

Please note that the formatting  
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**Lesson One: John 1:1–18****Prologue: Subject of the Book  
John 1:1–18**

The Gospel of John begins with an introductory passage which provides background against which the Gospel must be understood. This “prologue” sets forth the author’s understanding of the person he will be writing about and introduces the main themes to be developed in the book. The prologue falls into three main subdivisions.

**The Word in the Beginning (1–4)**

1. The first subdivision contains six assertions with regard to “the Word.” Analyze the passage by making a list of these assertions and giving a short explanation of the meaning or significance of each as it comes. Try to distinguish the special point made by each assertion. Do not “jump the gun” by looking ahead. Just say what you can on the basis of this first subdivision. In other words, let John explain himself in his own good time.

2. These opening statements plainly recall the first chapter of Genesis. John is not introducing some new deity. He is talking about the God of Genesis 1, the creator God who gave existence to everything that has existence. List statements or phrases which have distinct reference to Genesis 1.

3. Then give attention to the unusual usage of “the Word.” It refers to a person, as the remainder of the prologue will put beyond doubt. Explain this use of the term. Why is this person referred to as “the Word”? Perhaps the following points will lead to an explanation:

3a. Does it allude to Genesis 1?<sup>1</sup>

3b. The Greek *logos* is used for a single word (Matt. 15:23; 22:46), but is often applied to the whole of a message, especially “the word of God” (Acts 6:2, 7; cf. 8:4, 14, 25; etc.). Consider the purpose or function of a word. What does a word do?

3c. Now apply your answer to the prologue. What is the significance of calling Jesus Christ “the Word”?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup>The third subdivision of the prologue (14–18) will be most helpful on this question.

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## **Manifestation of This Life, the Light of Men, in the World (5–13)**

Now the point of all these grand assertions with regard to the pre-existence and the nature and essence of the Word becomes clear. The previous passage serves as background for what has now been manifested in history. The life which was in this One and which is “the light of men” has now been manifested.

1. Describe the confrontation between the light and the darkness of the world (5).

2a. The identity of the man named John (6–8) will be clarified in short order (19ff). Who was he—the author of the book, or some other?

2b. What was his mission or function?

2c. By consulting 19ff, explain why the author would clarify his identity as he does in 8.

3a. What was the reaction of the world to the coming of the light? (10–11).

3b. Does something seem strange, and even tragic, about this reaction? Explain.

3c. How would you characterize the world, given this reaction?

4a. Yet the coming of the light into the world was not entirely fruitless (12f). Some “received him.” How are those who received him further described?

4b. What high privilege was given to them?

4c. How did they “become children of God” (13).<sup>3</sup>

## **The Word Become Flesh (14–18)**

The first section (1–4) concluded by pointing out that life was in the Word and that that life “was the light of men.” The second section (5–13) speaks of the coming of the true light into the world and the effects of that coming. Now John tells us how the light came into the world. It was by an incarnation of the Word—that Word described by the six assertions of 1–4. In verse 17 he even goes so far as to name the person he has in mind.

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<sup>3</sup>Further explanation will be given in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (John 3).

1. *Incarnation of the Word (14).*

1a. Connect this verse with what was said about “the Word” in the first subdivision (1–4). What new thought is now added?

1b. What is meant by “became flesh”?

1c. What is meant by the word “incarnation”?

1d. The Greek verb in “dwelt among us” is literally *tabernacled*. He pitched his tent among us. He lived among us as in a tent or tabernacle.<sup>4</sup> How do Old Testament references to the tabernacle (such as Ex. 25:8f; 29:46; and esp. 40:34–38) provide background for understanding this passage?

1e. Through what means was his glory manifested to eyewitnesses? (cf. 2:11; 11:4, 40; 12:23f; and others).<sup>5</sup>

1f. How is the uniqueness of his glory brought out?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>But observe that “us” refers to those like the author who were actual eyewitnesses of the manifestation of his glory.

<sup>5</sup>Jesus did not walk about with a halo or a glow emanating from him. How then was his glory manifested?

<sup>6</sup>The Greek *monogenes* (only begotten) combines the word only (*monos*) with the word kind (*genos*). Literally it means “of a single kind” (Brown); therefore: “single of its kind, only.” It occurs in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; Hebrews 11:17; and in the Septuagint at Judges 11:34. As applied to Jesus Christ (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) it “denotes *the only son of God* or one who in the sense in which he himself is the son of God has no brethren. He is so spoken of by John ... because by the incarnation of the *logos* [Word] in him he is of nature or essentially Son of God, and so in a very different sense from that in which men are made by him ‘children of God’ (Jn. 1:13)” (GT, 417f). Or: “*unique (in kind)* of something that is the only example of its category” (AG, 527). The uniqueness of his sonship is thus brought out. Others may become children of God (1:12), but none are sons of God in the same sense as Jesus. He is the only one of the kind. His glory was that of the only son of God. Nothing like the glory manifested through him has ever been seen. If the idea of “begotten” is included, as some argue (Buchsel in TDNT, IV, 741; Ridderbos), reference again would be to the incarnation (cf. Luke 1:35b).

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1g. What in particular was shown about him by the manifestation of his glory?<sup>7</sup>

2. *Testimony of John (15)*. How is this attestation by John the Baptist (cf. also 26f, 30) explained by verses 1–4?

3. *Blessing Received (16–17)*.

3a. Verse 15 is somewhat parenthetical. Verse 16 is closely connected with the end of verse 14. How is “his fulness” explained by 14?

3b. What then has been received out of his fulness?<sup>8</sup>

3c. Verse 17 then elaborates. But what does this verse mean, for certainly an element of “grace and truth” were also found in the law given through Moses?

4. *The Manifestation of God in Christ (18)*.

4a. “No man has seen God at any time.” How is the limited vision of the divine glory received by Moses described in Exodus 33:20–23?<sup>9</sup>

4b. Explain the clause “who is in the bosom of the Father” by using parallel occurrences of the idea (Luke 16:22 & John 13:23).

4c. Use verse 18 in particular, but also the whole last subdivision (14–18) of the prologue, to explain how “the Word” is a wonderfully appropriate designation of the person Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Again we are reminded of Exodus. See 33:18, 19–23; 34:5–7. Pay particular attention to the similarity between the terms in which Jehovah’s glory was defined (33:19; 34:5–7) and those used by John.

<sup>8</sup>The expression “grace for grace” or “grace upon grace” is more literally translated *grace in place of (or instead of) grace*. [The Greek preposition is *anti*.] The abundance of grace is brought out. The grace manifested in him is never all used up. As grace is used, more grace is always there to take its place. In Christ grace has become “an ever-accessible and inexhaustible fountain” (Ridderbos).

<sup>9</sup>F. F. Bruce calls it “the afterglow of the divine glory.”

<sup>10</sup>Now we can also see how the prologue provides background preparing us to understand the ideas presented throughout this gospel with regard to the coming and work of Jesus Christ (cf. 3:11–13, 31–35; 5:19f, 30, 36; 7:16f; 8:19, 28f; 10:25, 32, 37f; 11:4, 40; 12:23f with 28; 12:48–50; 14:6–11, 24).

**Lesson Two: John 1:19–51****Beginnings of Jesus' Public Ministry  
John 1:19–4:54**

This opening section deals with some of the earliest events in the public life of Jesus, mostly taking place in southern Palestine before the great Galilean ministry reported so fully in the other gospels. Take note of references to time and location (1:28, 43; 2:1, 11, 12, 13, 23; 3:22–24; 4:1–3; and especially 4:43–45, 46 & 54), which establish the point that we are dealing with a short early period before the beginning of the wide-spread Galilean ministry. John 2:1, 11 and 4:46, 54 are “bookends,” defining the structure of this part of John.

**The First Week  
John 1:19–2:11**

The twelve apostles were taken from among men who had been with Jesus “beginning from the baptism of John” until the day of his ascension (Acts 1:21f). Jesus reminded the eleven, after Judas left: “You have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27). The detail preserved in this section convinces many that it derives from an eyewitness. The author of the gospel was there. He leaves a record of how he and the others first came to know Jesus Christ.

John omits the actual baptism of Jesus, which, however, is assumed, and the temptation narratives found in the other gospels. But he makes it plain that Jesus “hung around” the scene of John’s baptizing for some time after his own baptism. He gathers some, if not all, of his own disciples, who will become his apostles and begin a period of training, from the people prepared by John for the coming of the Christ (Messiah).

**The Testimony of John  
John 1:19–34**

John does not record everything about John the Baptist. The beginning of his work is reported in the synoptic gospels (Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3). The special focus of John’s gospel is upon the testimony of John.

**First Day: Testimony Concerning Himself (19–28)**

At the point John’s historical record begins, the work of John the Baptist has gone on long enough and with enough success to attract the attention of the Jewish establishment. Experts knowledgeable in the law and religious matters are sent to investigate (19). John’s testimony first takes a negative turn in response to questions raised by the delegation sent from Jerusalem.

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1. Explain why questions were raised (19–21) about whether John was ...

1a. The Christ<sup>11</sup> ... in the light of Luke 3:15;

1b. Elijah ... in the light of Malachi 4:5–6;

1c. The Prophet ... in the light of Deuteronomy 18:15–19 (cf. 34:9–12) and John 6:14 & 7:40.

2. How may John's denial that he was Elijah (21) be explained consistently with Matthew 11:13–14, 17:10–13 & Luke 1:17?<sup>12</sup>

3. How then does John explain himself? (22–23; cf. Is. 40:3).

4. John's answers left the Pharisees at a loss to understand the reason he was baptizing, and they ask about it (24f). John's full answer does not come until the next day (31). But the first part of his explanation mini-mizes his own work in comparison with the one he has come to introduce. How does he explain the greatness of that one? (26–27).

### **The Next Day: Testimony Concerning Jesus (29–34)**

1. The Gospel of John is much concerned with testimony. In this section you should find four different expressions of the testimony of John the Baptist. What is meant by identifying Jesus as "the Lamb of God"? (29).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Greek term used to translate Messiah, according to 41.

<sup>12</sup>John was Elijah in one sense, but not in another. The sense in which he could be identified with Elijah is explained by Luke 1:17.

<sup>13</sup>Difficulty has been found with the identification of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb, coming as it does from John the Baptist, in view of his later perplexity about the work of Jesus (Matt. 11:2f). He seems to have been perplexed by the failure to see events developing according to the program he had announced (Matt. 3:7–12). He does not seem to have expected the Messiah to be a sacrificial lamb who would die for the sins of the world. Many scholars (e. g. Dodd, Barrett, Brown, Carson) think the solution to the difficulty may lie in the concept of a conquering lamb who would destroy the sin of the world, found in Jewish apocalyptic literature. In fact, this imagery of a conquering lamb is found in the Book of Revelation (7:17; 17:14). For the expression "take away the sin" compare the paral-lelism found in First John 3: "manifested to take away sins" (5) being in-ter-changed with "destroy the works of the devil" (8). This idea of a con-quer-ing lamb may well have been what John the Baptist had in mind, though the Gospel of John itself will make it very plain that the conquest was to be achieved through the death of the lamb (12:31–33; cf. Rev. 5:6–12).

2. The second testimony (30) is found also in the prologue (15). How may this attestation be explained from the prologue (1–4)?

3. Verse 31 is John’s fullest explanation of why he came baptizing. What is his answer to this question of the Pharisees from the previous day (25)?

4a. The apostles of Jesus would first believe on Jesus as a result of John’s testimony (35ff with 7). But how did John himself recognize Jesus as the Messiah? (32–34).

4b. The word Messiah is not used (in 33), but in its place “the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.” Draw upon Isaiah 32:15, 44:3 & Joel 2:28–32 to explain how this would be a way of identifying Jesus as the Messiah.

5. What is the fourth expression of John’s testimony to Jesus, introduced as interchangeable with the others? (34).<sup>14</sup>

## **The First Disciples of Jesus John 1:35–51**

### **The Next [Third] Day: Jesus’ First Disciples (35–42)**

In all likelihood one of the two disciples of John the Baptist, who became the first two disciples of Jesus, was John, the author of this Gospel. The author never mentions his own name, but we shall notice several points at which he refers to himself. This part of the Gospel contains detail which certainly smacks of having come from an eyewitness. John was present and reports the very first meeting with Jesus, which must have been riveted into his memory, and the way he and the other disciples who became Jesus’ apostles first came to believe in him.

1. John’s mission has been variously described. He came to bear witness (7, 15, 19, 32, 34); to prepare the way of the Lord (23); to make him manifest to Israel (31). What light do verses 35ff cast upon the way John’s mission was fulfilled?

2. We have seen how John recognized Jesus as the Christ (or Messiah) (33–34). How did John’s disciples come to believe in Jesus? (35–42 with 7).

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<sup>14</sup>Do not miss the way each of these expressions helps to fill out the idea of the Messiah.

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3. One of the two disciples who heard John's testimony and followed Jesus (35–39) was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother (40). After hearing John and then spending some time with Jesus, he found Peter and told him about Jesus. What conclusion had he reached? (41).

4. How does Jesus, upon meeting Andrew's brother Simon, begin to show the prophetic insight which will be displayed repeatedly in this gos-pel? (42; cf. 47–51; 2:23–25; 4:17–19; etc.).

### **The Next [Fourth] Day: Philip and Nathanael (43–51)**

1. The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee and called Philip to follow him (43). How is Philip identified for the reader in a way that tells us something about this man and at the same time provides evidence of the close connection between the early disciples? (44).

2a. Philip had a friend or acquaintance named Nathanael, with whom he shares the news about Jesus (45). What conviction does Philip ex-press concerning Jesus?

2b. How is this expression of conviction related to Andrew's (41)?

3. What is Nathanael's initial attitude toward Jesus? (46a).<sup>15</sup>

4. Philip's reply (46b) indicates confidence in his own position. What, according to Philip, will be enough to dispel Nathanael's prejudice?

5. Philip's confidence was certainly justified. How does Jesus shatter Nathanael's doubt and bring him to faith? (47–49).

6. Again we have a confession of faith that both reveals a man's conviction and at the same time explains the content of the word "Messiah" (or Christ). What conviction does Nathanael express about Jesus? (49).

7. Jesus had already displayed supernatural knowledge, but tells Nathanael he would "see greater things than these" (50). How are these "greater things" explained? (51; cf. Gen. 28:10–17).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Do not imagine that these were gullible men, ready to accept whatever came along!

<sup>16</sup>Jesus alludes no doubt to Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:10–17). But the application is to the connection between Jesus and heaven, and "the heavenly powers at his disposal" (Ridderbos), which are to be demon-strated in the great works of Jesus performed before the eyes of the disciples (cf. 5:19f). These are the "greater things" to be witnessed by Nathanael, as also the other disciples.

### **Some Final Questions in Review**

1. Take a last look at the testimonies to Jesus from Andrew, Philip and Nathanael, which indicate what these disciples thought about Jesus at this early stage of his ministry. Drawing upon these (35–51), as well as the testimony of John the Baptist (29–34), indicate as fully as possible what was meant by the term “Messiah” or “Christ” (used in 41).

2. So far as the evidence permits, explain the grounds on which the disciples reached these conclusions about Jesus.

### **Final Reflection**

What a treasure we have in this passage! A day by day account of the first contact with Jesus, fixed forever in the memory, even the hour being remembered in one instance (39), and the explanation of how the apostles first came to believe on him. It strikes me as providing the sort of detailed memory only one who was there could provide. What is your impression?