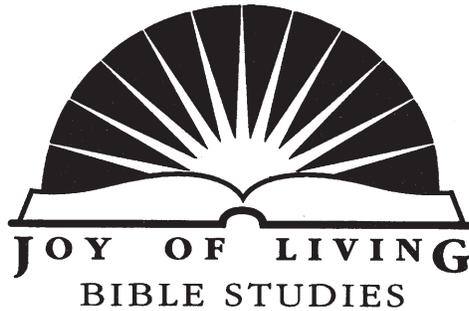


Gospel of John

Lesson 2



John Chapter 1

As we open the Gospel of John, consider that John is attempting to explain the infinite, almighty God to finite human beings, using the limited, imperfect medium of human language. As you read, ask God to help you begin to understand just how wonderful, how awesome, how magnificent He is, and to know how great His love for us is.

John 1:1 opens with what we humans understand as the beginning of all things, “In the beginning...” This is an echo of Genesis 1:1. However, where Genesis 1:1 goes forward from there telling what God did, John 1:1 tries to explain who existed before even this “beginning,” and who this Creator God is.

As we continue with John 1:1, we read that in the beginning “was the Word.” Words express ideas, thoughts, and emotions. It is through the words of a person’s mouth that we discover what is in their heart (see Luke 6:45). By looking forward to John 1:14 we learn that Jesus Christ is “the Word.” He expresses who God is; He reveals to us what God is like, what is in His heart. Jesus Himself said, “If you really know me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:7,9). Jesus Christ is the personal revelation of God.

We go on to learn that Jesus not only expresses *who* God is, but that He *is* God! We discover that He is eternal. There was never a time in all of eternity in which He did not exist. He was not created; He existed before everything in creation, because He is the Creator of all things (see John 1:3,10; Colossians 1:16). Not only did He create, He gave life. Genesis 2:7 says that God “breathed into his [man’s] nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” There is no life apart from Him (see John 14:6). He is the author of life, both physical and spiritual, and as we will discover, it is only through Him that we can have eternal life. He is life and light. Life, light, knowledge—these express God. Death, darkness, ignorance—these express the absence of God. Darkness cannot understand light; it cannot master it, nor can it overcome it.

Jesus Christ created the world, but when He came into His creation, it didn’t recognize Him. He created a special people, the Jews (Israelites), to whom He gave special revelation. They had been told that He would come. They were to look for Him, wait for Him, and anticipate Him. But when He came to them, they, as a whole, did not receive Him. Yet, to the ones who did receive Him, “to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born

not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). We, too, can be born into God’s family by believing in and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. (We will discuss this in greater detail in the Lesson 4 commentary.)

In John 1:14 we read that the eternal, pre-existent Word of God “became flesh.” John wrote in 1 John 4:14 that the Father sent His Son. Henrietta Mears wrote, “God did not send Christ into the world so that He would become His Son. Christ *is* the eternal Son.”¹ Nor did Jesus Christ just *appear* as a man; He actually *became* one of us, born of a woman—yet without sin—fully God, fully man (see Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 4:15). Jesus Christ was born a little baby in Bethlehem. He grew as children grow, and walked the earth as a man. He “made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14)—literally, “He pitched his tent in human flesh.”²

The apostle John writes to us about what he, personally, actually saw, not just about what someone told him. He says that he has actually seen this One in human flesh, and he has seen His glory.

John the Baptist

John 1:6 introduces us to someone new, “There was a man sent from God whose name was John.” The other three Gospels refer to him by the name “John the Baptist,” but the author of the Gospel of John, the apostle John, simply refers to him as “John.”

In Luke 1 we learn more about John the Baptist. He was of the tribe of Levi, the only child born to a certain aged couple—a priest named Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, who was a cousin to Mary, the mother of Jesus. John’s miraculous birth had been announced to his father by an angel, who instructed Zachariah to name him John and to keep him from wine or other fermented drink. In Luke 1:13-17, the angel told Zechariah:

- ☞ John would be a joy and a delight to them.
- ☞ Many would rejoice because of his birth, for he would be great in the sight of the Lord.
- ☞ He would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born.
- ☞ He would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

1. *What the Bible Is All About Bible Handbook, Revised and Updated*, p. 481.
2. “The Greek for ‘made his dwelling’ is connected with the word for ‘tent/tabernacle.’” Kenneth Barker, editor. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), notes on John 1:14.

We hear nothing of John after his circumcision celebration until he began preaching and baptizing in the wilderness. Matthew chapter 3 describes him. From his simplistic dress (camel's hair and a leather belt) and his simple food (locusts and wild honey), many believe he was a member of the Jewish sect called the Essenes, who lived an ascetic, communal life style.

John preached repentance in preparation for One who was coming (see Luke 3:7-14), and then he bore witness to who that One was. John 1:7 tells us that he "came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe." The Lord Jesus later said of Himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me" (John 1:15). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, "The manifestation of Jesus came after John's appearance, but in importance Jesus took precedence over him. 'Surpassed'...is the translation of an adverb that denotes positional precedence, whereas 'before'...refers to rank of importance. Jesus surpassed John because He was intrinsically greater."¹ John the Baptist was a created being, born of a woman. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God.

Law and Grace

John told the crowd, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). God's law was given to show us God's holiness and our sin. It is there to show us the hopelessness of our situation, which will lead us to the grace that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:19-20 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." And Galatians 3:24 tells us, "So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith." Romans 7:7 explains, "What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

The penalty for sin is death. Not just physical death, but eternal separation from God, who is life. You see, no one could ever be justified by the law—the law brought death. In contrast, Jesus Christ brings grace—God's grace, that is His undeserved kindness and love. This does not mean that God has overlooked sin. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, He bore God's judgment for humanity's sin. God gives us undeserved forgiveness through His only Son's sacrifice on the cross.

God's grace is available to us in and through Jesus Christ. He is the One who, having been at the Father's side, reveals to us what the Father is like. In Him we see God's love and mercy, and we discover

1. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, notes on John 1:15.

the great length our holy God went to in order for us to be reconciled to Himself. Remember, "The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). The blessings we have received in and through Jesus Christ are innumerable.

The Political Situation

During the time of Christ, Israel was not an autonomous country. It had been conquered by Rome, was governed by Rome and those she put in power, paid taxes to Rome, was subject to Roman law, and was occupied by Roman soldiers, who through every means necessary (including crucifixion) were determined to make the Israelites remain subject to Rome.

Along with the Roman authorities, the Jews were subject to another set of laws, those of the ruling Jewish religious leaders. Their highest tribunal was called the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy men plus the High Priest. The members were drawn from three groups: the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. The teachers of the law, many of whom were Pharisees, gave rise to Jewish legalism. Very simply put, they had taken the Law of Moses and expanded on it, adding many interpretations to it. The Roman government allowed these Jewish religious leaders to exercise power over the people in religious matters—matters of religious law. They were allowed to imprison and punish people. Even with the restrictions placed on them by the Romans, they were extremely powerful and wanted to retain that power.

A Voice in the Wilderness

With the rise and popularity of this new preacher in the wilderness, John the Baptist, it is not surprising that a group of priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to see who he was and what he was about. First, they asked who he was. John went right to the heart of their question by informing them that he was not the Messiah, the long anticipated Savior.

Next, they inquired if he was Elijah. This was not an allusion to reincarnation. They knew well that God's Word said in 2 Kings 2:11 that Elijah had not died, but had been bodily taken to heaven. God promised to send Elijah before the day of His great judgment (see Malachi 4:5).² We know that John couldn't have been Elijah, and he said plainly that he wasn't.

Finally, they asked him if he was "the Prophet." In Deuteronomy 18:14-22, Moses had told the nation of Israel that God would raise up a prophet like himself from among the Israelites, and they were to listen to him. John denied being this prophet.

Seemingly in frustration, they finally asked him who he was. John answered by referring to Isaiah 40:3, saying that he was merely a

2. Remember, John was to go before the Lord in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), but he was not Elijah. Many believe that the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 will be fulfilled in Revelation 11—that Elijah is one of the "two witnesses." Some, because of their lack of knowledge, have thought John 1:21 promotes reincarnation. First, the Bible directly contradicts that teaching in Hebrews 9:27 and other passages. Second, Elijah never died, so he couldn't have been reincarnated as John.

voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming Messiah. Then, as if they were surprised at his audacity, they questioned why he was baptizing people, since he appeared to be a “nobody.” John replied cryptically that he merely baptized with water, but that there was one already there among them, whom they didn’t know—“He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:27).

The Lamb of God

The day after the priests and Levites questioned him, John the Baptist introduced Jesus Christ. The event took place in the region of the Jordan River where John was baptizing people, “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). John saw the Lord Jesus and said to the crowd, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The reason John called Jesus the Lamb of God was to show that He would be the final sacrifice for sin. In the Old Testament we read in Exodus 12:3, “Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.” They were to kill the lamb and put the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. This was the institution of the Passover sacrifice of a lamb in order that the Israelites’ children would be spared. “When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down” (Exodus 12:23). All of the first-born sons in the households would be killed unless they had placed the blood of the lamb on the top and sides of the doorframe. God protected the Israelites by means of the blood of these Passover lambs.

A lamb was also one of the animals used for the regular sacrifices in the Old Testament: “If you offer a lamb, you are to present it before the Lord, lay your hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the tent of meeting” (Leviticus 3:7-8a). However, the blood of the animals sacrificed in Old Testament times did not actually take away sin (see Hebrews 10:1-4); it merely covered it.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to die for us, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin; therefore He is called the “Lamb of God.” He was sacrificed for us, and His blood “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He died to remove the guilt of sin from everyone who comes to Him and asks for forgiveness. As the blood of the sacrificial lamb was shed in the Old Testament, so the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was shed on the cross. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22b).

John 1:32-33 describes what happened when Jesus came to John to be baptized, “Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” ’ ”

As John declared, the Lord Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to His followers. When we come to Him and receive Him as our Savior, He

forgives our sin and gives us the Holy Spirit, so that we have new life and new power to live for Him (see also John 14:16-17; 16:7-14).

Jesus’ Disciples¹

Another day passed, and John the Baptist was talking with two of his disciples. One of these disciples was Andrew, and the other disciple is thought to have been the apostle John. The Baptist again identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, and when his two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus and spent the day with Him. After being with Jesus and hearing Him, Andrew wanted his brother Simon Peter to know Him, too. So, Andrew found his brother, told him, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41), and took him to meet Jesus.

Have you considered the importance of this? Simon Peter, who became one of Jesus’ key disciples, was brought to the Lord by his brother. What an important role Andrew played! Remember, each person you bring to the Lord is important, and you don’t know in advance what God will do with their life.

Next, we meet another disciple of Jesus, Philip, who came from Bethsaida, the same city as Andrew and Peter. We aren’t told if Andrew or Peter had told him about Jesus; however, the Lord Himself found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip then went to his friend, Nathanael, who was from the town of Cana (see John 21:2) and said, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”² Nathanael was skeptical of anyone who came from Nazareth and said with derision, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:45-46). However, he was not so skeptical that he would not go and see Jesus for himself.

In a brief exchange of words with Nathanael, Jesus refers to Himself for the first time in the Gospel of John as the “Son of Man” (John 1:51). As we continue with this study, we will gain a greater understanding of all that this entails. However, for now we see Jesus, the perfect Son of God, becoming human, and living among us in order to become, as John the Baptist said, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”.

After meeting the Lord Jesus Christ, Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael all followed Him. Have you met Jesus? Are you one of His followers? If you would like to know more about this, turn to page 4 or talk to your pastor or leader.

1. As Jesus’ public ministry grew, He chose a special group of disciples often referred to as the Twelve: “Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him” (Mark 3:13-19). Many people followed Him. Later in His ministry, He appointed seventy-two for a special work: “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1).
2. Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph, as many then believed. Luke 1 tells how the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin, Mary, and her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

6. Personal: How do you respond to the miraculous signs of Jesus that are recorded in Scripture? Have you put your faith in Him to work in your life in whatever way He knows is best for you?

Fourth Day: Review John 2, concentrating on verse 12.

1. Where did Jesus go after this? (John 2:12) Find this place on the map on page 8.

2. Who accompanied Jesus? (John 2:12)

3. What do you learn about the response of Jesus' brothers and neighbors to His ministry in the following verses?

Mark 6:1-3

John 7:2-5

4. Read Acts 1:13-14, which took place after Jesus had died on the cross, rose from the grave, and ascended into heaven. How had Jesus' brothers changed their response to His ministry by this time?

5. Personal: It must have been painful for Jesus when His brothers and neighbors refused to believe in Him. These were people He had grown up with and loved, and yet they "took offense at him" and gave him sarcastic counsel. Do you have family members or friends who do not know the Lord, and who mock you or take offense when you talk about Him? Are you sometimes tempted to react to them with anger? Read Hebrews 4:14-16. How is Jesus able to help you? Why not pray about this now?

Fifth Day: Review John 2, concentrating on verses 13-21.

1. What activity did Jesus find taking place in the temple courts when He went to Jerusalem? (John 2:13-14)

2. a. What did Jesus do when He saw this? (John 2:15-16)

- b. Of what Scripture passage did this situation remind Jesus' disciples? (John 2:17; this is from Psalm 69:9)

3. a. How did the Jewish leaders want Jesus to confirm His authority to do these things? (John 2:18)

- b. What sign did Jesus say would confirm His authority? (John 2:19)

4. a. What did the Jewish leaders assume Jesus was talking about? (John 2:20)

- b. What was Jesus actually talking about? (John 2:21)

5. Challenge: What took place to fulfill the sign Jesus spoke of, according to the following verses?
Acts 2:22-24

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

6. Personal: From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus knew why He had come to earth and what He would suffer, yet He willingly continued to obey His Father's will. How does this evidence of His love for you make you feel? Write a prayer to Him here.

