two disciples remained that day with Jesus. Obviously, this gave Him the opportunity to teach them and gave them the opportunity to observe Him for themselves. The results evidently convinced them to believe in Him (see vv 40ff).

All this fits the view, described earlier, that this section is introducing us to several of the men who later became apostles. It specifically introduces us to John, who is writing the account. And in the process, of course, it gives John the opportunity to provide evidence about Jesus, so that we can all have opportunity to believe in Him, even as His first disciples believed in Him.

Verses 40,41

46. Who was one of the two disciples of John that followed Jesus, and who was his brother? (Think: Since the other one of the two disciples who followed Jesus is not named, who might he be?)
47. List some other things you know about these two brothers.
48. What did Andrew do for Peter in John 1?
49. Who did he say Jesus was? Explain the significance of this term.

Andrew finds his brother Simon

Of these two disciples who followed Jesus in vv 35-39, one was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He found Simon and told him they had found the Messiah, the Christ. Messiah is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Christ (see notes on v20). John had been asked whether he were the Christ, but he denied it (v20). But he had come to prepare the way for One who was greater than he. He had identified Jesus as being that One, and Andrew concluded that Jesus was the Christ.

The Hebrew word Messiah and Greek Christ mean one who is anointed. Anointing (usually with oil) was a symbolic ritual in the Old Testament to dedicate or appoint someone to a special work. It was most common for kings (1 Samuel 9:16; 10:1; 16:13), but was also done for priests (Leviticus 4:3) and sometimes prophets (Psalms 105:15). Jesus held all three of these positions (which no one did under the Old Testament), but the special significance is that He would be the King or Ruler of God's special people under the New Testament. Jesus was the rightful heir of David's throne by lineage, but especially He was chosen of God to be the King of the spiritual New Testament kingdom (cf. v49).

Having found the Christ, in his zeal Andrew wanted other people to know about Him too. We ought all to respect this zeal in Andrew and imitate it. We too ought to tell all our friends and relatives about the blessings they can have if they accept the truth about Jesus.

Note that Andrew and Peter both eventually became apostles. Very little is ever told us specifically about Andrew except that he was Peter's brother. But regardless of what else he may have ever accomplished, bringing his brother to the Lord was a great accomplishment, since his brother became one of the most influential of apostles, preaching the first gospel sermon, etc.

We too may never personally accomplish things that put us much in the public eye. But if we convert a few souls for the Lord, and they accomplish much in His service, then through them we have accomplished much good that otherwise might never have occurred.

Verse 42

50. What name did Jesus give Simon, and what does this name mean?
51. Case Study: Catholicism claims Jesus gave Peter this name because the church would be built on Peter — Matt. 16:18. How would you respond? Note 1 Corinthians 3:11.
52. Application: What lessons can we learn from observing what Andrew did for Peter in this story?

Jesus gives Simon the name Cephas (Peter).

Note that Andrew did not personally teach Peter all that Peter needed to know to become a disciple. But he did bring Peter to the teacher who could tell him what he needed to know. So we may not be versed enough to instruct people fully and answer all their questions, but if we just set up Bible studies for other teachers and let them do the teaching, we have accomplished what we can.

Jesus said Simon was the son of Jonah (or John); which, of course, means Andrew also was a son of Jonah. Jesus gave Simon the name of Cephas (Hebrew), which is the equivalent of Peter in Greek. Apparently he was called simply Simon before this time, but Jesus gave the additional name of Peter.

This name means a stone. Catholic writers tie this to Matt. 16:18 and conclude this proves that Peter was the “rock” on which Jesus built His church, and that is the reason Jesus changed his name. However, this is nowhere stated to be the case here or elsewhere.

The word for “rock” in Matt. 16:18 is a related but different Greek word (observe that the NKJV here translates the name of Peter “a stone,” not a “rock”). The context of Matt. 16:18, combined with 1 Cor. 3:11, shows that the rock on which the church is built is, not Peter, but Jesus and the fact He is God’s Son (see notes on that passage).

For an in-depth study about whether Peter was the first Pope, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/

Exactly why Jesus made this name change is not stated here or elsewhere. Perhaps it was a reference to Peter’s character that, although he was impetuous and unstable at first, he would later become solid and established in the faith like a stone.

Verses 43,44

53. On the next day, whom did Jesus call to follow him? What did He say to him?

54. Where was this man from? Who also lived there? (Note: Find this city on a map.)

Philip becomes a disciple.

On the next day, Jesus wanted to go back to Galilee (apparently intended to leave the place where John the Baptist had seen Him). He found Philip, who was from Bethsaida, the same city where Andrew and Peter were from. This city is located on the Sea of Galilee, somewhere near Capernaum at the northern end of the sea [see MAP]. Peter and Andrew were fishermen there, according to other accounts, in partnership with James and John.

Jesus called Philip to follow Him. This was a way He several times called people to be His disciples. This is the first recorded example of Jesus’ use of this concept. To follow Him is to be His disciple (literally meaning a follower), not just to physically follow him to some place.

We are not told what Jesus further said to Philip to convince him to become a disciple. Unlike the two disciples in vv 35ff, Philip is not stated to have been a disciple of John, although context and location of this event may lead us to suspect that he was. In any case, Jesus appears to have taken the initiative in calling Philip.

Philip later became an apostle, as did Nathanael, whom we read about in the next verse.

Verses 45,46

55. Whom did Philip find, and what did he say regarding Jesus?

56. What attitude was expressed toward Nazareth? How did Philip respond? (Thought question: What does this tell us about Jesus’ hometown?)

Philip invites Nathanael to Jesus.

Philip shared Andrew’s desire to spread the news about Jesus. He found Nathanael and told him that they had found the one prophesied about in the law and prophets. He said he was Jesus, son of Joseph. This does not deny the virgin birth. Philip may not have known about that at this point. But in any case, Jesus was legally the son of Joseph, his heir, etc., just like an adopted child is treated and spoken of as the “son” of his adoptive father.

The author uses the testimony of Philip to introduce another argument to support Jesus’ claims: He fulfilled the prophecies of the Christ found in the law and prophets. Specific examples will be cited in the gospel accounts as we proceed through Jesus’ life.

John here familiarizes us with five of Jesus’ earliest disciples, all of whom eventually became apostles. John gives information not found elsewhere, and helps us learn especially about three

men who are little mentioned in other accounts. John personally knew all these men, especially Andrew and Peter, and could speak of these matters from close association with them.

The only other reference to this man by the name Nathanael is found in 21:2, where he is said to have come from Cana in Galilee. But that account, like this one in chap. 1, places him in the company of other apostles. This makes it highly likely that Nathanael was himself an apostle, probably the one called Bartholomew in the lists of apostles in the other accounts (see McGarvey's *Fourfold Gospel*). Men in the Bible often had more than one name —one a given name and another a family name or a second name more commonly used. Bartholomew means literally, son of Tolmai, so it identifies him by his family relationship, as was commonly done in that day. Cf. Simon Bar-Jonah, etc. Hence, it is likely that Bartholomew had another name.

Nathanael's skeptical remark about Jesus hometown shows that Nazareth was held in contempt. How could anything good come out of it? Philip urged him to see for himself. Jesus obviously grew up in a town that had a lowly reputation.

We also learn that, when we try to lead people to the truth, we should give them evidence on which to believe. Specifically, let them see for themselves what Jesus was like and what are the evidences for His claims. If they are skeptical at first, do not give up but get them to personally learn about Jesus, read the Bible accounts for themselves. Don't expect them to accept just because we do or on the basis of our opinion.

Verse 47

57. How did Jesus describe Nathanael? What does this tell you about him?

Jesus praises Nathanael for his honest character.

On seeing Nathanael coming, apparently before He had even met him, Jesus described him as an Israelite indeed, in who is no guile (deceit). Jesus knew what was in man (2:25), so He apparently could read a man's heart and character. This is a power only Deity possesses (1 Kings 8:39). It seems Jesus used this power in choosing His apostles.

Jesus viewed Nathanael as an honest man, who never was deceitful. This should also be said of us. He was an Israelite indeed — i.e., not just one of God's people by natural birth, but by character and conduct he lived the way God wanted His people to live. (King says that Jesus statement refers to the fact that Nathanael was outspoken. But I don't know why we should assume that. Lots of people are guileless or free from deceit, but are not particularly outspoken.)

Apparently Nathanael made a sincere effort to be free from deceit, so Jesus statement led to a response from Nathanael as in the following verses.

Verses 48,49

58. What question did Nathanael ask Jesus, and what was Jesus' answer? (Thought question: What ability of Jesus does this demonstrate?)

59. What did Nathanael then call Jesus?

60. Explain the meaning of the terms Nathanael used for Jesus.

Jesus' knowledge of Nathanael leads to his conviction.

Nathanael was surprised that Jesus knew anything about him, so he asked how Jesus knew him. Jesus said He had seen Nathanael under the fig tree before Philip called him. We are not told specifically when or where Nathanael had been under a fig tree. But Jesus' statement revealed superhuman knowledge, since Nathanael knew Jesus had not been present when he was under the fig tree. Perhaps no one else was present and knew about it, but obviously neither Philip nor anyone else had as yet said anything about the incident. Nathanael knew there was no way Jesus could have known this by human power, so he accepted Philip's conclusion about who Jesus was.

He addressed Jesus as "Rabbi" (cf. v38). He called Jesus "the Son of God" and "King of Israel." These statements constituted Nathanael's confession that he accepted Jesus as the Christ

and the rightful ruler over Israel (see on the expression “Christ” in vv 20,41). He had witnessed superhuman power, but whether or not he meant to admit Jesus’ Deity in the expression “Son of God” seems unclear. John the Baptist had, however, already used this term for Jesus (v34).

Verses 50,51

61. What did Jesus say Nathanael would yet see? (Think: What does this mean?)

62. Application: What lessons can we learn about personal evangelism from these stories?

Jesus assures Nathanael of greater proofs to come.

Jesus stated that if Nathanael believed on the basis of the evidence he had so far received, he would see greater things than that. This also seems to imply that Nathanael, along with the other apostles, would accompany Jesus and witness many of the great miracles He would yet accomplish. His knowledge of Nathanael’s conduct was one of His less significant achievements.

The NKJV translation “most assuredly” gives the meaning of the expression which is otherwise translated “verily, verily,” or literally “amen, amen.” It was a statement of strong affirmation of a great truth. The expression is unique to Jesus’ teaching and is found rarely if ever in any other man’s teaching.

In fact, Jesus said people would see the heavens opened and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (Jesus). This seems to refer back to Jacob’s dream of the ladder into heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it (Gen. 28:10-17). It is highly unlikely that an event would literally occur in which angels would ascend and descend upon Jesus. Apparently the meaning is not literal, but like many of Jesus’ descriptions of Himself in John and elsewhere, it was a spiritual expression (like “I am the vine,” “I am the sheepfold,” etc.). The most likely meaning is that Jesus would become a means of communion and fellowship between God and man, so that God would give many blessings to man by way of Jesus. He is now our mediator and intercessor as High Priest (see 1 Tim. 2:5; and the book of Hebrews).

Note some of the titles or descriptions given to Jesus already in the testimony of John and these early disciples:

Lamb of God (vv 29,35)

Son of God (vv 34,49)

Rabbi (vv 38,49)

Messiah or Christ (v41)

One that Moses and the prophets predicted (v45)

King of Israel (v49)

Son of man (v51)

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