

The Gospel of John

Lesson 1

John 1:1 - John 1:51

John becomes a disciple of the Lord in AD 27 at the age of seventeen after being a follower of John the Baptist for a few months. Later, he and his brother James are chosen by the Lord as apostles. John is the youngest of them all, born in Bethsaida and educated in the normal Jewish system. As a young man he joins the family business of fishing at the Sea of Galilee.

After seeing the baptism of the Lord at the Jordan River, he and his brother return to their fishing business where Jesus finds them and calls them to follow him. The Lord loves this John and allows him to be in His inner circle once he is an apostle.

In AD 90, at the age of 80, John is the only apostle left of the original twelve, and the Holy Spirit leads him to write his eyewitness account of the life and ministry of Jesus. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke¹ are already well circulated in the church as Scripture, but they record only the Galilean ministry and the Passion of Christ which include events of the last two months of Jesus' time on earth. John's Gospel fills in the rest of the story, focusing primarily on the Judean ministry of Jesus as well as the Passion. Without John's Gospel, almost eighteen months of the Lord's ministry would never have been known. His Gospel begins with establishing that Jesus is God.

The Word was in the beginning with God

²**John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.³ ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John does not present an argument to prove the existence of God and neither did Moses in the opening verses of the Book of Genesis. Simply put, God has always existed and will always exist as the "Word." Within the pages of the Scripture, the term "Word" to refers to the pre-existent Christ who took on the flesh of man to provide a way of eternal fellowship with God. He can do this because He is the God who created all things. We must not confuse the issue; Christ took on flesh as a baby to become the Savior of the world He created. The flesh of a regular normal baby born in 4 BC who did not create the world did not accidentally become the Christ of the Scriptures as some presume. Jesus, the Word, is the eternal God in equal fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

Because of the Creator, all life exists in the universe. Here on earth, He gives and sustains life in every single person on earth.⁴ One of John's favorite subjects is presenting Jesus as the light of men.⁵ Humanity lives in the darkness of sin, but Jesus is the Light that illuminates the way. It has been sixty years since Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave to culminate in the Light giving process, but many of the people who actually saw His

¹ Mark was written in AD 53 or AD 54. Matthew was written in AD 57. Luke was written sometime between AD 57 and AD 62. Mark was written in AD 53 or AD 54.

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³ Isaiah 9:6

⁴ The same idea is found in Colossians 1:16, John 11:25, and Hebrews 1:3.

⁵ John 8:12

resurrected life refused to put their trust in Him. Even though they saw Him with their own eyes, they refused to accept His message.

John the witness

John 1:6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.⁶ ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

In verse 6, John introduces John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, whose purpose in life is to introduce Jesus to the world and testify of His divinity as the Light of the world. As that Light, Jesus came to provide all the knowledge needed to turn to Him as Savior and secure eternal life with Him in eternity. John the Baptist is the preacher who points the world to Christ so "all might believe," a favorite expression for John who uses it more than 100 times in this gospel.

The true light

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.⁷ ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

In general, the people of the world know little about the pre-incarnate Christ who created them. Even worse, they do not recognize Him when He comes to them as their light to lead them out of the darkness.

Rejected by His own

John 1:11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,⁸ ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

In this passage John is referring to the Jewish people who rejected Jesus. But in a much larger sense, John uses this theme to include all the people of the world. In the midst of this conglomeration of people, many believe in Jesus and accept the new birth in God. Still today, Israel refuses to accept the Messiah, but the message of the Lord continues to spread to people everywhere.

The Word became flesh

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.⁹ ¹⁵ John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" ¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.¹⁰

When Jesus left heaven to come to earth, He did so as a baby. In theological terms it is called the incarnation of Christ. John does not say that Jesus entered a man for this purpose, but that He came as a babe, taking on a fleshly body like the rest of His creation.

⁶ Malachi 3:1

⁷ Isaiah 49:6

⁸ Isaiah 56:5

⁹ Isaiah 40:5

¹⁰ Exodus 20:1

Paul writes about this concept in several of his letters.¹¹ Here, John is referring to the virgin birth recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. At His birth, God literally comes to live with His creation on earth. Once He arrives, many see His glory. The people who see His glory are seeing the glory of God, the Word, Who has existed and will exist for all time.

Many religious people find difficulty with the term "begotten." All faiths except Christianity define the term as "the first created being of God."¹² But the term does not mean that Jesus was created by God, it means that He came forth from God as the manifested glory of the eternal God.

John understands that Jesus is God and uses the testimony of John the Baptist to connect Jesus with the Law of Moses. All of the Baptist's listeners are of Jewish background. They are tied to the Law of Moses but their man-made laws have taken them far from the intent of the Words of God delivered through the pen of Moses. They need a Savior to redeem them from their rebellion and the religion they have created, and Jesus came to earth for that very purpose, bringing them the gift of grace. Even though they have strayed so far from the Lord, belief in Jesus will bring them back into the relationship by that gift of grace. Jesus also brings them the truth since, by this time in the world, the Jews have altered Moses' law and are living in rebellion because they have created a faith that does not resemble the Lord's original intent. Jesus comes at this time to return the Jews to the truth of His desire for His people and His world.

The begotton of God

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.¹³

God has always been invisible to the physical human eye.¹⁴ Here John is giving a preview of a doctrine that will be covered by Jesus during His ministry.¹⁵ John's point is to convey that even though God is invisible, He became visible in the form of Jesus Christ so everyone who can see Him is seeing God.

The phrase "the only begotten God" is from the Textus Receptus, but the oldest and most reliable manuscripts have "God only begotten." We do not know why it has been changed unless some of the translators wanted to soften the emphasis of the deity of the Lord. The Greek uses the word "monogenes" which means "alone family." It implies that Jesus is the One God, yet God in His eternal plan presents Himself as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus is part of the one eternal fellowship that God has with Himself. It is a fitting end to John's beautiful prologue to his gospel, showing all men who God is and what He is.

At this point in the narrative, John leaves out a great deal of the history of the Lord's life that Matthew, Mark and Luke include in their Gospels. To understand how John is filling in the gaps of the untold story, we need to include a brief synopsis of their narratives in chronological order.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 8:9; Galatians 4:4; Romans 1:3; Romans 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 3:16; Hebrews 2:14

¹² The view of Muslims, Jehovah's Witness, Mormons, etc.

¹³ Proverbs 8:30

¹⁴ Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 4:12

¹⁵ John 14:7

Synopsis of events in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels, not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Matthew includes the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to His adopted father, Joseph.	Matthew 1:1-17
Luke includes the genealogy of Jesus from Adam to His mother Mary.	Luke 3:23-38
Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist.	Luke 1:1-25
Gabriel visits Mary to tell her of the pregnancy.	Luke 1:26-38
Mary visits Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, to tell her of her pregnancy.	Luke 1:39-56
An angel visits Joseph in a dream to tell him of Jesus' birth.	Matthew 1:18-25
Jesus is born in Bethlehem sometime between January and March of 4 BC.	Luke 2:1-7
The shepherds visit Jesus in the manger.	Luke 2:8-20
The wise men bring gifts to Jesus in the manger.	Luke 2:1-12
The circumcision of Jesus occurs on His eighth day of life.	Luke 2:21
Jesus is presented in the temple.	Luke 2:22-38
Joseph's family escapes to Egypt because of Herod's decree to kill the infant boys.	Matthew 2:13-15
Israel's children feel Herod's wrath from March to April, 4 BC.	Matthew 2:16-18
After the death of Herod in April of 4 BC, Joseph returns from Egypt and settles with his family in Nazareth in 4 BC.	Matthew 2:19-23 and Luke 2:39
The childhood of Jesus at age 12 in the temple occurs in Jerusalem in AD 8.	Luke 2:40-52
The ministry of John the Baptist begins in August AD 26.	Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-20

The story of John the Baptist and the gospel of John (February AD 27)

John ^{1:19} This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

After the end of the prologue, John begins to recount the ministry of John the Baptist. Beginning in February of AD 27, the purpose of John's ministry is to point the world to the coming Christ. The religious leaders come to the wilderness where he is ministering to ask if he is claiming to be the Christ. John is forthright with his answer by stating that he is definitely not the Christ.

The question from the Pharisees, day one

John ^{1:21} They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"

Since John is proclaiming the coming Christ, the religious leaders continue to probe and ask if John is Elijah from Malachi's prophecy, but he claims that he is not.¹⁶ However, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus identifies John as the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.¹⁷ Why the confusion? John does not know the whole story of God's plan as Jesus does and he is still expecting Elijah to appear too, not knowing that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy.

John also denies that he is a prophet although he is heralding as a prophet the coming Christ. Not satisfied with John's answer, they ask him to tell them what they need to tell the leaders back at the Sanhedrin.

¹⁶ Malachi 4:5

¹⁷ Mark 9:10-13

John's response

John ^{1:23} He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said."¹⁸

John the Baptist answers the religious leaders with the words of the prophet Isaiah. Matthew, Mark, and Luke report the same answer but they do not openly apply it to John the Baptist. However, there is no reason why it should not apply. John knows his job is to announce the coming Christ as foretold by Isaiah.

Why baptize?

John ^{1:24} Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know.¹⁹ ²⁷ "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

Baptism is not a new concept with the Jews. In Judaism, when a Gentile converts he is baptized into the faith. These religious leaders want to know why John is baptizing people who are already of Jewish heritage. Although it is not seen here, the purpose of John's baptism is to show repentance for sin. In Judaism, repentance is removed by a sacrifice and an offering to the temple. John's use of baptism signifies a change from that Jewish system which is about to start with the inauguration of Jesus' ministry.

Not to miss a point in this passage, Jesus is standing in the crowd when John is answering the questions of the religious leaders. Why doesn't Jesus answer their question about John's being the spirit of Elijah? Why doesn't He explain why John is baptizing? Why doesn't John point Him out to the religious leaders? It isn't time for Jesus to speak; John needs to complete his ministry.

The place

John ^{1:28} These things took place in Bethany, beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

When the New Testament speaks of Bethany, it almost always means the little town on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives about two miles from Jerusalem. However, this Bethany is closer to the Dead Sea than it is the Jordan River; it is on the west side of both. In that day, the little town where John was baptizing was on the east side of the Jordan River called Bethabara and later was referred to as the Bethany beyond the Jordan by the church.

Baptism of Jesus, day two in July of AD 27

John ^{1:29} The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"²⁰ ³⁰ "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"³¹ "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."

On the previous day John the Baptist has told the religious leaders that the Messiah was standing in the crowd and on this day, Jesus comes to be baptized. We now know the

¹⁸ Isaiah 40:3

¹⁹ Malachi 3:1

²⁰ Exodus 12:3; Isaiah 53:7

timing of this event. John the Baptist began his ministry in February of AD 27 and ministered in the wilderness for six month before Jesus came to be baptized in July of AD 27.

Jesus must have come to the river to observe the ministry of John many times before because the Baptist indicates that he did not recognize Him on His previous visits. On this occasion John does recognize Jesus as the Messiah as He approaches to be baptized and introduces Him to the crowd. He is the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world, not just those of the Jews. The other Gospel writers agree with John's record at this point.²¹

The Holy Spirit

John ^{1:32} John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³ "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'

The author recalls the second time John the Baptist states that he does not recognize Jesus. The two were cousins, but whether they knew each other in their adulthood we do not know. Surely John knew of the Jesus' purpose because his mother and father knew their Nephew's purpose. John probably played with Jesus in the early years and, as they grew into adulthood, they saw each other with less regularity. Nevertheless, John knows that Jesus is the Messiah when He comes to be baptized on this special day.

John the Baptist makes an important point in this passage when he says that he baptizes with water but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John doesn't fill in the details of the baptism since the other Gospel writers cover it well.

The Son of God

John ^{1:34} "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

When John the Baptist sees the Spirit come upon Jesus, and he hears the words of the Father saying, "My Beloved Son," there is no doubt in his mind or the others present that this is the long awaited Son of God, the Messiah. Nathanael²² will call him the Messiah, as well as Martha,²³ and Caiaphas,²⁴ to name a few. Jesus the Messiah is God.

Synopsis of events in the life of Jesus from the other Gospels, not included in John's Gospel

EVENT	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days and then is tempted by the devil between July and August of AD 27.	Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

John's disciples follow Jesus, day three

John ^{1:35} Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following, and *said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?"

²¹ Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-23

²² John 1:49

²³ John 11:27

²⁴ Matthew 26:63

In this passage we find a conflict of facts. According to the three Gospel writers, Jesus left the baptismal waters of the Jordan and went immediately into the wilderness for 40 days. Here, John the Baptist and two of his disciples see Jesus walking on the following day. Is this the day after His baptism or is it the day after His wilderness experience and temptation by the devil? We have to assume that it is after the temptation since it fits the content of the intended story line.

The two who are with John the Baptist are Andrew and John, the writer of this Gospel. They have heard the message of the Baptist whose purpose is to direct people to Jesus and acted on it. Andrew and John want to go where Jesus is going, a fitting desire for all of mankind, even today.

The tenth hour

John ^{1:39} He *said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

Andrew and John follow the Lord to the house where He is staying. It is the tenth hour or 10:00 in the morning. John is writing his gospel in Ephesus which is part of the Roman Empire and as such uses Roman time rather than Jewish time since he is writing to the church as a whole.

Andrew

John ^{1:40} One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

Although Andrew is a Jew, his name is Greek. He and his brother Simon Peter are from Bethsaida in Galilee.²⁵ We know very little about Andrew accept that he is one of the four apostles who are considered the inner circle of Jesus along with Peter, James, and John the author of this gospel.

Simon's name changed

John ^{1:41} He *found first his own brother Simon and *said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

Once Andrew discovers where Jesus is staying, he goes to find his brother Simon Peter to bring him to the Lord. At the first meeting, Jesus changes Simon's name to Cephas or Peter as we know it today. Cephas is the Aramaic and Peter is the Greek form of the same name meaning "a chip off the rock."

Philip

John ^{1:43} The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He *found Philip. And Jesus *said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip is from the same home town as Andrew and Peter. Word about Jesus is spreading from friend to friend and the group of followers begins to grow.

²⁵ John 1:44

Nathanael

John 1:45 Philip *found Nathanael and *said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Phillip finds his friend Nathanael and encourages him to follow the Lord. Notice that Phillip already knows that Jesus is the Messiah predicted by both Moses and the prophets. He uses that same argument for following the Lord that Paul uses in his testimony to everyone of Jewish heritage who will listen to him.

Nathaniel's question

John 1:46 Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip *said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and *said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathanael questions the Lord's Messiahship because of His home town. Nathanael is from Cana, a town near Nazareth and it is quite possible that he is simple expressing his view about the city's reputation. Perhaps it is simply town rivalry being expressed; nevertheless, Philip does not argue with Nathanael about his opinion. When Jesus sees him under the fig tree, He knows him to be a man of integrity without any form of craftiness and that he is a faithful follower of Jehovah. Jesus looks into his heart and sees a good man.

Jesus sees Nathaniel in the fig tree

John 1:48 Nathanael *said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these."

We do not know if Nathanael has been to the river with John the Baptist and believed his message about the coming Messiah, but Nathanael is probably a man of God as Philip implies when he speaks to him.²⁶ Jesus reads his heart and accepts him as a disciple, promising him a greater look into the things of God.

The promise of great things

John 1:51 And He *said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."²⁷

"Truly, truly," is a Hebraism translated into Greek and then into our English text. It is the same as saying, Amen, Amen. To define it we need to use two words, "firm and faithful." Jesus uses it to begin His statement with authority and faithful truth. John uses the two words together but the other three gospel writers never do; therefore, we do not know if Jesus actually repeated the word "truly" or not.

The Lord's promise to Nathanael reflects the story of Jacob's dream in Genesis and the words of the prophet Daniel. If Nathanael was not at the Lord's baptism just two months before, he missed seeing the heavens open and hearing the voice of the God the Father. But in a greater sense, the Lord's words to Nathanael are already speaking of His mission to be the eternal bond between heaven and earth.

²⁶ John 1:45

²⁷ Genesis 28:12; Daniel 7:13