

John 1:1-28
March 23, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Instead of opening with a teaser question, I thought it would be helpful to introduce the Gospel of John.

As you know, there are four Gospels with four different writers who have given us “snapshots” of our Lord’s life on earth, though no complete biography could ever be written (John 21:25). The first three Gospels major on describing *events* in the life of Christ, whereas John emphasized the *meaning* of these events. For example, all four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000 but only John records Jesus’ sermon on “The Bread of Life” which followed that miracle when He interpreted it for the people.

John, the beloved disciple, wrote this book for both Jews and Gentiles, presenting Jesus as the Son of God. We know that John had Gentiles in mind as well as Jews, because he often “interpreted” Jewish words or customs for his readers (John 1:38, 41–42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16). His emphasis to the Jews was that Jesus not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, but He also fulfilled the *types*. Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Ladder from heaven to earth (John 1:51; and see Gen. 28). He is the New Temple (John 2:19–21), and He gives a new birth (John 3:4ff). He is the serpent lifted up (John 3:14) and the Bread of God that came down from heaven (John 6:35ff).

John will walk us through seven (7) miracles of Jesus throughout his writing for the purpose of “so that you may believe,” which then leads us to “so that you may have eternal life.” He wants to reveal who Jesus is and what He did for us.

Transition: So the one major theme that runs throughout John’s Gospel is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal life (John 20:31).

We begin today in Chapter 1, where John records seven names and titles of Jesus that identify Him as eternal God. Since we’re only covering the first 28 verses, we will read three (3) of those names for Jesus. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning.

³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood (or overcome) it.

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the

light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming (or who comes) into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, (or the Only Begotten) who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, (or the Only Begotten) who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

John the Baptist Denies Being the Christ

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ. (The Messiah, or the Anointed One, or God's last King)"

²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' " (Isa 40:3)

²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

²⁶ "I baptize with (or in) water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

John 1:12–13 gives us the marvelous promise of God that anyone who receives Christ will be born again and enter the family of God! John says more about this new birth in John 3, but he points out here that it is a spiritual birth from God, not a physical birth that depends on human nature.

The Light is still shining! Have you *personally* received the Light and become a child of God?

Close in Prayer**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 284-287). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

GOD IS HERE!**John 1**

But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" asked Solomon as he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:27). A good question, indeed! God's glory had dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), and in the temple (1 Kings 8:10–11); but that glory had departed from disobedient Israel (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22–23).

Then a marvelous thing happened: the glory of God came to His people again, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The writers of the four Gospels have given us "snapshots" of our Lord's life on earth, for no complete biography could ever be written (John 21:25). Matthew wrote with his fellow Jews in mind and emphasized that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Mark wrote for the busy Romans. Whereas Matthew emphasized the King, Mark presented the Servant, ministering to needy people. Luke wrote his Gospel for the Greeks and introduced them to the sympathetic Son of man.

But it was given to John, the beloved disciple, to write a book for both Jews and Gentiles, presenting Jesus as the Son of God. We know that John had Gentiles in mind as well as Jews, because he often “interpreted” Jewish words or customs for his readers (John 1:38, 41–42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16). His emphasis to the Jews was that Jesus not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, but He also fulfilled the *types*. Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Ladder from heaven to earth (John 1:51; and see Gen. 28). He is the New Temple (John 2:19–21), and He gives a new birth (John 3:4ff). He is the serpent lifted up (John 3:14) and the Bread of God that came down from heaven (John 6:35ff).

Whereas the first three Gospels major on describing *events* in the life of Christ, John emphasized the *meaning* of these events. For example, all four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000 but only John records Jesus’ sermon on “The Bread of Life” which followed that miracle when He interpreted it for the people.

But there is one major theme that runs throughout John’s Gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal life (John 20:31). In this first chapter, John recorded seven names and titles of Jesus that identify Him as eternal God.

The Word (John 1:1–3, 14)

Much as our words reveal to others our hearts and minds, so Jesus Christ is God’s “Word” to reveal His heart and mind to us. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). A word is composed of letters, and Jesus Christ is “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:8), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. According to Hebrews 1:1–3, Jesus Christ is God’s *last* Word to mankind, for He is the climax of divine revelation.

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word (vv. 1–2). He existed in the beginning, not because He had a beginning as a creature, but because He is eternal. He *is* God and He was *with* God. “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

Jesus Christ is the creative Word (v. 3). There is certainly a parallel between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, the “new creation” and the “old creation.” God created the worlds through His word: “And God said, ‘Let there be ...’ ” / “For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). God created all things through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16), which means that Jesus is not a created being. He is eternal God.

The verb *was made* is perfect tense in the Greek, which means a “completed act.” Creation is finished. It is not a process still going on, even though God is certainly at work in His creation (John 5:17). Creation is not a process; it is a finished product.

Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word (v. 14). He was not a phantom or a spirit when He ministered on earth, nor was His body a mere illusion. John and the other disciples each had a personal experience that convinced them of the reality of the body of Jesus (1 John 1:1–2). Even though John’s emphasis is the deity of Christ, he makes it clear that the Son of God came *in the flesh* and was subject to the sinless infirmities of human nature. In his Gospel, John points out that Jesus was weary (John 4:6) and thirsty (John 4:7). He groaned within (John 11:33) and openly wept (John 11:35). On the cross, He thirsted (John 19:28), died

(John 19:30), and bled (John 19:34). After His resurrection, He proved to Thomas and the other disciples that He still had a real body (John 20:24–29), howbeit, a glorified body.

How was the “Word made flesh”? By the miracle of the Virgin Birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38). He took on Himself sinless human nature and identified with us in every aspect of life from birth to death. “The Word” was not an abstract concept of philosophy, but a real Person who could be seen, touched, and heard. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is God.

The revelation of God’s glory is an important theme in the Gospel. Jesus revealed God’s glory in His person, His works, and His words. John recorded seven wonderful signs (miracles) that openly declared the glory of God (John 2:11). The glory of the Old Covenant of Law was a fading glory, but the glory of the New Covenant in Christ is an increasing glory (see 2 Cor. 3).

The Law could reveal sin, but it could never remove sin. Jesus Christ came with *fullness* of grace and truth, and this fullness is available to all who will trust Him (John 1:16).

The Light (John 1:4–13)

Life is a key theme in John’s Gospel; it is used thirty-six times. What are the essentials for human life? There are at least four: light (if the sun went out, everything would die), air, water, and food. Jesus is all of these! He is the Light of life and the Light of the world (John 8:12). He is the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2). By His Holy Spirit, He gives us the “breath of life” (John 3:8; 20:22), as well as the Water of life (John 4:10, 13–14; 7:37–39). Finally, Jesus is the Living Bread of Life that came down from heaven (John 6:35ff). He not only has life and gives life, but He *is* life (John 14:6).

Light and darkness are recurring themes in John’s Gospel. God is light (1 John 1:5) while Satan is “the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). People love either the light or the darkness, and this love controls their actions (John 3:16–19). Those who believe on Christ are the “sons of light” (John 12:35–36). Just as the first Creation began with “Let there be light!” so the New Creation begins with the entrance of light into the heart of the believer (2 Cor. 4:3–6). The coming of Jesus Christ into the world was the dawning of a new day for sinful man (Luke 1:78–79).

You would think that blind sinners would welcome the light, but such is not always the case. The coming of the true light brought conflict as the powers of darkness opposed it. A literal translation of John 1:5 reads, “And the light keeps on shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it or understood it.” The Greek verb can mean “to overcome” or “to grasp, to understand.” Throughout the Gospel of John, you will see both attitudes revealed: people will not understand what the Lord is saying and doing and, as a result, they will oppose Him. John 7–12 records the growth of that opposition, which ultimately led to the crucifixion of Christ.

Whenever Jesus taught a spiritual truth, His listeners interpreted it in a material or physical way. The light was unable to penetrate the darkness in their minds. This was true when He spoke about the temple of His body (John 2:19–21), the new birth (John 3:4), the living water (John 4:11), eating His flesh (John 6:51ff), spiritual freedom (John 8:30–36), death as sleep (John 11:11–13), and many other spiritual truths. Satan strives to keep people in the darkness, because darkness means death and hell, while light means life and heaven.

This fact helps explain the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:6–8). John was sent as a witness to Jesus Christ, to tell people that the Light had come into the world. The nation of Israel, in spite of all its spiritual advantages, was blind to their own Messiah! The word *witness* is a key word in

this book; John uses the noun fourteen times and the verb thirty-three times. John the Baptist was one of many people who bore witness to Jesus, “This is the Son of God!” Alas, John the Baptist was martyred and the Jewish leaders did nothing to prevent it.

Why did the nation reject Jesus Christ? Because they “knew Him not.” They were spiritually ignorant. Jesus is the “true Light”—the original of which every other light is a copy—but the Jews were content with the copies. They had Moses and the Law, the temple and the sacrifices; but they did not comprehend that these “lights” pointed to the true Light who was the fulfillment, the completion, of the Old Testament religion.

As you study John’s Gospel, you will find Jesus teaching the people that He is the fulfillment of all that was typified in the Law. It was not enough to be born a Jew; they had to be born again, born from above (John 3). He deliberately performed two miracles on the Sabbath to teach them that He had a new rest to give them (John 5; 9). He was the satisfying manna (John 6) and the life-giving Water (John 7:37–39). He is the Shepherd of a new flock (John 10:16), and He is a new Vine (John 15). But the people were so shackled by religious tradition that they could not understand spiritual truth. Jesus came to His own world that He had created, but His own people, Israel, could not understand Him and would not receive Him.

They saw His works and heard His words. They observed His perfect life. He gave them every opportunity to grasp the truth, believe, and be saved. Jesus is the way, but they would not walk with Him (John 6:66–71). He is the truth, but they would not believe Him (John 12:37ff). He is the life, and they crucified Him!

But sinners today need not commit those same blunders. John 1:12–13 gives us the marvelous promise of God that anyone who receives Christ will be born again and enter the family of God! John says more about this new birth in John 3, but he points out here that it is a spiritual birth from God, not a physical birth that depends on human nature.

The Light is still shining! Have you *personally* received the Light and become a child of God?

The Son of God (John 1:15–28, 49)

John the Baptist is one of the most important persons in the New Testament. He is mentioned at least eighty-nine times. John had the special privilege of introducing Jesus to the nation of Israel. He also had the difficult task of preparing the nation to receive their Messiah. He called them to repent of their sins and to prove that repentance by being baptized and then living changed lives. John summarized what John the Baptist had to say about Jesus Christ (John 1:15–18). First, *He is eternal* (John 1:15). John the Baptist was actually born six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36); so in this statement he is referring to our Lord’s preexistence, not His birth date. Jesus existed before John the Baptist was ever conceived.

Jesus Christ has *fullness of grace and truth* (John 1:16–17). Grace is God’s favor and kindness bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. If God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive; but He deals with us on the basis of *grace and truth*. Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, met all the demands of the Law; now God is free to

share fullness of grace with those who trust Christ. Grace without truth would be deceitful, and truth without grace would be condemning.

In John 1:17, John did not suggest that there was no grace under the Law of Moses, because there was. Each sacrifice was an expression of the grace of God. The Law also revealed God's truth. But in Jesus Christ, grace and truth reach their fullness; and this fullness is available to us. We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8–9), but we also live by grace (1 Cor. 15:10) and depend on God's grace in all that we do. We can receive one grace after another, for "He giveth more grace" (James 4:6). In John 1:17, John hinted that a whole new order had come in, replacing the Mosaic system.

Finally, *Jesus Christ reveals God to us* (John 1:18). As to His essence, God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). Man can see God revealed in nature (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20) and in His mighty works in history; but he cannot see God Himself. Jesus Christ reveals God to us, for He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). The word translated "declared" gives us our English word *exegesis*, which means "to explain, to unfold, to lead the way." Jesus Christ explains God to us and interprets Him for us. We simply cannot understand God apart from knowing His Son, Jesus Christ.

The word *Son* is used for the first time in John's Gospel as a title for Jesus Christ (John 1:18). The phrase "only-begotten" means "unique, the only one of its kind." It does not suggest that there was a time when the Son was not, and then the Father brought Him into being. Jesus Christ is eternal God; He has always existed.

At least nine times in John's Gospel, Jesus is called "the Son of God" (John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31). You will recall that John had as his purpose in writing to convince us that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). At least nineteen times, Jesus is referred to as "the Son." He is not only the Son of God, but He is God the Son. Even the demons admitted this (Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41).

John the Baptist is one of six persons named in the Gospel of John who gave witness that Jesus is God. The others are Nathanael (John 1:49), Peter (John 6:69), the blind man who was healed (John 9:35–38), Martha (John 11:27), and Thomas (John 20:28). If you add our Lord Himself (John 5:25; 10:36), then you have seven clear witnesses.

John gave the record of four days in the life of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the first disciples. He continues this sequence in John 2 and presents, as it were, a "week" in the "new creation" that parallels the Creation week in Genesis 1.

On the first day (John 1:19–24), a committee from the Jewish religious leaders interrogated John the Baptist. These men had every right to investigate John and his ministry, since they were the custodians and guardians of the faith. They asked him several questions and he clearly answered them.

"Who are you?" was a logical question. Was he the promised Messiah? Was he the Prophet Elijah who was supposed to come before the Messiah appeared? (Mal. 4:5) Great crowds had

gathered to hear John, and many people had been baptized. Though John did no miracles (John 10:41), it was possible the people thought that he was the promised Messiah.

John denied being either Elijah or the Messiah. (In one sense, he was the promised Elijah. See Matt. 17:10–13.) John had nothing to say about himself because he was sent to talk about Jesus! Jesus is the Word; John was but “a voice”—and you cannot see a voice! John pointed back to Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 40:1–3) and affirmed that he was the fulfillment.

Having ascertained who John was, the committee then asked what he was doing. “Why are you baptizing?” John got his authority to baptize, not from men, but from heaven, because he was commissioned by God (Matt. 21:23–32). The Jewish religious leaders in that day baptized Gentiles who wanted to adopt the Jewish faith; *but John baptized Jews!*

John explained that his baptism was in water, but that the Messiah would come and baptize with a spiritual baptism. Again, John made it clear that he was not establishing a new religion or seeking to exalt himself. He was pointing people to the Savior, the Son of God (John 1:34). We shall learn later that it was through baptism that Jesus Christ would be presented to the people of Israel.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 271-274) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. The Prologue (1:1–18)

All four Gospels begin by placing Jesus within a historical setting, but the Gospel of John is unique in the way it opens. The Book of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus that connects Him to David and Abraham. Mark starts with the preaching of John the Baptist. Luke has a dedication of his work to Theophilus and follows that with a prediction of the birth of John the Baptist. But John begins with a theological prologue. It is almost as if John had said, “I want you to consider Jesus in His teaching and deeds. But you will not understand the good news of Jesus in its fullest sense unless you view Him from this point of view. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, and His words and deeds are those of the God-Man.”

The prologue contains many of the major themes of the Gospel which are later reintroduced and developed more fully. The key terms include “life” (v. 4), “light” (v. 4), “darkness” (v. 5), “witness” (v. 7), “true” (v. 9), “world” (v. 9), “Son” (v. 14), “Father” (v. 14), “glory” (v. 14), “truth” (v. 14). Two other key theological terms are “the Word” (v. 1) and “grace” (v. 14), but these important words are used in John only in this theological introduction. “Word” (*Logos*) does occur elsewhere in the Gospel but not as a Christological title.

A. The Logos in eternity and time (1:1–5).

1:1. As far back as man can think, **in the beginning ... the Word** was existing. The term “Word” is the common Greek word *logos*, which meant “speaking, a message, or words.” “Logos” was widely used in Greek philosophical teaching as well as in Jewish wisdom literature and philosophy. John chose this term because it was familiar to his readers, but he invested it with his own meaning, which becomes evident in the prologue.

The Word was with God in a special relationship of eternal fellowship in the Trinity. The word “with” translates the Greek *pros*, which here suggests “in company with” (cf. the same use of *pros* in 1:2; 1 Thes. 3:4; 1 John 1:2). John then added that **the Word was God**. Jehovah’s Witnesses translate this clause, “The Word was a god.” This is incorrect and logically is polytheism. Others have translated it “the Word was divine,” but this is ambiguous and could lead to a faulty view of Jesus. If this verse is correctly understood, it helps clarify the doctrine of the Trinity. The Word is eternal; the Word is in relationship to God (the Father); and the Word is God.

1:2. The Word has always been in a relationship **with God** the Father. Christ did not at some point in time come into existence or begin a relationship with the Father. In eternity past the Father (God) and the Son (the Word) have always been in a loving communion with each other. Both Father and Son are God, yet there are not two Gods.

1:3. Why is there something rather than nothing? That is a great question in philosophy. The Christian answer is God. He is eternal, and He is the Creator of **all things**. And the Word was the agent of Creation (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). All Creation was **made** by the Word in relation with the Father and the Spirit. John stressed the work of the Word. He came to reveal the Father (John 1:14, 18); and the work of revelation began in Creation for Creation reveals God (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:19–20).

1:4. Life is man’s most important asset. To lose life is tragic. John affirmed that in the ultimate sense, **life is in Christ**. Man’s spiritual and physical **life** come from Him. (For John’s teaching on life, cf. 5:26; 6:57; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3; 20:31.) Jesus, the Source of “life” (cf. 11:25), is also **the light of men** (cf. 8:12). Light is commonly used in the Bible as an emblem of God; darkness is commonly used to denote death, ignorance, sin, and separation from God. Isaiah described the coming of salvation as the people living in darkness seeing a great light (Isa. 9:2; cf. Matt. 4:16).

1:5. Light’s nature is to shine and dispel **darkness**. Darkness is almost personified in this verse: darkness is unable to overpower light. By this, John summarized his Gospel record: (a) **Light** will invade the dominion of **darkness**. (b) Satan the ruler and his subjects will resist the light, but they will be unable to frustrate its power. (c) The Word will be victorious in spite of opposition.

B. The witness of John the Baptist (1:6–8).

1:6. In addition to the eternal Word, **a man** came on the stage of history: **his name was John**. This John did not author this Gospel but was the great forerunner of Jesus known as John the Baptist. He **was sent from God**, which was the secret of his importance. Like the Old Testament prophets, he was equipped and commissioned by God for special ministry.

1:7. The word **witness** (both as a noun [*martyria*] and verb [*martyreō*]) is important in this Gospel (cf. v. 15, 32, 34; 3:11, 26; 5:31–32, 36–37; 18:37; 19:35; etc.). (See the chart with the comments on 5:33–34.) John the Baptist was sent for people’s benefit to be an additional pointer to the truth of Jesus, the Revealer of the Father. People in sin are in such darkness that they need someone to tell them what is **light**. John’s goal was that **all men might** come to trust in Jesus.

1:8. John the Baptist was great, but **he ... was not the Light**. Some evidence suggests that the movement begun by John the Baptist continued after his death and even after the death and resurrection of Jesus (4:1; cf. Mark 6:29; Luke 5:33). Twenty years after Jesus' resurrection (cf. Acts 18:25; 19:1–7) Paul found about 12 disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus. A Mandaean sect still continues south of Baghdad which, though hostile to Christianity, claims an ancestral link to the Baptist.

C. The coming of the Light (1:9–13).

1:9. This has been called the Quaker's text because of that group's erroneous use of it and their stress on the "inner light." The words **was coming** (*erchomenon*) may refer to every man (as in the NIV) or to Christ, **the true Light** (as in the NIV text). The latter is preferred, for it suggests the Incarnation.

Christ **gives light to every man**. This does not mean universal salvation or general revelation or even inner illumination. Instead, it means that Christ as the Light shines (*phōtizei*) on each person either in salvation or in illuminating him with regard to his sin and coming judgment (3:18–21; 9:39–41; cf. 16:8–11).

1:10. **The world** (*kosmos*) means the world of men and human society which is now in disobedience to God and under the rulership of Satan (cf. 14:30). The *Logos* came among people in the Incarnation, but mankind **did not recognize** its Maker (cf. Isa. 1:2–3). The failure to recognize (*egnō*, "know") **Him** was not because God's nature was somehow "hidden" in people, as some suggest. Rather, it is because of human ignorance and blindness, caused by sin (John 12:37).

1:11. In some ways this is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. The *Logos* went to **His own** home **but** He had no welcome. Jesus went to **His own** people, the nation Israel, but they as a whole rejected Him. In rejecting **Him**, they refused to accept Him as the Revelation sent by the Father and refused to obey His commands. Isaiah long before had prophesied of this Jewish national unbelief: "Who has believed our message?" (Isa. 53:1)

1:12. That unbelief, however, was not universal. Some **received** Jesus' universal invitation. **To all who** accepted Jesus as the Revealer of the Father's will and as the Sacrifice for sin, **He gave the right to become children of God**. The word "right" (*exousian*) is a needed improvement over the KJV's "power," and "children" (*tekna*) is better than the KJV's "sons." People are not naturally children of God but can become so by receiving the gift of the new birth.

1:13. The new birth does **not** come by **natural descent** (lit., "of bloods"), **nor** is it the result of a **human decision** (lit., "the will of the flesh," i.e., the natural human desire for children), nor is it the result of a **husband's will**. The birth of a child of God is not a natural birth; it is a supernatural work of **God** in regeneration. A person welcomes Jesus and responds in faith and obedience to Him, but the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is "the cause" of regeneration (3:5–8).

D. The Incarnation and revelation (1:14–18).

1:14. **The Word** (*Logos*; cf. v. 1) **became flesh**. Christ, the eternal *Logos*, who is God, came to earth as man. Yet in doing so, He did not merely “appear” like a man; He became one (cf. Phil. 2:5–9). Humanity, in other words, was added to Christ’s deity. And yet Christ, in becoming “flesh,” did not change; so perhaps the word “became” (*egeneto*) should be understood as “took to Himself” or “arrived on the scene as.”

“Flesh” in this verse means a human nature, not sinfulness or weakness. In the Greek the words **lived for a while among us** recall God’s dwelling with Israel in the Old Testament. The word “lived” is *eskēnōsen*, from *skēnē* (“tabernacle”). Much as God’s presence was in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), so Jesus dwelt among people.

We have seen most naturally implies that the author was an eyewitness. **His glory** refers to the unique splendor and honor seen in Jesus’ life, miracles, death, and resurrection. **The one and only Son** (*monogenous*; cf. John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) means that Jesus is the Son of God in a sense totally different from a human who believes and becomes a child of God. Jesus’ sonship is unique for He is eternal and is of the same essence as **the Father**. The glorious revelation of God which the *Logos* displayed was **full of grace and truth**, that is, it was a gracious and truthful revelation (cf. John 1:17).

1:15. **John** the Baptist gave a continuing testimony to Jesus. The present tense of the Greek verbs **testifies** and **cries out** stresses this. Jesus was younger and began His ministry later than John. But John said that because of His preexistence (and thus His true nature) **He ... has surpassed me**.

1:16. The Word made flesh is the source of grace (*charin*), which is the sum total of all the spiritual favors God gives to people. The words **we ... all** refer to Christians and include John the author. Because of **the fullness of His grace ... one blessing after another** (*charin anti charitos*, lit., “grace in place of grace”) comes to Christians as waves continue to come to the shore. The Christian life is the constant reception of one evidence of God’s grace replacing another.

1:17. The greatness of the old dispensation was the giving of **the Law** by God **through** His servant **Moses**. No other nation has had such a privilege. But the glory of the church is the revelation of God’s **grace and truth ... through Jesus Christ** (cf. v. 14).

1:18. The statement **No one has ever seen God** (cf. 1 John 4:12) may seem to raise a problem. Did not Isaiah say, “My eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty”? (Isa. 6:5) God in His essence is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). He is One “whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). But John 1:18 means, “no one has ever seen God’s essential nature.” God may be seen in a theophany or anthropomorphism but His inner essence or nature is disclosed only in Jesus. **God the only Son** is literally “the unique God” or “the only begotten God” (*monogenēs theos*; cf. *monogenous*, “the one and only” in v. 14). John was probably ending his prologue by returning to the truth stated in verse 1 that the Word is God. Verse 18 is another statement affirming Christ’s deity: He is unique, the one and only God. The Son **is at the Father’s side**, thus revealing the intimacy of the Father and the Son (cf. the Word was “with God,” vv. 1–2). Furthermore, the Son **has made ... known** (*exēgēsato*, whence the English “exegeted”) the

Father. The Son is the “exegete” of the Father, and as a result of His work the nature of the invisible Father (cf. 4:24) is displayed in the Son (cf. 6:46).

II. Jesus’ Manifestation to the Nation (1:19–12:50)

This major part of John’s Gospel describes the public ministry of Jesus to the nation Israel. It is a “book of signs,” a narrative of seven of Jesus’ miracles that point to Him as the Messiah. Along with the signs are public discourses explaining the significance of the signs and two long private interviews (chaps. 3–4).

A. *Jesus’ early ministry (1:19–4:54).*

1. early testimonies to Jesus (1:19–34).

a. *John’s first witness (1:19–28).*

1:19. As in the Synoptic Gospels, the ministry of John the Baptist was so influential that the authorities in **Jerusalem** decided to investigate him. **The Jews** is the author’s title for the city’s leaders. The **priests and Levites** went to ask about his baptism and what he claimed for himself. 1:20–21. John said, **I am not the Christ** (i.e., the Messiah). (See comments on vv. 40–41 about the meaning of the title “Messiah.”) This was his confession, as stressed by the repetition of the verb (in Gr.) **confessed**.

Interestingly in response to their questions John’s answers were progressively shorter: “I am not the Christ” (v. 20); **I am not** (v. 21); **No** (v. 21). He did not want to talk about himself, for his function was to point to Another. John had an Elijah-type ministry. He appeared on the scene suddenly and even dressed like **Elijah**. He sought to turn people back to God as Elijah did in his day. And Malachi had predicted that Elijah would return before Messiah’s coming (Mal. 4:5). Therefore, many speculated that John was Elijah. **The Prophet** was expected because of Deuteronomy 18:15 (referring to Christ; cf. John 1:45). Some wrongly understood that the coming “prophet” was to be distinct from the Messiah (v. 24; 7:40–41).

1:22–23. **John replied** that he was not any of the expected prophetic figures. He explained, however, that his ministry was described in the Old Testament. He was **the voice** (*phōnē*), while Jesus is the Word (*Logos*). John’s function was one of preparation, and it was carried on in **the desert**. (On the meaning of John’s quotation from Isa. 40:3, see the comments on Matt. 3:3.)

1:24–25. The **Pharisees** were an important sect of Judaism. They numbered about 6,000 and were most influential. They held a strict interpretation of the Law and embraced many oral traditions. The Pharisees were the only minor group to survive the Jewish war of a.d. 66–70, and their teachings formed the basis for Talmudic Judaism. Their question to the Baptizer was, in essence, “Since you have no official title, **why** are you baptizing?”

1:26–27. John knew that his baptizing work was only anticipatory. He explained that another **One** was coming who was unknown to them. That coming **One** is so great that John considered himself unworthy to do even the lowliest service for Him (such as untying His **sandals**).

1:28. The site of **Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River** is now unknown. (It is not to be confused with another Bethany, home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, near Jerusalem.) As early as a.d. 200, Origen, when visiting Palestine, could not find it. A probable site is opposite Jericho.

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 466-467). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Word Became Flesh (1:1–18)

No other book in the Bible has a prologue as overtly theological as does the Gospel of John. First, John made a clear and decisive statement regarding the nature of Jesus: “the Word was God” and that “Word became flesh.” John wanted it known that Jesus Christ was fully God in human form. That is the meaning of “incarnation,” from the Latin *incarnatus*, which means made flesh. God has made Himself known through Christ. Christ was both “Word” and “flesh,” not one to the exclusion of the other, and thus was the perfect and only God-man. Christ made His “dwelling” with us, a word associated with “tent” or “tabernacle,” intimating the literalness of God’s coming to humanity. This word usage should not be lost on the reader, for the tabernacle of the Old Testament was an earthly building filled with the glory of God (Exod. 40:34–35).

In using the term “Word” (*logos*), John was using a term familiar to both Jews and Greeks, though each attributed a different meaning to the term. For the Greek mind the “Word” referred to the rational principle that supervised or governed the universe. To the Jew, “Word” was a reference to God. Thus John wanted to equate the “Word” with God while noting that the Word was distinct from the Father. John stated that Jesus was with God “in the beginning” and that through Christ “all things were made.” Jesus is therefore seen as co-eternal with God and as the Creator.

John then discussed the purpose of the Word becoming flesh, namely that Christ brought life, a life that serves as the “light” for all people. The life Christ offers is beyond that of mere human life; it is life eternal with God. Therefore, Jesus brought the light of truth and the life of salvation. The questions and concerns of this world that find no ultimate answers are met by the Light that pierces all darkness with the brilliance of truth, yet this truth has been rejected. The bitter irony of this should not be lost on the reader. John emphasized this irony, stating that though He created the world, the world did not recognize Him. Though He came to His own, His own did not receive Him. God has come to the world for acceptance and relationship. Those who accept the Light, who believe in the message Christ proclaimed about Himself, are given the “right to become the children of God.” To be born into the kingdom of God is not something achieved on human energy (see Eph. 2:8–9) but by the grace of the living God through Christ Jesus. This is to be balanced by the emphasis on the need to “receive” Christ. Though we bring nothing to God and contribute nothing to our salvation, the gift itself is dependent on our willingness to receive it from the one who offers it.

John’s Role (1:19–28)

The role of John the Baptist is explained with clarity in relation to Christ. John the Baptist was sent from God (1:6). John was not himself the Light (1:8). He came as a witness to Christ (1:7, 15).

John the Baptist offered the words of the prophet Isaiah about the nature of his identity: “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’ ” (see Isa. 40:3). Some had thought he might be Elijah, the great prophet who had never died but had been taken to be

with God (2 Kgs. 2:11). Many believed that Elijah would return to the earth in order to announce the coming end of the world. John denied being Elijah. A word should be mentioned, however, regarding Jesus' reference to John as Elijah in the Synoptics (Matt. 11:14; 17:10–13). What was at hand in Jesus' mind was how John was a fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Malachi 4:5 (see Luke 1:17).

What was the purpose of John's testimony? First, to fulfill prophecy (Isa. 40:3). Second, to call people to repentance. Third, to draw people's attention toward the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. What was the purpose of John's baptism? Clearly it was not Christian baptism, for that is the mark of one's acceptance of Christ as personal Lord and Savior. John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). It looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and served to prepare the people for the coming of the kingdom of God.

Allen, J. P. (1972). *John*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 666-667). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

God Comes to Man (John 1:1–28)

The passage—Matthew and Luke had already told of the birth events. John starts from further back. He wrote toward the end of the first century when some were skeptical that Jesus was God. Others doubted that he was truly man. John affirms both. He identifies Jesus as the eternal Son, the Word, agent of creation. He leaves no room for doubt.

Such is the nature of the famous prologue, verses 1–18, done in classic style. But his purpose was not speculation or debate. He established a base for the climax of verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (RSV). The rest of the chapter is a firsthand account of how Jesus the man related to other men. It is the way God wishes to act with his sons.

Special points—The first actor on the stage is John the Baptizer—always referred to as merely "John." It is noteworthy that the author of this Gospel, John the disciple, never refers to himself by name. He calls himself, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20), and "the other disciple" (20:4), and one of the "sons of Zebedee" (21:2). It is a good evidence of his authorship. One can be sure of the preparation young John received from the Baptizer. John was *his* disciple, and an apt one, before he was Jesus'. The forerunner surely taught his small group all he knew about the promised Messiah. On a wonderful day John the Baptist baptized that Messiah. And then there was silence. We know that Jesus was six weeks in the wilderness of temptation, but they did not know that. They had to be perplexed by his absence.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 1:1-28. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.