

The Word Becomes Flesh

John 1:1-14

SS Lesson for 07/03/2022

Devotional Scripture: John 3:16-21

OUTLINE

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Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Jesus is the Word of God (Rev 19:13)

God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus (Col 1:15-19)

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Jesus created and sustains all things through the powerful Word (Heb 1:2-3)

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Jesus not only created everything, but He holds them together (Col 1:16-18)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The beginning of John's Gospel is unlike that of the three other New Testament Gospels. Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy and the birth narrative of Jesus (Matthew 1:1–24), Luke's Gospel begins with two birth narratives (Luke 1:1–2:21), and Mark's Gospel skips straight to Jesus' adult ministry (Mark 1:1–20). But the introduction to John's Gospel differs dramatically. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called "synoptic" because of their similar perspectives on recounting the person and work of Jesus. John's Gospel stands apart from the others as the writer stresses Jesus' divine identity as the Son of God and Messiah (John 20:31). The introduction to John's Gospel draws the reader's attention in referring to the eternality of the Word of God. Throughout this week's Scripture text, John makes reference to "the Word" (John 1:1, 14). By using this designation, John is actually reflecting philosophical and rhetorical concepts common in his day. Specifically, John's use of the underlying Greek word for "Word"—*logos*, from which we get our English word *logic*—reflects the ways philosophers tried to make sense of the world. Pagan philosophers used the term to address the ways the pagan gods communicated with the cosmos and the created order. For pagans, the concept of "the Word" was an attempt to make sense of the world and the animating forces therein. However, John upends the pagan expectations. Instead of a distant animating life force or an obscure connection to supernatural "reason," John applies the concept of the Word to the eternal God of Israel. This God is the one through whom all creation came into being. This God has revealed himself specifically to his creation. That John would repurpose a concept used by pagan philosophers makes sense considering the context and audience of John's Gospel. The Gospel was likely composed in the second half of the first century by Jesus' own disciple John—"the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). This was "the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down" in the Gospel (21:24). In addition to this Gospel, John the apostle—not to be confused with John the Baptist—also wrote the New Testament epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John and the text of Revelation. We might assume that John wrote his Gospel to appeal to a broad audience, Jew and Gentile. If these were the collective audience of his Gospel, then John's emphasis on repurposing pagan philosophical concepts would be understandable; these communities would be familiar with such ideas.

Key Verse: John 1:3

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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.

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). 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.

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 marg.) 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). **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 Eng. “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).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Eternal Word (John 1:1-5)

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
- 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
- 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Word's possession of Deity (1-2)

Jesus was God in all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form (Col 2:9)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

Jesus is the very nature of God, yet took on human likeness (Phil 2:5-7)

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Jesus is the Word of God (Rev 19:13)

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus (Col 1:15-19)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

Jesus is the Creative Word (3)

God created all things by speaking them into existence (Ps 33:6)

6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Jesus created and sustains all things through the powerful Word (Heb 1:2-3)

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Everything created was created through and by the Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-4)

1:1 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.

Jesus not only created everything, but He holds them together (Col 1:16-18)

16 For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Jesus is the Word, the giver of life (4-5)

God gave Jesus the right to grant life (John 5:26)

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

Jesus is the path to eternal life (John 14:6)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus, the last Adam, provides a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45)

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

Jesus is the water of life (Rev 22:1)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb

The Presented Word (John 1:6-14)

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.
8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Presented Word through the sending of John (6)

God had Isaiah to prophecy about John (Isa 40:3)

3 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

God Himself prophesied about John (Mal 3:1)

1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

When John did come, he spoke of the coming of Jesus (Luke 3:15-16)

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The Presented Word through Repentance (7)

Part of the preparation for Jesus was John's presenting repentance to the people (Acts 13:24)

24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

God prepared John, during his time in the desert, to preach about repentance (Matt 3:1-2)

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

John baptized for repentance (Acts 19:3-4)

3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. 4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

The Presented Word through Testimony (7-8)

John told of how salvation would come through Jesus (Acts 13:24-26)

24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. 25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.

Jesus called John's testimony valid (John 5:32-34)

32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. 33 "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved.

God's preparation and promises are always on time and faithful (2 Pet 3:9)

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The Presented Word through the recognition that Jesus is the light (9-10)

Jesus is the light of salvation (Ps 27:1)

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

Jesus has the light dwelling in Him (Dan 2:22)

He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

Jesus is the light of the world (John 12:46)

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Jesus will eternally be the light of the new Heaven and Earth (Rev 21:23)

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

The Presented Word that Jesus is the path to being a child of God (11-13)

Child of God through faith in Jesus (Gal 3:26)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

Child of God through the redemption by Jesus (Gal 4:4-5)

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Child of God through predestination by God through Jesus (Eph 1:5)

He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

The Presented Word through being the glory of God (14)

At the transfiguration Jesus physically showed His glory (Matt 17:2)

There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

Jesus' first sign revealed His glory (John 2:11)

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Isaiah spoke of Jesus' glory through prophecy (John 12:40-41)

40 "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-- and I would heal them." 41 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

God gave us His glory through Jesus (2 Cor 4:6)

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

In the Beginning: The Word and The Father (1:1-2)

In the beginning God...(Genesis 1:1).

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

Matthew and Luke begin with the birth of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, and Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. John goes all the way back to **"the beginning."** The first words of John's Gospel, **"In the beginning..."**, bring to mind the account of creation in Genesis 1. The phrase, **"in the beginning,"** both in the English and in the Greek,¹ is the same in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. This cannot be merely coincidental; it must be intentional. When Moses wrote the Book of Genesis, he began, **"In the beginning God..."** John is doing virtually the same thing in the first two verses of his Gospel.

In this first chapter of his Gospel, John does not mention the name **"Jesus"** until verse 17, and then not again until verse 29. He does not say, nor can he, that **"Jesus"** was in the beginning. **"Jesus"** is the name given to the God-man, born of the virgin Mary. It is His human name, which is given Him only after His incarnation. In attempting to teach this text, I have frequently fumbled for my words when referring to our Lord. I find myself sometimes using another expression, "the second person of the Godhead." This is because our Lord always existed with God and as God, as the "second person of the Godhead," yet He took on human flesh at a point in time. In John 1:1-3, John is speaking of our Lord's pre-existence as "the second person of the Godhead." When John refers to our Lord here, he calls Him **"the Word."**² By and large, the terms **"Messiah," "Son of God,"** and **"Jesus"** are only appropriate when referring to our Lord after His incarnation.³ Our Lord has always existed as God, and He has always existed in unity and fellowship with God the Father. But He did not become God incarnate (Jesus) until the incarnation, described by Matthew and Luke.

What John tells us in the first two verses of his Gospel is mind-boggling: *Jesus is God*. Before He took on human flesh, **"the Word"** existed eternally as God, and in fellowship with God the Father. It is important that we grasp this fact. John's words cannot be reduced to mean anything else, to mean anything less. *Our Lord is God. He is eternal. He existed in the very beginning, and He has ever existed with the Father.* This is what John expects us to understand him to be saying, and it is what he hopes to convince us is true.

The most obvious and important connection John makes is this: *The God who created the universe is the One who was found lying in a Bethlehem manger*. John wants us to know that the **"Jesus"** he introduces is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. *More than this, the Jesus who is the Messiah is the Jesus who is God*. Our Lord did not "begin to be" in Bethlehem. He did not even have His origins in Genesis 1 and 2, when God created the world. He was there; He already existed when the world was created. He was there *with* God. He was there *as* God.

Are we reading something into the Bible that isn't there? Not at all! This affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ is constantly made in the Gospel of John. Jesus claims not only to be God, but to have come down from the Father in heaven. This is what those who trust in Him come to believe. This is what His enemies seek to deny:

¹ In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the phrase in Genesis 1:1 is the same as the phrase in the Greek text of John 1:1.

² "He does not bring the term 'son' into his opening sentences at all; instead, he speaks first of the Word. There was no danger of this being misunderstood; Old Testament readers would pick up the reference at once. God's Word in the Old Testament is His creative utterance, His power in action fulfilling His purpose. The Old Testament depicted God's utterance, the actual statement of His purpose, as having power in itself to effect the thing purposed. Genesis 1 tells us how at creation 'God said, *Let there be...and there was...*' (Gen. 1:3). 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made...he spake, and it was done' (Ps. 33:6, 9). The Word of God is thus God at work." J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 48.

³ It is true that one might speak of the "Messiah" or the "Son of God" in a prophetic sense, before the incarnation.

“I have both seen and testified that this one is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49)

“No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man” (John 3:13).

“The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all” (John 3:31).

For this reason the Jewish authorities were trying even harder to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the desert, just as it is written, ‘***He gave them bread from heaven to eat.***’⁴ 32 Then Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father is giving you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:31-33).

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 6:38).

47 I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, and they died. 50 This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”...58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like your ancestors ate and died. The one who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:47-51,58)

28 Then Jesus shouted out while teaching in the temple, “You both know me and know where I come from!” And I have not come on my own initiative, but the one who sent me is true. You do not know him, 29 but I know him, because I have come from him and he sent me” (John 7:28-29).

Jesus answered, “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. But you people do not know where I came from or where I am going” (John 8:14).

Jesus replied, “You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world” (John 8:23).

40 But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this!” 41 You people are doing the deeds of your father.” Then they said to Jesus, “We were not born as a result of sexual immorality! We have only one Father, God himself. 42 Jesus replied, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am now here. I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me” (John 8:40-42).

56 Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.” 57 Then the Jewish people who had been listening to him replied, “You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!” (John 8:56-58)

Then some of the Pharisees began to say, “This man is not from God, because he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such miraculous signs?” So there was a division among them (John 9:16).

29 We know that God has spoken to Moses! We do not know where this man comes from!” 30 The man replied, “This is a remarkable thing, that you do not know where he comes from, and yet he caused me to see!” (John 9:29-30)

“If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (John 9:33).

1 Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come for him to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to

⁴ In the NET Bible, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are indicated by a combination of boldface and italic type. Less direct allusions to Old Testament passages are indicated by italic type only.

the end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he should betray Jesus. 3 Jesus, because he knew that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God. . . (John 13:1-3).

"Do not let not your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in Me" (John 14:1).

"Now we know that you know everything and do not need anyone to ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you have come from God" (John 16:30).

"Now they understand that everything you have given me is from you. 8 because I have given them the words you have given me. They accepted them and really understand that I came from you, and believed that you sent me" (John 17:7-8).

The Jewish religious leaders replied, "We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of god!" (John 19:7)

Jesus replied to her, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).

You may remember from my previous lesson (1) that years ago I was teaching the Gospel of John at a Bible study in our home when a young couple began to attend. By the third chapter of John, the woman blurted out, "If I didn't know better, I'd think Jesus was claiming to be God." It is very clear that Jesus does claim to be God. It is also clear that John is attempting to convince us that Jesus is God. This is the truth that the enemies of our Lord could simply not tolerate.

What John teaches us here about the deity of Jesus Christ is consistent with what the Old Testament taught about the promised Messiah. The Old Testament prophets indicated that the coming Savior was going to be a man, of the seed of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, and David (Genesis 49:8-10; 2 Samuel 7:12-14). They also indicated that the Savior would be the eternal God:

6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7, NKJV).

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old,

From everlasting" (Micah 5:2, NKJV).

The New Testament writers clearly agree with John in affirming that the Jesus of the Gospels, the Jesus whom the church worships as Savior and Lord, was not only a sinless man, but also perfect and undiminished deity:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, 16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him. 18 He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead so that he himself may become first in all things. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him 20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—whether things on the earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:15-20).

1 After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, 2 in these last days he has spoken to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world. 3 The son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence and sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, *he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

8 But of the son, *Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and a righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom.* 9 *You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. So God, your God, has anointed you over your companions with the oil of rejoicing.*”

10 And, *“You founded the earth in the beginning, Lord, and the heavens are the works of your hands* 11 *They will perish; but you continue. And they will all grow old like a garment.* 12 *and like a robe you will fold them up and like a garment they will be changed; but you are the same and your years will never run out”* (Hebrews 1:8-10).

9 I, John, your brother and the one who shares with you in the persecution, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island named Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day when I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches—to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.” 12 I turned to locate the voice that was speaking with me, and when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the lampstands was one *like a son of man*. He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest. 14 His head and hair were as white as wool, even as white as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame. 15 His feet were like polished bronze that has been refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword extended out of his mouth. His face shone like the sun shining at full strength. 17 When I saw him I fell down at his feet as though I were dead, but he placed his right hand on me and said, “Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, 18 namely, the one who lives! I was dead, but look, now I am alive—forever and ever—and I have the keys of death and Hades!” (Revelation 1:9-18).⁵

The Word and the World (1:3-5)

3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 *In him was life,*⁶ and the life was the light of mankind. 5 And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

Verses 1 and 2 place our Lord at the beginning—in fact, before the beginning. He was there with the Father before the world existed. Now, in verse 3, John goes on to show that our Lord was not only present at the beginning, but He was the source of all that had a beginning. The **“Word”** was not passive, but active, the One through whom all things came into existence. He was not created; He was the Creator. He did not merely create all things *for* God, He created all things *as* God. All things came into being through Him. The **“Word”** spoke, and all things came into existence. As the Creator, He is the origin, the source of life.⁷

John now draws upon the imagery of **“light”** introduced in Genesis 1, applying it once again to the **“Word.”** In Genesis, one of the first things Moses tells us is that God called light into existence (1:3). God then separated the **“light”** from **“darkness”** (1:4). After creating **“light,”** God created **“life”** (Genesis 1:11f.) John draws a parallel to the original creation at which **“the Word”** was present and active. Almost without recognizing it, we are transported in time from the original creation (John 1:3) to the appearance of our Lord in human history at the incarnation (verses 4-5ff.). When the **“Word”** came into the world, the world was in a state of chaos, spiritually speaking. When the **“Word”** appeared, He was the **“light”** that illuminated the darkness, revealing the righteousness of God and exposing man’s sin. This had the effect of separating the **“light”** from the **“darkness.”** The darkness observed the light, but did not **“master”** it (verse 5).

That **“light,”** which appeared at the coming of our Lord continues to shine. There are several ways to translate verse 5, as seen below:

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (NIV).

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (NRS).

The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it (NEB).

The crucial word in the NET Translation is the word **“mastered”**.⁸ **“And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it”** (emphasis mine). The Greek word can have the sense of “grasping” or

⁵ See also 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 5:20.

⁶ See footnote 7 above. These words are an allusion to Psalm 36:9.

⁷ See Colossians 1:15-20, cited above.

⁸ “Mastered” seems to best convey and allow for the two possible meanings of the Greek word used here.

“comprehending” mentally, but it can also have the sense of “overpowering” (as the marginal note in the NASB indicates) or “overcoming.” Either nuance of the word would be acceptable in this context.⁹ Jesus came into the world as the true “light,” but lost men were not able to grasp it (compare 1 Corinthians 3:14). Or, even more strongly, Jesus came into the world, illuminating its sin and need for redemption, and the world chose to remain in its sin, thus seeking to oppose and even to overcome the light, but they could not do so.

John introduces “light” as a theme that will recur throughout this Gospel (John 3:18-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36; 12:46). It is a prophetic theme, which is highlighted in Matthew (4:13-16; 5:14-16) and Luke (1:76-79; 2:25-32; 16:8) as well. Jesus came as the “light,” and He left His disciples and His church behind to reflect that “light” in His absence. The world’s efforts to suppress the “light” have failed, and thus the light continues to shine, even till the present time, through the people of God:

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. 6 for God, who said, “*Let light shine out of darkness,*” is the one who shined in our hearts to give us the light of the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

7 Therefore, do not be partakers with them, 8 for you were at one time darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light—9 for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention. 13 But all things being exposed by the light are made evident. 14 For everything made evident is light, and for this reason it says, “‘Awake! O sleeper. Rise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you!’” (Ephesians 5:7-14).

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world 16 by holding on to the word of life so that I will have a reason to celebrate in the day of Christ because I did not run or work in vain (Philippians 2:14-16).

Jesus and John: The Word and the Witness (1:6-8)

6 A man came,¹⁰ sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to testify about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

John the Baptist was a very prominent and respected individual. Many came to him to hear him preach, even though his message was a call to repentance. They were content to follow John, and even open to the possibility that he was the Messiah:

People from all over Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan river, as they confessed their sins (Mark 1:5).

While the people were filled with anticipation, and they all pondered in their hearts whether perhaps John could be the Christ (Luke 3:15).

33 “You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. 34 (I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved.) 35 He was a lamp that was burning and shining, and you wanted to rejoice greatly for a short time in his light” (John 5:33-35).

The amazing thing about John the Baptist is that he never performed a miracle or a sign; he only preached and baptized:

⁹ Verses 9 and 10 seem to combine the two nuances of the word, so that the world neither “knew” Him who was the light nor “received” Him as the light.

¹⁰ There is a clear contrast here between the Word and John. The Word *was*; John *came*. The term translated “came” in verse 6 is employed three times in John 1:3, where in each case it refers to things created, things which came into being at the will of God. John came (into being, we might say); the Word *was*. Morris writes, “Jesus ‘was’ in the beginning. John ‘came into existence.’ The contrast is continued when John is described as ‘a man,’ for Jesus has already been spoken of as ‘the Word.’” Morris, p. 88.

40 Jesus went away across the Jordan River again to the place where John had been baptizing at an earlier time, and he stayed there. 41 Many came to him and began saying, “*John performed no miraculous sign,* but everything John said about this man was true!” 42 And many believed in Jesus there (John 10:40-42, emphasis mine).

The apostle John turns his attention to John the Baptist in verses 6-8. If I am correct in assuming that John the Apostle was the second disciple of John the Baptist who left him to follow Jesus (John 1:35-42), then it is little wonder that the author of this Gospel has something to say about John the Baptist. How interesting that the Apostle John does not refer to the Baptist here as “John the Baptist,” but simply as “**John.**” The emphasis of verses 6-8 is not on John as a “baptizer,” but on John as a “**witness.**” John came as a witness to the “**light,**” that all men might put their trust in Him. He was not the light, but only a witness to the light. In his reference to John the Baptist, the Apostle John was careful to point out the Baptist’s subordinate role, as was the Baptist himself (see verses 19ff.).

John the Baptist’s task was to bear witness to the “**light.**” His mission was the same as his disciple, John the Apostle: to focus his ministry on Christ, so that men might come to believe in Him for salvation. The “**light**” to which John had been bearing witness had not dawned as yet, nor had Jesus yet been identified as that “**light.**” John could only speak of the “**light**” as One who was coming, One who was yet to be revealed.

The “Light” and Lost Sinners (1:9-13)

9 The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was created through him, but the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become God’s children, 13 children not fathered by human descent or by human desire or a husband’s decision, but by God.

John himself is not the light to which he bears witness. The light to which he bears witness is the *true*¹¹ Light. He is the fulfillment of all that “**light**” foreshadowed. The “**Word**” is the source of light; He is the One who called light into existence (Genesis 1:3). After the creation account in Genesis, “**light**” becomes a prominent Old Testament theme. Consider some of the Old Testament “**light**” texts that foreshadow our Lord’s coming:

“*And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, A morning without clouds, Like the tender grass springing out of the earth, By clear shining after rain*” (2 Samuel 23:4, NKJV).

For You will light my lamp; The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness (Psalm 18:28, NKJV).

The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD *is* the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1, NKJV)

Who cover *Yourselves* with light as *with* a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain (Psalm 104:2, NKJV).

In the Old Testament prophets, God’s “**light**” becomes a dominant messianic theme:

The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined (Isaiah 9:2, NKJV).

So the Light of Israel will be for a fire, And his Holy One for a flame; It will burn and devour His thorns and his briers in one day (Isaiah 10:17, NKJV).

I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them (Isaiah 42:16, NKJV).

Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth’ “ (Isaiah 49:6, NKJV).

¹¹ Of the 27 occurrences of the word always (in the KJV) rendered “true,” other writers employ the term but 5 times; all the rest of the occurrences are in one of John’s writings. The word “true” can mean “true as opposed to what is false” (see Luke 16:11). It can also (as here) mean “true” in the sense that it is the ultimate and final fulfillment of earlier prototypes. Thus, our Lord is the true light (John 1:9; 1 John 2:8), the true bread (6:32), the true vine (15:1), and the true witness (Revelation 3:14).

Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard (Isaiah 58:8, NKJV).

1 Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.² For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.³ The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising (Isaiah 60:1-3, NKJV).

19 “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory. 20 Your sun shall no longer go down, Nor shall your moon withdraw itself; For the LORD will be your everlasting light, And the days of your mourning shall be ended” (Isaiah 60:19-20, NKJV).

He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what *is* in the darkness, And light dwells with Him (Daniel 2:22, NKJV).

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD *will be* a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case And executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness (Micah 7:8-9, NKJV).

When John tells us that Jesus is the “**light**,” he is telling us that our Lord is the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes, realized in Messiah, who was symbolized and characterized by light in the Old Testament. Jesus is the “**true light**,” that is, the final consummation of that “**light**” foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The appearance of the “*true Light*” established a standard of righteousness which exposes the sins of those who walk in darkness:

19 “Now this is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. 20 “For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. 21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God” (John 3:19-21).

11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.. 12 For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention. 13 But all things being exposed by the light are made evident. 14 For everything made evident is light, and for this reason it says:

“Awake, O sleeper. Rise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you” (Ephesians 5:11-14).

The “**true light**” came into the world, but the world’s response to that light was not what we would have hoped. The Word, who existed before the world was created, who brought the world into existence, who brought forth the light, came into the world which He made and yet the world did not know Him. The one who was both the Word and the Light came into the world He created, and this world did not want Him.

He came to possess what was His, but even His own people did not receive Him. There is a clear play on words in verse 11. Some English translations do not even indicate that there are two different words employed by John, with a slightly different meaning. They translate both Greek terms by the same English words, “**His own:**”

He came to **His own**, and **His own** did not receive Him (verse 11, NKJB, emphasis mine).

He came to **His own**, and those who were **His own** did not receive Him (verse 11, NASB, emphasis mine).

He came unto **his own**, and **his own** received him not (verse 11, KJV, emphasis mine).

The NET Bible renders this verse the most accurately:

He came to what was his own,¹² but his own people did not receive him (NET).

How ironic that the One who created all things should come to possess what was His, and yet He was rejected by His own people. How similar this sounds to our Lord’s parable of the “wicked tenant farmers” in Matthew 21:33-46. It is indeed a dark picture, one that reveals the wickedness of men who would reject their Creator (see Romans 1:18-32).

¹² I am inclined to agree with Leon Morris, who renders this “he came home,” but I will take this matter up in our study of the “cleansing of the temple” (John 2:12-22). Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 96.

There is good news, however. The rejection of “**the Light**” by His own people did not at all thwart the purposes of God. John is not simply telling us the story of “God in the Hands of Angry Sinners”;¹³ in verses 12 and 13, he will tell us about those sinners who are in the hands of a gracious God. Not all will reject the Light that has come into the world. Those who receive Him are given the authority to be called God’s children—twice His: they are His by virtue of creation, and His by virtue of sonship. This is true of everyone who places faith in His name.¹⁴

Lest anyone dare to give themselves credit for being among the company of the saved, let them listen to the words of John in verse 13, which clearly teach that *salvation is God’s work, not our own, God’s choosing us, more than our choosing Him.*¹⁵

“Children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband’s decision,¹⁶ but by God.”

There is considerable discussion about what these words mean. Literally, the text reads, “Who were born, not of *bloods*. . . .” Rather than spend time exploring all the options, it is more profitable to take the broader view here. All three expressions, “**of bloods**,” “**will of the flesh**,” and “**will of man**” describe human origins from the standpoint of human initiative and human action. John seems to draw together all the expressions he can think of which his readers accept as the source of human conception and birth. Both in terms of the actual joining of cells, and in terms of the motivations and initiatives behind this union, *John tells us that our spiritual birth does not originate from, or through, human intent or endeavor. Rather, those who are born into the family of God as His children are those who are “born of God.” God is the Creator; He is the ultimate cause, the One through whose will and work men become His children.* This will be played out in greater detail in our Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3. Put concisely in biblical terms:

“Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9; Psalm 3:8, NKJV).

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44; see 6:65).

For from him and through him and to Him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:36).

The Word and Human Flesh (1:14-18)

14 Now the Word became flesh and lived¹⁷ among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the only [begotten]¹⁸ One, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father. 15 John testified about him and cried out, “This one was the one about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is greater than I am, because he existed before me.’” 16 For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The only One, himself God, who is in the presence of the Father, has made God known.

These verses are the climax of all that John has been leading up to in his prologue. Up to this point, we have been told that “the Word” is a person who is eternal, who is in fact a member of the Godhead. He was there at

¹³ This is R. C. Sproul’s title for a most excellent chapter in his book, R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985), chapter 9, pp. 221-234.

¹⁴ “The ‘name’ meant much more to people of antiquity than it does to us. . . . For men then it stood for the whole personality. When, for example, the Psalmist spoke of loving the name of God (Ps. 5:11), or when he prayed, ‘The name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high’ (Ps. 20:1), he did not have in mind simply the uttering of the name. He was thinking of all that ‘God’ means. The name in some way expressed the whole person.” Morris, p. 99.

¹⁵ See also John 15:16. This is not to say that we have no choice to make; it is to say that His choice of us precedes our choice of Him.

¹⁶ I paraphrase the words, “a husband’s decision,” “the twinkle in a husband’s eye.”

¹⁷ The Greek word, rendered “lived” would literally be rendered “tabernacled.” This can hardly be coincidental. John again plays upon Old Testament history and imagery. The tabernacle was God’s means of dwelling in the midst of His people. How much better our Lord’s incarnation was to the Old Testament tabernacle.

¹⁸ The word “begotten” is omitted in the NET Bible, but I believe it must be present. It is deeply embedded in the Greek word, and it is a key element in the messianic scheme in the Bible. Begetting can refer to physical birth (Hebrews 11:17), and to spiritual birth (1 Corinthians 4:5; Philemon 1:10). In its messianic sense, to be “begotten” is not to be “born,” but to be appointed and enthroned as God’s King (see Psalm 2:7). God the Father did not quote Psalm 2:7 at the birth of our Lord, but later (see Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5).

creation; indeed, He was the Creator. He is distinct from, yet intimately in fellowship with, God the Father. He is the source of light and life. He is the One to whom John the Baptist bore witness, foretelling His appearance. He is the One whom His own people rejected, but those who receive Him become children of God. Those who do become God's children do so not out of human volition or effort; they are divinely "conceived." We have not yet been told who this person is. We are now told in verses 14-18.

Until now, the One John has been introducing to us has been identified only as "**the Word.**" This "**Word**" is also the "**Light**" which shines upon men. Illumination can occur from a great distance, as the light of the sun shines on us from afar. But John is now about to tell us an astounding fact: the "**Word**" became flesh and lived among men. Here is something absolutely unique to human history. In the pagan religions, the "gods" have come down to the earth in some form, but never was there an incarnation like that of our Lord. So too, in some false religions, men are promised that they will become gods, but never that God would take on humanity as John describes here.¹⁹

The "**Word**" lived (tabernacled)²⁰ among His people by adding perfect humanity to His undiminished deity. Thus He manifested His glory to men. God's "**glory**" was once displayed by means of the tabernacle:

42 *"This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. 43 And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory"* (Exodus 29:42-43, NKJV).

33 And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. 34 Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:33-35, NKJV).

At the incarnation, God "**tabernacled**" among His people by means of His Son, and thus John can say, "**We saw his glory—the glory of the only [begotten] One, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father**" (John 1:14; see also 1 John 1:1-4).

John says, "**we saw his glory.**" The "**we**" must certainly be the apostles, although others may be included as well. The transfiguration of our Lord would be one of the more dramatic demonstrations of His glory (see Luke 9:30-32; 2 Peter 1:16-19). Another instance would be the turning of water into wine (John 2:11) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:4, 40). The greatest display of the glory of God in Christ up until now would be His death, burial, and resurrection (see John 12:28; 13:31; 17:5, 22, 24; 1 Corinthians 15:43). It may well be that John's use of the word "**glory**" should force us to reconsider and redefine "**glory**," so that it encompasses things we do not normally associate with glory. As One who came forth "**from the Father**," who was "**full of grace and truth**," we would certainly expect Him to reveal God's glory.

This One John has been introducing is Jesus Christ. He is the One of whom John the Baptist bore witness. He is the One who is greater than all. He is greater than John the Baptist; He existed before him. He is greater than the law. He is "**full of grace and truth**" (verse 14). The law was a revelation of God, written in stone. The Lord Jesus Christ is the revelation of God, manifest in human flesh, who tabernacled among men. He is the full and final revelation of God:

1 After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, 2 in these last days he has spoken to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world. 3 The son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, *he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:-1-3).

Jesus Christ is greater than the law because He is the full revelation of God (when the law only partially revealed Him). Furthermore, His grace is greater than the grace provided by the law: "For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another [literally grace upon grace]. 17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16,17).

¹⁹ It is interesting to consider Satan's strategies in this regard. At the fall of man, described in Genesis 3, Satan promises man (technically, he promised Eve this) that he can become like God (see Genesis 3:5). In Genesis 6:1-4, it would appear that Satan is seeking to bring about a kind of "incarnation" by having fallen angels cohabit with the "daughters of men."

²⁰ See footnote 19 above.

While there is a sense in which we can contrast “grace” and “law,” it is also true that the law was God’s gracious gift to men. The law is not devoid of grace. Rather, through Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, God manifests greater grace.²¹ Thus, John can say that in Christ we have received “**grace upon grace.**” Moses was the instrument through whom “the grace of law” was given; Jesus Christ is the instrument through whom “**grace upon grace**” is given.

In the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, the invisible God is now visible to men. Moses longed to see God more fully and was granted a partial glimpse (Exodus 33:17—34:7). In Christ, we see God dwelling among men in human flesh. It is more than we could ever have hoped. It is more than we shall ever be able to grasp. It is a wonder that will inspire our worship throughout time and eternity.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/what-child-john-11-18>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

So much of the work of ministering and leading a church requires in-person work. Meeting church members for fellowship, praying for them in the hospital, visiting families with newborns. These and other occurrences are commonplace in ministry and require physical presence. The central theme of the Christian faith required a similar kind of physical, embodied presence. God extended his love and grace to humanity in an extraordinary way—the Word of God became flesh and dwelt within his creation. This act, beyond human comprehension, was an extraordinary gift of God’s embodied presence. In response, people can accept his gift with humility, gratitude, and faith. As a result of this gift, there is a change of identity to becoming the children of God. God’s children are tasked with extending his love to others. In an increasingly “disembodied” human experience—demonstrated by the frequent use of smartphones and social media—God’s children can intentionally chose to love others by their physical presence.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Jesus is the light of the world. Without Him, the entire universe would be lifeless, lost, and utterly dark (Colossian 1:15-17).

The Word - When John penned his Gospel, he did not begin with Jesus in the manger. No, he started before time began. John introduced his Gospel message by identifying Jesus as the "Word." He declared that Jesus was with God at the very onset of time. When the Jewish people read this reference to Jesus, they knew exactly what John implied. The "Word" (logos) meant God Himself.

Life - The Scriptures specifically identify Jesus as the source of life. John explained the meaning of life in two ways. First, physically, Jesus keeps everything in the world breathing and existing. Second, Jesus is the foundation of all spirituality. When an individual opens his or her heart to Jesus, trusting Him, and understanding His sacrifice on Calvary, that person is given a new life as the foundation of their salvation. Jesus becomes their light, living inside their heart through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Is the True Light - When love, goodness, or any other positive things happen in the world, we remember Jesus is the wellspring of all good and perfect gifts. Sadly, humanity is fallen, sinful, and rejects the Creator. But for those who say they believe in God's message, the Gospel, and His messenger, Jesus Christ, these are the ones the Father gives the right to bear His name. Human beings are born once of an earthly mother. But God offers a second birth, a spiritual birth. For the Christian, the Lord becomes Father, and He nurtures His children to behave like the Son. This transaction is spiritual. Man cannot work hard enough to get into God's family, nor do enough good deeds. Only by accepting Jesus as Savior can a man enter the kingdom of God. God put flesh on His creative Word, and the Word pitched a tent and lived right alongside humanity, just like the tabernacle traveled with the Hebrew children in the middle of their camp. The Lord's presence in the tabernacle was their floodlight directing them to the Promised Land. John paints the same picture of Jesus. He illuminated God's truth for us. He is now the floodlight for Christians to make it to their heavenly home.

²¹ The writer to the Hebrews would prefer the term “better.”