

**The Bible Notebook**

**THE GOSPEL  
ACCORDING TO JOHN**

*That you may know Him*  
*(John 20:31)*

Volume 1

*Chapters 1-3*

By

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# DEDICATION

To

Jacob Sean Sanders

*My Favorite Grandson & Abigail's Favorite Brother*

# INTRODUCTION

**SCRIPTURE.** The translation used in this study of the Gospel According to John is the Holman Christian Standard Bible. For most of my ministry, I read from various translations and “versions” of the Bible, preached from the King James Version, and studied from the New American Standard Bible. For a number of years, I would leave my study and cross over to the nearest men’s Bible class during Sunday School and listen to Lavelle Hammett, the principal of the local high school, teach the Bible lesson. Later, his son-in-law, Kenny Herring, who taught in another school five miles away, taught that class. The Scripture in our Sunday School books was printed in both the KJV and the NIV (New International Version). There were times when a question about a word or phrase would generate a discussion, with the men suggesting various solutions. Then, a very quiet member of the class, Robert Sanders, another teacher, would say, “I have the New American Standard Bible and it says...” He would read the verse and as I observed, I would see the men look at each other and begin to nod. They understood. That was a simple observation I noted with appreciation.

I am a member of the faculty of Cambridge Graduate School, whose founder and president, Dr. Gene Jeffries, has always required the New American Standard Bible for all classes. When I was elected to the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I discovered that the Bible Society that owns the copyright to the NIV had pulled our right to publish that version. The Broadman and Holman Division (the Bible and book publishing branch) and LifeWay Church Resources (the division that publishes the literature) contacted the organization that owns the copyright to the NASB, but could not get permission to use it. It was then that LifeWay began the costly process of publishing a totally new translation, working with Dr. Ed Blum, the General Editor. Dr. Blum met with us for my first committee meeting as a member of the Broadman and Holman Committee, and later in the day Dr. Jimmy Draper, President of LifeWay Christian Resources at the time, brought him to my table to answer questions posed by a trustee from Miami.

It was my privilege to sit on the Broadman and Holman Committed for several years, and finally to serve as the chairman before rotation off the board. One of our primary commitments was to produce a word for word translation rather than a phrase for phrase rendering (NIV and others). The HCSB is the latest translation and it is from the oldest Bible publisher in America. For the first time ever a translation was done by scholars who were in immediate contact with each other through the Internet. Also for the first time, translators could use their computers to check for accuracy and consistency. The Scripture for this study of the Gospel of John will be the Holman Christian Standard Bible, except where otherwise noted.

**AUTHOR.** For an overview of debates as to the authorship of the book we commonly call The Gospel According to John, one may consult a variety of commentaries, dictionaries, and other reference works that deal with the introduction to various books of the Bible. In this study it is assumed that The Fourth Gospel was written by John, the brother of James, the son of Zebedee, who refers to himself simply as the disciple Jesus loved. This is the disciple who stood with Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross, the one to whom Jesus committed the care of His mother,

rather than her own surviving sons. If some publisher had decided to publish a book on someone named Jesus who had been crucified in some remote part of the Roman Empire over half a century earlier, this John would have been his first choice to write that book. All the other apostles had been martyred, leaving only John as the ideal person to give an eyewitness account of many of the things Jesus said and did. In fact, John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would begin the First Epistle of John by stating that he was writing about One he and the other disciples had seen with their own eyes, touched with their own hands, and heard with their own ears. John was uniquely qualified to write about Jesus, but that is not why he wrote the Fourth Gospel. This Gospel is the product of the mind of the Holy Spirit. John was the human instrument, the Holy Spirit the divine Author.

**DATE.** It is also assumed here that those commentaries that place the date at or about A. D. 86 are right in that conclusion. This writer also believes the three Epistles of John were probably written at the end of that decade, and that the Revelation was written about A. D. 96.

**PURPOSE.** It is a great advantage to us that John himself spells out very clearly the purpose of this Gospel account: “But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, HCSB).

**DOCUMENTATION.** Credit will be given when this writer quotes from any source, with a significant change in documentation because of the nature of this study. Traditional documentation is used in my commentary of Philippians (*UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*) and in certain other commentaries. However, many of my Bible studies prepared with the Internet in mind, so I identify the source along with the quote in the body of the study. For example, I will identify *The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament*, and then after that I will simply use the abbreviation (NCWB) at the end of the quotation. I may note that a word is defined by the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, from the *Bible Navigator*, Electronic Bible Library, LifeWay Christian Resources, and after that use the abbreviation “HBD”.

**THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK.** For a number of years, I had prepared verse by verse Bible studies as I prepared to teach various books of the Bible. In time, I adopted the umbrella term, THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK for the collection. That is exactly what these studies are: My Bible Notebook. A few of them may be considered commentaries, complete with traditional documentation, but most were prepared with the layperson and the bi-vocational pastor in mind. It has always been my desire to see THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK become a quick reference for a busy pastor who is capable of much deeper research than I. Most of the studies may be viewed on the PastorLife.Com web site, edited by Dr. Mike Minnix for the Georgia Baptist Convention. I also have a companion series, THE SERMON NOTEBOOK, and over 150 sermons have been forwarded to Dr. Minnix for him to upload them to the PastorLife.Com web site.

**JOHN.** John and his brother James were working with their father Zebedee on his fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, probably mending nets, or unloading fish, when Jesus of Nazareth walked by and said, “Follow Me.” They followed Him. When we are in heaven with them we may ask why they

would have left their father and their work to follow One who offered them no earthly rewards or incentives. All we are told is that they, like their contemporaries, Peter and Andrew, left their nets and followed Him. Even though John does not call attention to himself, it seems likely that John was among those disciples of John the Baptist when he proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God.

It is the opinion of this writer that John may have been the youngest of the apostles Jesus called, not that such speculation has any significance in the study of this book, but I believe it fits. What is obvious is that John was divinely called to follow Jesus, intensively trained to serve Him, and uniquely commissioned to take up the cross and follow His Lord.

As mentioned above, The Sermon Notebook parallels The Bible Notebook. In The Sermon Notebook, I have eighteen sermons on the cross, one of which focuses on the cross John was called to bear. While the purpose was not to show that John was uniquely prepared to write this Gospel account of the life of Christ, a few excerpts from that sermon makes the point. In the first place, John could testify to what Matthew was inspired to write: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, **“If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it (Matt 16:24-25). He heard Him with his own ears, and took up his cross and followed Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” That is exactly what the cross meant to Bonhoeffer, and that is what it mean to John, the beloved disciple.

As a young disciple was far from the mature disciple who would be inspired to write the Scripture that the church and the world would read until Jesus’ return. In other words, he was young and immature and he had a long way to go before he would become the apostle Jesus called him to be. John and his brother James fished with their father Zebedee on the Sea of Galilee. We cannot be sure, but it seems that their mother was Salome, and that she may well have been the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). If so, Jesus was their first cousin.

In the Gospels, James is always mentioned first, probably because he was the older brother. They were usually listed first, along with Peter and Andrew, in the list of apostles. Jesus gave the sons of Zebedee a nickname: “He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, He gave the name Peter; and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, He gave the name “Boanerges” [that is, “Sons of Thunder”] (Mark 3:16-17). Perhaps this brief account reveals the reason for that name:

When the days were coming to a close for Him to be taken up, He determined to journey to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of Him, and on the way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for Him. But they did not welcome Him, because He determined to journey to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

In his youth, John, along with his brother James sought preeminence among the apostles. The Holy

Spirit inspired writers to write the truth, not whitewash saints. If a human being had been trying to create a new religion, there would have been a temptation to leave out certain shameful episodes in the lives of both Abraham nor David. There would have been the same temptation in revealing the character of James and John, but Mark was inspired to write the truth about them:

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him and said, ‘Teacher, we want You to do something for us if we ask You.’”

“What do you want Me to do for you?” He asked them.

“They answered Him, “Allow us to sit at Your right and at Your left in Your glory.”

“But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you’re asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We are able,” they told Him.

“Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at My right or left is not Mine to give; instead, it is for those it has been prepared for.” When the [other] 10 [disciples] heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John” (Mark 10:35-41).

The youthful John here is not the mature John whom the Lord kept alive long after all the other Apostles had been martyred to write that amazing Evangelistic Gospel, three powerful epistles, and the Revelation. The self-centered, ambitious John in the passage from Mark is not the same man as the Elder John who never uses his own name in the book that is identified by his name. He only calls himself the disciple Jesus loved. What was the difference? For one thing, he had seen the risen Lord.

In many ways John, the disciple the Lord loved, was the one who was closest to Jesus. Since he may have been the youngest disciple, Jesus may have “taken him under His wing” during His earthly ministry. We know that he was always in the first group mentioned. It was either Peter and Andrew, and James and John, or Peter, James and John. Who was it whom Jesus gave responsibility for his mother at the foot of the cross? It was John. Who was it who was in the position of honor at the Last Supper? It was John. Who is called the Beloved Disciple? Again, it was John. Who was it who was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel, three epistles and Revelation? Again, it was John.

At the time of the arrest, trials, and crucifixion of Jesus, John was the disciple closest to Him in a physical sense. It was John who gained access to the courtyard of the high priest for Simon Peter, which may lead us to wonder if John might have been close enough to have heard Peter deny Christ. It was John who stood with Mary at the foot of the cross, watching Him suffer in agony, pain in sorrow for your sins and mine.

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing there, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (John 19:25-27).

In addition to that, John was also the first to believe in the Resurrection (John 20:1-9). I have no proof that this disciple was John, but it would take some strong evidence to convince me otherwise. Why would he not look to His own brothers to take care for His mother? They were not believers at this point. Mary loved her sons, but they did not share her faith.

There is one other fact we should bear in mind as we begin a study of this unique Gospel account. When Jesus announced to Simon Peter the kind of death he would die, Peter he did what we all have a tendency to do; we say, “But what about him?!”

“So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them. [That disciple] was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, ‘Lord, who is the one that’s going to betray You?’ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord—what about him?”

“If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow Me.”

So this report spread to the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?” (John 21:20-23)

John did not remain alive until our Lord’s return, but he did remain alive to serve a very special purpose in the service of the One who loved him in spite of his youthful sins and his youthful zeal.

**JOHN’S UNIQUE POSITION.** Paul and Peter had been dead some twenty years when John was inspired to write the Fourth Gospel. They would have been dead thirty years when John recorded the Revelation. All the other apostles were dead, including John’s brother James, who was the first of the apostles to be martyred in A. D. 44. In a real sense, John had built on the foundation laid by Paul at Ephesus, but in reality John had his own ministry. Paul was dead, but John was a powerful influence in churches throughout the region of Paul’s missionary journeys, especially in the area surrounding Ephesus and the other six churches Jesus addressed in the Revelation.

At the end of the First Century, if any Christian leader needed information about what composed true Scripture, they could go to Ephesus and talk with the Elder John. It seems reasonable that many would have done that. A generation later, when a question arose, there were leaders who could say, “I once asked John about that and he said” thus and so. A generation after that there were people who could address an issue by saying, “my mentor sat at the feet of the Apostle John, and he asked

him that very question. He taught us that John said” thus and so. I am convinced that this happened.

Jesus did not say that John would remain alive until His return, but that it was not Peter’s concern what He had for John to do. John, once a youthful, ambitious, self-serving, egotistical follower of Jesus, was not the aged, mature, selfless disciple who would not even use his own name in this great epistle which would be read millions of times before the Lord’s return. He simply calls himself “the disciple Jesus loved”.

**JOHN REVEALS JESUS.** In my first survey class in New Testament at Mississippi College, when we came to the Gospel of John I heard my professor use a term I had not encountered before. He made the statement that an incipient Gnosticism was making its way into the church at the time John wrote this book. I had probably spent as much time in Bible study as any other student. I had been called into the ministry when I was thirteen and licensed when I was seventeen. I had preached at mission churches and I had taught children in Sunday School. I had been perfect in the memory work drills at the Mississippi state Training Union Convention, and the next year I had been the second place boy in the Sword Drills in the state. But I had never heard of Gnosticism. I was guessing at “incipient”, but completely in the dark on Gnosticism. Then, when I learned what it was, I knew I had never seen a Gnostic. Nor, did I ever expect to see one.

Little did I realize that Eastern Mysticism had its roots in ancient Gnosticism. Not that I ever expected to see anyone who subscribed to Eastern Mysticism. Nor did I realize that the impact that Humanism was having on America even at that time. I had never heard of the first Humanist Manifesto, let alone the second one. How could I have imagined that Eastern Mysticism had made its way to America and would soon be manifesting itself through a new movement in America. It was called New Age. New Age movements were, and are rooted in Eastern Mysticism.

The prince of this world, Satan, is very subtle, so when Christians began to take a stand against Humanism, he injected that godless, evolutionary system with a dose of religion. Around 1990 there were reports that new polls showed that more Americans said they believed in God. Evangelists declared, we are reaching America for Jesus Christ. We were optimistic at first, but then we read the rest of the study and learned that more Americans said they believed in a god, gods, or a god-like force, but that it was not having an impact on the way they lived. What was happening?

New Age was stepping in to provide answers for those who rejected Humanism but did not embrace Jesus Christ. Many pastors were convinced that New Age was a passing fad that faded away with the weird music one associated with it. They did not understand that before preachers began warning against New Age, New Agers began using a new term: postmodernism. Through the eighties and mid-way through the nineties, preachers often warned about “secular humanism”, but failed to warn against New Age movements. New Age movements and philosophies require a lot of time and effort to understand, so only a few summary statements will be made here. New Age was an umbrella term, and almost all religious groups could fit under that umbrella, so long as they were not monotheistic. They even talked about Jesus, but the New Age Jesus is not the biblical Jesus, any more than the Mormon Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible. The New Age Christ is not the Christ of the



Bible. The New Agers taught that if you are searching for Christ, look within and you will discover that you are your own Christ.

New Age is rooted in Eastern Mysticism, which in turn is rooted in ancient Gnosticism. Gnosticism, according to some who have studied it, is rooted in the ancient Babylonian religious beliefs (some attribute them to Nimrod, the founder of both Nineveh and Babylon). In reality, the vile roots of New Age, Eastern Mysticism, and Gnosticism reach back to the Garden of Eden, and the very first satanic lie to a human being: “you shall be as God.”

There is another element of Gnosticism that we must hold before us as we read the Gospel According to John. The Gnostics believed that god is spirit and spirit is good. They believed matter is evil, and that if god touched matter he would be contaminated by it. In order to explain the existence of matter (the world), they taught that the supreme god created a lesser god, who created a still lesser god, who in turn created a still lesser god, and so on, until they had created a god who had the power to create the world without contaminating the supreme god. He himself would be contaminated by the matter he created, but that contamination would not reach all the way up the chain to the supreme god. The Gnostics called that god Logos, a word which means word or that by which the gods communicate.

That is an oversimplification of the Gnostic heresy, which some Gentile converts were bringing into the church. Any heresy is serious and dangerous, and Gnosticism was but the first major “ism” to become a problem for the church. What is important is that the Holy Spirit inspired John to provide believers with the truth about Jesus, which answers all heresies. The Prologue to the Gospel of John destroys Gnosticism, Eastern Mysticism, as well as Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses teachings today. Right now, Mormons missionaries and Jehovah’s Witnesses are spreading out all over the country in an effort to proselytize members from traditional churches. They have been far too successful in their mission, primarily because church members do not know the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit inspired John to give us the answers we need. This same John was inspired to write: “This is how you know the Spirit of God: **Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.** But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now” (1 John 4:2-3, bold added by this writer).

# Chapter 1

Expository Outline of the Prologue  
Prepared By Dr. Leon Hyatt

NOTE: I talked with Dr. Hyatt, a friend of 40 years about the Prologue to the Gospel of John and he told me he had prepared an expository outline on the Prologue to the Gospel of John and he said he

would send it to me. Since I am very familiar with Dr. Hyatt's work, I immediately asked permission to use this outline and possibly include the entire outline as an appendix. He graciously granted me permission to use his outline anyway I felt led to use it. The following is his expository outline of the Prologue to The Gospel of John.

EXPOSITORY OUTLINE OF  
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
By Dr. Leon Hyatt

INTRODUCTION:

- A. [The reality of who Jesus is] (1:1-4)
  - 1. In the beginning was the Word (1:1a)
  - 2. The Word was with God, and the Word was God in the beginning (1:1b-2).
  - 3. He made all things (1:3).
  - 4. In Him was life (1:4a),
  - 5. The life was the light of men (1:4b).
- B. [The response to Jesus] (1:5-13)
  - 1. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not accept it (1:5-11).
    - a. A man named John came from God (1:6-8)
      - (1) He came as a witness (1:7)
        - (a) To testify about the light (1:7b)
        - (b) So that all might believe through Him (1:7c).
      - (2) He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light (1:8).
    - b. The true light, who gives light to everyone came into the world (1:9-11)
      - (1) He was in the world, and the world was created by Him, but the world did not recognize Him (1:10).
      - (2) He came unto His own, and even His own did not receive Him (1:11).
  - 2. But to as many as did receive Him, He gave the right to be the children of God (1:12-13).
    - a. To those who believe in His name (1:12b)
    - b. Who were born (1:13)
      - (1) Not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man (1:13b)
      - (2) But of God (1:13c).
- C. [The revelation He came to give]: The Word became flesh and lived among us (1:14-18)
  - 1. We beheld His glory (1:14b-14d)
    - a. Glory like the only begotten of the Father (1:14c),
    - b. Full of grace and truth (1:14d).
  - 2. John testified of Him and proclaimed (1:15),
    - a. "This is the One about whom I said (1:15b),
    - b. 'The One coming after me is above me, because He was before me'" (1:15c).
  - 3. We have all received grace after grace from His fullness (1:16-17).

- a. For the law came through Moses (1:17a),
- b. But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (1:17b).
- 4. He revealed God (1:18)
  - a. No man has seen God at any time (1:18a)
  - b. [But He is] the One and Only Son who is in the bosom of the Father (1:18b).

NOTE: This concludes Dr. Leon Hyatt's expository outline on the Prologue to John's Gospel.

## Prologue To The Gospel

**1:1 - IN THE BEGINNING.** *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* John begins this Gospel with "In the beginning" (Greek, en archêi - the root word for archaeology). This denotes "the beginning before all beginnings, prior to the beginning of Genesis 1:1. The phrase could be rendered 'from all eternity.' The expression in Greek 'characterizes Christ as preexistent, thus defining the nature of his person'" (Dana and Mantey)" [*New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - after this, NCWB].

It is appropriate that the Gospel of John would take us back to Genesis 1:1, where we read, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Genesis account does not point to the beginning of eternity for the simple reason that eternity has no beginning and no end. That was the beginning of the world, the beginning of that which we call time. Jesus has co-existed with the Father throughout eternity. The Prologue to John's Gospel is very important, as the following comment from A. T. Robertson will attest:

"Archê is definite, though anarthrous like our at home, in town, and the similar Hebrew be reshith in Gen 1:1. But Westcott notes that here John carries our thoughts beyond the beginning of creation in time to eternity. **There is no argument here to prove the existence of God any more than in Genesis. It is simply assumed.** Either God exists and is the Creator of the universe as scientists like Eddington and Jeans assume or matter is eternal or it has come out of nothing. Was (ên). Three times in this sentence John uses this imperfect of eimi to be which conveys no idea of origin for God or for the Logos, simply continuous existence. Quite a different verb (egeneto, became) appears in verse **John 1:14** for the beginning of the Incarnation of the Logos. See the distinction sharply drawn in **John 8:58**, 'before Abraham came (genesthai) I am' (eimi, timeless existence)" [Word Pictures in the New Testament, A. T. Robertson, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Technology Division - after this, ATR]. (Bold added by this writer)

**THE WORD.** (Greek, *ho logos*). The Bible Knowledge Commentary carries the following comment on this word: "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” [Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - after this, [BKC]

While that is true, it is far from an exhaustive study into the meaning or the application for John’s readers. The definite article is used and it demands one specific “Word” here (Jesus is *the* Word, not *a* Word). Robertson explains that “Logos is from legô, old word in Homer to lay by, to collect, to put words side by side, to speak, to express an opinion. Logos is common for reason as well as speech. Heraclitus used it for the principle which controls the universe. The Stoics employed it for the soul of the world (anima mundi) and Marcus Aurelius used spermatikos logos for the generative principle in nature” [ATR]. Most people who grow up attending worship services have heard pastors say that “Word” here is a term for Jesus, but they may not understand why it is used of Jesus. Why did John not simply use the name Jesus or the title Christ. There is a very good reason for that. The incipient Gnosticism, mentioned already, that was making its way into the church at that time demanded a response, and this is God’s response. **His response nailed the coffin lid closed on Gnosticism, just as it will nail it closed on Eastern Mysticism, New Age movements, and the so-called Christian cults of this day.**

In the first place, words are used to communicate, to convey thoughts. God communicates His love and His redemption to us with words which may be translated into the many and various languages of this world. But here, God communicates with us through a Person, the Logos, who is clearly identified as Jesus. He is the Divine Logos. Vines explains the significance of it’s use here:

“The Personal Word,’ a title of the Son of God; this identification is substantiated by the statements of doctrine in John 1:1-18, declaring in verses John 1:1, 2 (1) His distinct and superfinite Personality, (2) His relation in the Godhead (pros, "with," not mere company, but the most intimate communion), (3) His deity; in John 1:3 His creative power; in John 1:14 His incarnation ("became flesh," expressing His voluntary act; not as AV, "was made"), the reality and totality of His human nature, and His glory "as of the only begotten from the Father," RV (marg., ‘an only begotten from a father’), the absence of the article in each place lending stress to the nature and character of the relationship; His was the shekinah glory in open manifestation; John 1:18 consummates the identification: "the only-begotten Son (RV marg., many ancient authorities read "God only begotten,") which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him," thus fulfilling the significance of the title ‘Logos,’ the ‘Word,’ the personal manifestation, not of a part of the Divine nature, but of the whole Deity” [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, The Bible Navigator Electronic Bible Library, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville - after this, VINES].

When I talked with Dr. Leon Hyatt about this study in the Gospel According to John, he offered to send me his expository sermon outline of John 1:1-4. At that time, I asked permission to use it in this study and he graciously gave his consent. Here is an excerpt from that sermon:

SERMONS FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL  
WHO JESUS IS, John 1:1-4  
By Dr. Leon Hyatt  
An Excerpt

INTRODUCTION:

- A. John's gospel is different from the other three.
  - 1. The other three tell the story from the point of view of those who met Jesus as a man on earth.
    - a. They tell how the disciples came gradually to understand who Jesus was.
    - b. With them we trace the story as the wonder of Jesus' greatness gradually unfolded to their hearts.
  - 2. John tells the story from the point of view of his mature understanding of who Jesus was.
    - a. John became a disciple as a very young man, perhaps 16 years old.
    - b. When he wrote his gospel, he was a mature man, some think 60 or more years old.
    - c. He presents his understanding of Jesus that grew out of years of learning, thinking, and receiving insights from God.
- B. We can see the difference in John's approach in the very beginning of his record of Jesus' life.
  - 1. Mark began his gospel with Jesus' baptism.
  - 2. Luke began his gospel further back, with the announcement of John the Baptist's conception by the Angel Gabriel.
  - 3. Matthew began his gospel still further back, with Abraham.
  - 4. But John began his gospel all the way back to before the creation of the world, when nothing existed but God Himself.
    - a. When nothing else existed, Jesus was already there.
    - b. He was actually and literally the great eternal God of all gods.
- C. John introduced that truth about Jesus with one of the most all-inclusive and powerful statements about Jesus that has ever been written.

I. JESUS IS THE WORD

- A. **What did John mean to communicate when He called Jesus "The Word"?**
  - 1. Many think John got the idea of calling Jesus "the word" from Greek philosophers of his day and before his day.
    - a. Many Greek philosophers used the Greek word for "word" (logos, λογος) to describe an unseen unifying force in the world.
    - b. But nothing we know of John indicates that he was a student of philosophy, Greek or otherwise.
  - 2. **John WAS a great student of the Holy Scriptures**, and I believe he got his idea from

the Scriptures available to him in his day (the Old Testament and other New Testament writings that already existed before John wrote his gospel).

a. **In the Old Testament, “The Word of God” is a name for One who appeared many times with a message from God.**

(1) The first time that name was used was in Genesis 15:1, “After these things the Word of Jehovah came to Abraham in a vision saying, . . . .”

(a) Many understand this verse to simply mean that Abraham received a message from God.

[1] But a message is not seen in a vision, and it does not come and speak. It is sent and is spoken.

[2] **The words actually say Someone called “The Word” came and spoke to Abraham.**

(b) I believe the passage means that Abraham saw a great Being called “The Word” and received a divine message from Him.

[1] Then The Word said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; . . . .” and Abram answered, “Lord Jehovah, what can You give me, since I am childless . . . .”

[2] **Obviously Abram understood that the One called “The Word” was Jehovah God, yet that One was called “Word from God.”** Though He was God, yet He was distinguished from God. Is that a puzzle to you?

It is the same puzzle that we face when we hear that Jesus and the Father are One, yet they spoke to each other, and Jesus was sent by the Father (One God; two Persons in God).

(c) “The Word of God” was an appropriate name for that great Being, because He did more than bring a message. **He was Himself a revelation of God.**

[1] The only way another person can know what is in my mind and heart is to learn it from the words I speak. My words reveal to you what is in me.

[2] In the same way, “The Word of God” was Himself a revelation of what is in the mind and heart of God.

(2) The use of the name “The Word” reached its climax in the book of Ezekiel.

(a) Ezekiel began his book with a description of a vision, of which he said, “I saw visions of God . . . **the Word of Jehovah came directly to Ezekiel the priest.**” (Ezek. 1:1-3). Then he described what he saw. It was a great cloud with light enfolded within it and flashing out of it. In the cloud was a majestic throne and on the throne sat One so mighty that His voice sounded like a roaring waterfall and His presence shone like fire with all the colors of the rainbow. The glorious One who sat on that throne was coming out to

Ezekiel in the far away land of Babylon. He was the same One who had led the Israelites through the wilderness in a cloud by night and a fire by day. Now He was coming to speak to and lead Ezekiel in the pagan land of Babylon. The message He spoke that day is recorded in Ezekiel 2:1-3:15. It was so overwhelming that, after receiving it, Ezekiel sat stunned for seven days (Ezek. 3:13).

- (b) Afterward Ezekiel began every message in his book with the words, “The Word of Jehovah came to me, saying, . . . .” Ezekiel never preached a message unless he first received it from the mouth of the great Word of Jehovah.
3. When John called Jesus the Word, He was saying that Jesus was the very divine Being who had been coming and speaking to God’s prophets through the ages, from Abraham to Ezekiel.
- a. He had come to men on earth many times before, but then He came through visions and voices.
  - b. In John’s time, He came in human flesh.

NOTE: The entire expository outline of John 1:1-4 is as thoroughly (and scholarly) prepared by Dr. Leon Hyatt as this excerpt. With his permission I have chosen to include his outline at this point.

**WITH GOD.** John was inspired to press the point he is making here. The Logos, Jesus has been with God throughout all eternity. Barnes explains that

“This expression denotes friendship or intimacy. Comp. Mark 9:19. John affirms that he was with God in the beginning-- that is, before the world was made. It implies, therefore, that he was partaker of the divine glory; that he was blessed and happy with God. It proves that he was intimately united with the Father, so as to partake of his glory and to be appropriately called by the name God. He has himself explained it. See John 17:5: And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. See also John 1:18: No man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, which IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER, he hath declared him” [Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, BARNES].

**THE WORD WAS GOD.** The Holy Spirit inspired John to continue the revelation of the Son of God in such a way as to leave no room for argument by any serious student of the Word of God (the Scripture), and no “out” for any enemy of the Son. **“Jehovah’s Witnesses translate this clause, ‘The Word was a god.’ This is incorrect and logically (it) 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” [BKC. Bold added by this writer].

Two Jehovah's Witnesses came to my door and my wife invited them in, with the assurance that "My husband will be glad to talk with you." I told her she had a cruel streak in her! When I came into the den the ladies had their translation of the Bible open to Isaiah, their hands pressing down on the page. I spoke to them, pulled up my desk chair and asked them to turn to John 1:1. They asked why. I asked them to just turn to John 1:1. It was obvious that they knew why. It was just as obvious that they did not want to turn to that Scripture. They tried to get me to look at a passage in Isaiah, but I insisted, "If we don't get it right at John 1:1 nothing else matters." They would not look at it, so I quoted it to them. Their faulty translation says that the Word was *a* God, whereas the Greek demands *the* God. They insisted that they did not see any difference between "a" god and "the" God.

At one point one of the ladies said, "I am supposed to be asking the questions." She then seemed to catch herself and began to ask questions about Jehovah. I said, all right, let me answer that. I took a pen and a piece of paper and began to list the words for God in the Old Testament. One of the women said, I know about Yahweh. I asked, "Do you realize that no one used the name Yahweh until 1400 B. C.?" She insisted, "That's not right." I assured her that it is absolutely right. This is the name God Gave Moses at the burning bush.

The visit ended with the two ladies scrambling to get away when I tried to give them a copy of the Holman Christian New Testament. I don't recommend my parting comments to anyone else, but I felt very strongly that I should add, "What you are doing is of the devil." They denied that, but I assured them, "You are serving the devil." It was very obvious that I could not reason with them, but when they are alone at home, the Lord might convict them of that fact.

**1:2 - HE WAS WITH GOD.** "*He was with God in the beginning.*" The One introduced to us as the Word (vs. 1) was "with God in the beginning." One commentary I appreciate states that "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" [The Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - afer this BKC].

**1:3 - CREATED THROUGH HIM.** "*All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created.*" Jesus was the Agent of Creation. How perfectly this parallels the opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning God Created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). John would have been conscious of that, but the important thing here is that this is not actually The Gospel of John, but **The Gospel of Jesus Christ According to John**. The Holy Spirit is the divine author, John the instrument by which it was recorded and sent out to the churches. Creation, I believe, was the work of the Trinity. God (the Father) said, "Let there be," and it was so; God (the Word, the Son) was the Agent of Creation (John 1:1ff); and "the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters" (Gen 1:2). One of my Old Testament professors declared rather emphatically to me, "There is no Holy Spirit in the Old Testament!" If one holds a unitary theory of God, he can hardly acknowledge the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, but those



who hold a trinitary view of God should have no problem with this.

When former Governor Mike Huckabee was a candidate for the presidency in late 2007 and the first part of 2008, he was grilled by one member of the media on the Genesis account of Creation. Mike Huckabee was given no chance to win the White House at the outset because he was an evangelical Christian and a minister, which should be shocking to Americans of 2008, but Americans acted as if they were beyond being shocked. Many of their grandparents prayed for a Christian president, their parents settled for lip service, and the current generation cannot conceive of a serious evangelical Christian receiving the nomination!

In that early debate, Gov. Huckabee was questioned by a member of the media who zeroed in on the Genesis account of Creation. Huckabee's response was that he believed that God created all things, but did not know how he did it. Many pastors who were attended college and seminary when he did would have answered the same way. The questioner charged that he did not answer his question. To which, Huckabee said, "I did answer it. I said, 'I don't know.'" That questioner seemed determined to get Huckabee to say he believed in the Genesis account of Creation: a literal six days of creation in which God said, "let there be, and it was so."

I was very impressed with Mike Huckabee until he gave this answer. It was a good political response, but it was not a good biblical response. I might add that it might well have been an honest answer. No doubt, this questioner, as well as the other candidates, would have tried to laugh him right out of the race if he had said he believed exactly what the Bible says in Genesis 1. I was personally pleased that the questioner was unable to make the governor look like a fool, but I was deeply disappointed in his answer from a theological point.

When a friend gave me a copy of Henry Morris' book, *THE GENESIS ACCOUNT OF CREATION*, a number of years ago, I discovered that Morris was a hydrologist who founded and served as president of the Institute for Creation Science, then located in California, but now relocated to Texas. As I read Henry Morris' work, I discovered that I was reading the work of a scientist who followed the Genesis account of creation far more closely than most pastors and theologians I knew. Not long after I read that book, Andy and Jan Mercer became good friends to my family. We visited with each other on many occasions, and usually ended up discussing Dr. Jan Mercer's favorite subject: special creation. She taught biology under a department head who was an evolutionist for 30 years, and got away with it, possibly because she was able to out talk him. For a quarter of a century, Dr. Jan Mercer guided my studies in special creation. She knew Dr. Morris personally and believed he "had one of the top five minds in America."

It is assumed here that God created the world just exactly as He tells us He did it in Genesis One. Obviously, if I were running for a political office, the world would be laughing at me. However, I am not as concerned about what the world thinks as I am what fellow pastors may, or may not understand about the beginnings. Sadly, not too many pastors over the past generation have made an in-depth study of Creation, or considered the possibility that God's account in Genesis should be taken literally. Francis Schaeffer once said that the most meaningless word in the English language

is the word “god” spelled with a small “g”. I spell “God” with a big (capital) “G”. In other words, He created it just like He said He did it. He created all things out of nothing. I have said at times, “If your god could not have created the world the way it says He did it in Genesis, please spell your god with at small “g”.

I had the privilege of spending an hour with creation scientist Ken Ham at the annual meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention a number of years ago. He is the creator and president *Answers in Genesis*. Ken Ham has often said that, when it comes to creation, he would take the word of God who was there, rather than the world of man, who was not there. He and I both arrived almost an hour early for the meeting and he asked me several times how I thought his message would go over with the pastors attending the Pastors Conference. Perhaps he was as conscious as I of the fact that the pastor of that large church seemed to be keeping his distance from both of us. I assured Ham that the pastors present for the Pastors Conference would love what he had to say. They did.

In Genesis, the Scripture uses the Hebrew word (transliterated bara) which means to bring something into existence out of nothing. Vines notes that the Hebrew word ‘bara’ means to “create, make”, before offering the following explanation:

“This verb is of profound theological significance, since it has only God as its subject. Only God can ‘create’ in the sense implied by ‘bara’. **The verb expresses creation out of nothing**, an idea seen clearly in passages having to do with creation on a cosmic scale: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1; cf. Gen. 2:3; Isa. 40:26; Isa. 42:5). **All other verbs for ‘creating’ allow a much broader range of meaning**; they have both divine and human subjects, and are used in contexts where bringing something or someone into existence is not the issue. Bara is frequently found in parallel to these other verbs, such as ‘asah, ‘to make’ (Isa. 41:20; Isa. 43:7; Isa. 45:7, 12; Amos 4:13), yasar, ‘to form’ (Isa. 43:1, 7; Isa. 45:7; Amos 4:13), and kun, ‘to establish.’ A verse that illustrates all of these words together is Isa. 45:18: ‘For thus saith the Lord that created [bara] the heavens; God himself that formed [yasar] the earth and made [asah] it; he hath established [kun] it, he created [bara] it not in vain, he formed [yasar] it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else.’ The technical meaning of bara’ (to ‘create out of nothing’) may not hold in these passages; perhaps the verb was popularized in these instances for the sake of providing a poetic synonym. Objects of the verb include the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 40:26; Isa. 42:5; Isa. 45:18; Isa. 65:17); man (Gen. 1:27; Gen. 5:2; Gen. 6:7; Deut. 4:32; Psa. 89:47; Isa. 43:7; Isa. 45:12); Israel (Isa. 43:1; Mal. 2:10); a new thing (Jer. 31:22); cloud and smoke (Isa. 4:5); north and south (Psa. 89:12); salvation and righteousness (Isa. 45:8); speech (Isa. 57:19); darkness (Isa. 45:7); wind (Amos 4:13); and a new heart (Psa. 51:10). **A careful study of the passages where bara occurs shows that in the few nonpoetic uses (primarily in Genesis), the writer uses scientifically precise language to demonstrate that God brought the object or concept into being from previously nonexistent material**” [Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words - after this, VINES,

bold added by this writer].

**APART FROM HIM.** John writes, “and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created.” Jesus is exclusively, the Agent of Creation. God said, “let there be”, and the pre-incarnate Son accomplished it. If you don’t believe He could create all things out of nothing, how can you call him God (with a capital “G”)? Jesus is the One and only Creator. He is exclusively the Creator. That message does not resonate with humanistic evolutionists who reject special creation; with New Agers, who believe all is one and one is all; or with postmodern students who reject the whole idea of a God who is exclusive.

David Roach, a correspondent for the *Southern Baptist Texan*, quotes Oprah Winfrey: “One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing there is only one way to live.” One lady in the audience asked her, “How do you please God?” To which the popular TV icon said that, “There are many ways and many paths to what you call God.” Continuing, she referred to the lady’s question and said, “Her path might be something else, and when she gets there, she might call it light. But her loving and her kindness and her generosity, if it brings her to the same place that it brings you, it doesn’t matter whether she calls it God along the way or not.” I had seen the clip a number of times, so I recalled the statements Roach quotes.

Responding to another question, Winfrey declared with conviction said, “There couldn’t be just one way.” Another lady asked, “What about Jesus?” Winfrey said, “What about Jesus?” The woman said, “There is one way and only one way, and that is Jesus.” Roach rightly noted that Oprah “appeared indignant” as she dismissed the whole concept, and speaking over the lady, continued, “There couldn’t possibly be with the millions of people in the world” [Roach, David, *Southern Baptist Texan*, April 21, 2008, p. 1].

As I stressed to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, if we don’t get it right here nothing else matters. If we don’t have a Creator at the beginning, we don’t need a Redeemer now, because we cannot have a Judge at the end. Jesus is *the* God, not *a* god, and He is *the* Savior, not *a* Savior.

**1:4 - LIFE WAS IN HIM.** “*Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men.*” “Greek *zōē* in classical usage meant life in general, as that common element possessed by all living creatures. But John and the other NT writers took the word and uplifted its meaning to designate the eternal, divine life given to the believers. The NT writers were careful to distinguish this word from other words that mean life, such as *psuche*-, the psychological life” [NCWB]. “Life was in Him” clearly means that He is the Source of life! Without Him there would be no life.

**This is the answer to ancient Gnosticism, as it is the answer to Eastern Mysticism, New Age movements, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses today.** Two words used here are often related to Jesus: Light and Life. Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). He also said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus is the source of light, as He is the source of life. A. T. Robertson, one of the

most brilliant New Testament scholars of the Twentieth Century, gave the world one of the most amazing works in the history of the church, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. To many students of the word, especially pastors, Robertson's *Word Pictures*, has been a trusted research tool for many decades. He explains here the use of the word "life" in this passage:

"That which has come into being (verse John 1:3) in the Logos was life. The power that creates and sustains life in the universe is the Logos. This is what Paul means by the perfect passive verb *ektistai* (stands created) in Col 1:16. This is also the claim of Jesus to Martha (John 11:25). This is the idea in Heb 1:3 "bearing (upholding) the all things by the word of his power." Once this language might have been termed unscientific, but not so now after the spiritual interpretation of the physical world by Eddington and Jeans. Usually in John *zê* means spiritual life, but here the term is unlimited and includes all life; only it is not *bios* (manner of life), but the very principle or essence of life. That is spiritual behind the physical and to this great scientists today agree. It is also personal intelligence and power. Some of the western documents have *estin* here instead of *ên* to bring out clearly the timelessness of this phrase of the work of the Logos. And the life was the light of men (*kai hê zê ên to phôs tôn anthrôpon*) [A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; *The Bible Navigator*, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, ATR].

**LIGHT OF MEN.** Robertson offers the following thoughts on Light:

"Here the article with both *zê* and *phôs* makes them interchangeable. "The light was the life of men" is also true. That statement is curiously like the view of some physicists who find in electricity (both light and power) the nearest equivalent to life in its ultimate physical form. Later Jesus will call himself the light of the world (John 8:12). John is fond of these words life and light in Gospel, Epistles, Revelation. He here combines them to picture his conception of the Pre-incarnate Logos in his relation to the race. He was and is the Life of men (*tôn anthrôpon*, generic use of the article) and the Light of men. John asserts this relation of the Logos to the race of men in particular before the Incarnation" [ATR].

As the light of the sun is essential for life on earth, the light of the Son is essential for eternal life. In fact, Jesus reveals in the Revelation that He is the Light of heaven: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's glory illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23).

**1:5 - THAT LIGHT.** "*That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.*" It would be easy to pass over this verse without giving it the consideration demanded, considering the lofty theme of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel. Jesus is the Light of the world (1:4; 14:6), and it is the most essential property of light shine, or to illuminate. The verb, "shine", is "Linear present active indicative of *phainô*, old verb from *phaô*, to shine (*phaos*, *phôs*). "The light keeps on giving light" [ATR].

Light exists because the God commanded its existence, and because Jesus, the Agent of creation (John 1:1-2) accomplished it: “Then God said, ‘**Let there be light, and there was light.**’ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness” (Gen 1:3-4, bold added by this writer). If there was total darkness and you add light, it illuminates. Today, one buys a good flashlight and the print on the box in which it comes informs you of the power of that light. I have LED lights that are blinding, and they illuminate a room, but they are not spot lights. I have a spotlight that, the print informed me, is rated at 3 million candle power. The LED light will light up a room if the power goes out. The spot light will light up the top of a tree several hundred yards away. The Sun is 93 million miles from the earth and it shines so brilliantly that no one can look into that light. It is a blinding light, but it can light only one part of the earth at a time. Photos taken from satellites clearly show a distinct line across continents, with one side light and the other side dark.

Without going into many of the ways we are dependant upon the sun for life, the conclusion is obvious: we cannot live without it. If the earth were one million miles closer to earth all life would be consumed. If it were one million miles farther from the sun we would all freeze. So what should we conclude? Our life on this planet depends upon the One who placed the sun where it is and gave it the right amount of light so that we might have life on earth. The sun has never missed a day, with one exception (Josh. 10), since it was created. Jesus, the Light of the world, will go on shining throughout eternity, and His light will never fail. We are totally dependent upon Him.

**DARKNESS.** We know what darkness is in the physical world. “Darkness” is often used in the Bible to denote sin, ignorance, guilt, or misery. One reason “darkness” is used metaphorically for evil is that men often sin under cover of darkness. “It refers here to a wicked and ignorant people. When it is said that ‘the light shineth in darkness,’ it is meant that the Lord Jesus came to teach an ignorant, benighted, and wicked world: This has always been the case. It was so when he sent his prophets; so during his own ministry; and so in every age since. His efforts to enlighten and save men have been like light struggling to penetrate a thick, dense cloud; and though a few rays may pierce the gloom, yet the great mass is still an impenetrable shade” [Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian ReSources - after this, BARNES].

**DID NOT OVERCOME IT.** John was inspired to write, “Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men” (vs. 4); and here he writes that the light “shines in the darkness” (5a); and now he adds, “yet the darkness did not overcome it.” Many older students of the Word remember the KJV, “ And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not”. Since the word “comprehend” means to grasp something mentally, or to understand it, that translation misses the point (unless we are thinking in terms of “encompassing” the light). I like the HCSB, “did not overcome it”, but I would paraphrase it, “yet the darkness did not extinguish it.” Clarke wrote:

“*auto ou katelaben*, Prevented it not- hindered it not, says Mr. Wakefield, who adds the following judicious note:-" Even in the midst of that darkness of ignorance and idolatry which overspread the world, this light of Divine wisdom was not totally eclipsed: the Jewish nation was a lamp perpetually shining to the surrounding

nations; and many bright luminaries, among the heathen, were never wanting in just and worthy notions of the attributes and providence of God's wisdom; which enabled them to shine in some degree, though but as lights in a dark place, 2Peter 1:19. Compare Acts 14:17; Acts 17:28, 29" [Adam Clarke's Commentary, The Bible Navigator - after this, CLARKE].

Satan could not extinguish that light in the Garden of Eden; the world could not combine forces with Satan to extinguish it before the Flood. Pharaoh tried and failed. Satan unleashed all his dark forces against the Light. The prince of this world uses the nations and empires of the world to try to extinguish the Light: the Amalakites in the wilderness, the Canaanites in the Promised Land, and then the great nations of history: Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, Romans. All the forces of the devil and all the forces of this world have conspired to try to extinguish that light, but all have failed. Satan is using false religions, pagan nations, and diabolic schemes today to extinguish that light. Gnosticism failed, Islam will fail, New Age movements will fail, humanism will fail. When this world has been consumed, and all the elements melted, as Peter wrote, the Light of the world will be the Light of eternity. All enemies will be destroyed, but the Word will continue to shine and His glory will be the light of heaven forever.

**1:6 - THERE WAS A MAN.** *"There was a man named John who was sent from God."* Robertson has, "There came a man" (*egeneto anthrōpos*), with the note, "Definite event in the long darkness, same verb in verse John 1:3" [ATR]. This man came in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy.

**NAMED JOHN.** This is John the Baptist, not the apostle John who wrote this Gospel account of Jesus Christ. The name John (Greek, *Iōanês*) means God has been gracious. "In the giving of the name see Luke 1:59-63, Hellenized form of Jonathan, Joanan (Gift of God), used always of the Baptist in this Gospel which never mentions the name of John son of Zebedee (the sons of Zebedee once, John 21:2)" [ATR].

Since other Gospel writers had referred to the forerunner as "the Baptist", one wonders why the Apostle John mentions him only as John. At no place in this Gospel does the writer refer to himself by name: he was simply the disciple Jesus loved. The young man, who with his brother James, created a serious dispute when he sought preeminence among the disciples, is now a humble servant who seeks no honor or legacy for himself. The Holy Spirit is the divine Author of this material, so the real answer lies with Him. At the same time, it is possible the everywhere the Gospel was preached the identity of John the Baptist was readily distinguished from that of the Apostle John. The writer of the material in EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE (QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - after this, EHS), notes that verses 6-13 deal with

"the historical appearance of the Word. The Forerunner is introduced, as in the other Gospels; and, significantly enough, this Evangelist calls him only 'John,'—omitting 'the Baptist,' as was very natural to him, the other John, who would feel less need for distinguishing the two than others did. The subordinate office of a witness to the light is declared positively and negatively, and the dignity of such a function is

implied. To witness to the light, and to be the means of leading men to believe, was honour for any man" [EHS].

**SENT FROM GOD.** Every thing in the Prologue to John is significant, and these words form a part of the story. John the Baptist was "sent from God", but Jesus is God. Mark opens his Gospel with the ministry of John the Baptist, rather than the birth of the Jesus. He summarized his work and ministry in this way: "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). Putting the two passages together, the message is that John the Baptist was "sent from God" to baptize and to preach the baptism of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins". What a contrast to the work of the religious leaders of the day, who were more concerned with ritual and ceremony than repentance. Every individual who is called to preach today must know that he has a specific calling from God, and that God still calls preachers and missionaries to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord told Jeremiah to proclaim: "From prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated superficially the brokenness of My dear people, claiming: Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer 8:10b-11). The KJV has, "For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer 8:11). Even though the passage in Jeremiah has a different application for our day, it seems reasonable to conclude that any preacher who does not preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins is treating "superficially the brokenness" of man.

Sadly, there are popular preachers today who openly confess that they do not preach about sin or repentance because they "just want people to feel good." That is not just sad, it is heresy! Anyone who seeks to heal the spiritual brokenness of the heart through baptism, communion, or some kind of psychobabble is treating the problem of the human heart superficially. That itself is a very serious sin.

**1:7 - A WITNESS.** *"He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him."* At our Lord's appearance just before His ascension, Jesus announced that, once empowered by the Holy Spirit, His followers would be his witnesses to a lost world (Acts 1:8). One hears a lot about witnessing in churches today, but it is doubtful that the average church member has any concept of all that word entails. The word is from the Greek word "*martus*", from which we get the English word 'martyr' (one who bears 'witness' by his death), "denotes 'one who can or does aver what he has seen or heard or knows;' it is used (a) of God, Rom. 1:9; 2Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8; 1Thess. 2:5, 10 (2nd part); (b) of Christ, Rev. 1:5; Rev. 3:14; (c) of those who 'witness' for Christ by their death, Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; Rev. 17:6; (d) of the interpreters of God's counsels, yet to "witness" in Jerusalem in the times of the Antichrist, Rev. 11:3..."[VINES].

**TO TESTIFY ABOUT THE LIGHT.** What does a witness do? He testifies! To what did John testify? He came "to testify about the light." But, what light? We must keep everything in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel within that context. "Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it" (1:4-5). Jesus is the

Light of the Word, John was sent “to testify about the light.” This is another nail in the coffin lid of Gnosticism, Eastern Mysticism, and New Age beliefs. That includes the New Age propaganda of Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey (A New Earth Web Event). As already mentioned, Oprah Winfrey, on her very popular TV show, proclaimed that there are many paths to “what you may call god.” She added that another person might call it light. As mentioned above, a lady in Winfrey’s audience insisted that Jesus is the only way. A highly offended Oprah Winfrey exclaimed, “There is no way He is the only way. With all those millions out there, there is no way there can be only one way” (shown over and over on BlueTube). That is a satanic attack on the Light of the World. Jesus is the only Light, and Oprah Winfrey and her New Age guru will never extinguish the light (see vs. 5).

**SO THAT ALL MIGHT BELIEVE THROUGH HIM.** John, the Apostle, is very specific in this reference to the mission of John the Baptist. He came to bear witness to the Light, “so that all might believe through Him.” “Jesus is the object of faith, John a vehicle through which people could believe in Christ” [NCWB]. God’s salvation is available to all who “believe through Him.”

**1:8 - HE WAS NOT THE LIGHT.** “*He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.*” We must keep the context of the Prologue to this Gospel in mind: “The Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). The Word (Logos) is Jesus, the Light of the World; the source of life to all who believe in Him (vs. 4). Jesus is the Light, not John. John was sent to be a witness to the Light. There might have been people in the church at the time who elevated John to a position not intended by Scripture. If so, this verse sets the record straight. It also condemns the worship of individuals who have been canonized as “saints”, as well as worship through a “saint”. As we will see, John clearly reject any emphasis upon himself, as well as any suggestion that he might have been the Messiah.

**HE CAME TO TESTIFY ABOUT THE LIGHT.** John was not the Light who gives life to all who believe in Him, but he came to testify about Jesus, the Light of the World. John was “a light (John 5:35) as all believers are (Mat 5:14), but not “the light” (to phôs)” [ATR].

“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” [BKC].

**1:9 - THE TRUE LIGHT.** “*The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*” Jesus, the Word (Logos), is the true light as opposed to the a false light. Jesus is the true light as opposed to the devil: “And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). The KJV has, “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”



The HCSB is preferred here because Satan may “disguise himself as an angel of light” but he cannot actually transform himself into an angel of light.

Some commentaries, to illustrate the significance of the “true light”, point to a the use of a false harbor light one might use to draw a ship onto a shore where it would be broken up so the people behind the false light might salvage what they could from the wreckage. Robertson translates then offers his comments: “The true light (to phôs to alêthinon). ‘The light the genuine,’ not a false light of wreckers of ships, but the dependable light that guides to the harbor of safety. This true light had been on hand all the time in the darkness (ên imperfect, linear action) before John came” [ATR].

**WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD.** We must remember to keep each verse and each phrase in the context of the Prologue to John’s Gospel account. “Most translators prefer to join the phrase ‘coming into the world’ with ‘the true Light’ and not with ‘every man’ because John’s prologue stresses the fact that the light came into the world” [NCWB]. The emphasis here is upon the Incarnation and all that it entailed. John is writing to stress that they divine Logos (Word) came into the world as the Light of the World in order to give life to all who believe in Him.

“This has been called the Quaker’s text because of that group’s erroneous use of it and their stress on the ‘inner light” [BKC]. This idea is indeed erroneous because the emphasis is upon the coming of Jesus into the world, not some inner light. Robertson comments on the One who was “coming” (erchomenon) in this way:

“This present middle participle of erchomai can be taken with anthrôpon just before (accusative masculine singular), “every man as he comes into the world.” It can also be construed with phôs (nominative neuter singular). This idea occurs in John 3:19; John 11:27; John 12:46. In the two last passages the phrase is used of the Messiah which makes it probable here. But even so the light presented in John 11:27; **John 12:46 is that of the Incarnate Messiah, not the Pre-incarnate Logos. Here kosmos rather than panta occurs in the sense of the orderly universe as often in this Gospel.** See Eph 1:4” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Many writers agree that the light that was coming denotes the Incarnation of Jesus Christ rather than the existence of the pre-incarnate Christ. The comment by Adam Clarke illustrates the efforts made by Bible students through the years to explain this verse:

“As Christ is the Spring and Fountain of all wisdom, so all the wisdom that is in man comes from him; the human intellect is a ray from his brightness; and reason itself springs from this Logos, the eternal reason. Some of the most eminent rabbins understand Isaiah 60:1, Rise and shine, for thy LIGHT is come, of the Messiah who was to illuminate Israel, and who, they believe, was referred to in that word, Genesis 1:3, And God said, Let there be LIGHT; and there was light. Let a Messiah be provided; and a Messiah was accordingly provided” [Adam Clarke's Commentary, The Bible Navigator; LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, CLARKE].

**1:10 - HE WAS IN HE WORLD.** *“He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him.”* Christ, the Light of the world, was in the world before the Incarnation. He was the pre-Incarnate Christ. He was the Agent of creation (1:3), so He had to exist in a pre-incarnate state. Then why is He not mentioned in the Old Testament, except in Messianic prophecy and hope? Those who hold to a unitary theory of God answer that in the Old Testament God was playing the role of the Father; during the earthly ministry of Jesus, He was playing the role of the Son; and since Pentecost, He has been playing the role of the Holy Spirit. The trinitary position is that God is one in essence, Three in Person.

The unitary theory (one Person in the Godhead) is more easily illustrated in human terms, but this writer is convinced that the trinitary view is right. In the Prologue to this Gospel, God the Father and God the Son (Word) are one. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many “gods” and many “lords”— yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him” (1 Cor 8:5-6). Most Bible students believe the Holy Spirit was the one who inspired Paul to write that. Before the Ascension, Jesus stated that He had asked the Father to send the Spirit into the world.

Do we have any evidence of the presence of the Second Person of the Trinity in the Old Testament? Many believe we do, and this writer agrees. Consider the following verses from the OT:

“But the **Angel of the Lord** called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” (Gen. 22:11).

“Then the **Angel of the Lord** called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, **I will indeed bless you** and make your offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. **Your offspring** will possess the gates of their enemies. **And all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring** because you have obeyed My command” (Gen 22:15-18, bold added for emphasis).

“Meanwhile Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire within a bush” (Ex 3:1-2).

So, what must we conclude as we read the hundreds of times the title, “The Angel of the Lord” in the OT? This writer infers from this term that the pre-incarnate Christ is the one speaking. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Son and the Father speak with each other (and about each other!), and Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send. When Jesus withdrew to pray to the Father, if the Father did not exist as a distinct member of the Trinity, Jesus was misleading His

followers, and perpetrating a hoax.

**THE WORLD WAS CREATED THROUGH HIM.** This is a reminder of what is revealed in verse 3. Jesus was the Agent of Creation. God said, “Let there be”, and the eternal Son created it. Creation was the work of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit.

**YET THE WORLD DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM.** Jesus was the “instrumental in creation of the universe and the men in it. **the world knew him not**—i.e., mankind did not recognize him. What tragic irony! (Note the three uses of “world”: man’s habitat, universe, mankind.)” [NCWB].

Robertson explains that “did not know”, or “knew him not” (his translation of *auton ouk egnô*) is the

“Second aorist active indicative of common verb *ginoskô*, what Gildersleeve called a negative aorist, refused or failed to recognize him, his world that he had created and that was held together by him (Col 1:16). Not only did the world fail to know the Pre-incarnate Logos, but it failed to recognize him when he became Incarnate (John 1:26). Two examples in this sentence of John’s fondness for *kai* as in verses John 1:1, 4, 5, 14, the paratactic rather than the hypotactic construction, like the common Hebrew use of *wav*” [ATR].

**1:11 - HE CAME TO HIS OWN.** “*He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.*” This writer agrees that, “In some ways this is one of the saddest verses in the Bible” [BKC]. As long as I can remember, I have understood this to mean that Jesus came unto His own people, Israel, and they rejected him. This does seem to be the idea, but there is a grammatical challenge here. “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) [BKC, bold in the original]. Robertson points out the grammatical challenge one faces in this verse. As he points out, this is

“**Neuter plural, ‘unto his own things,’** the very idiom used in John 19:27 when the Beloved Disciple took the mother of Jesus ‘to his own home.’ **The world was ‘the own home’ of the Logos who had made it.** See also John 16:32; Acts 21:6. They that were his own (*hoi idioi*). In the narrower sense, ‘his intimates,’ ‘his own family,’ ‘his own friends’ as in John 13:1. Jesus later said that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country (Mark 6:4; John 4:44), and the town of Nazareth where he lived rejected him (Luke 4:28; Mat 13:58). **Probably here *hoi idioi* means the Jewish people,** the chosen people to whom Christ was sent first (Mat 15:24), but in a wider sense the whole world is included in *hoi idioi*” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Since “His own” is neuter in Greek (meaning “His own things” - property or possessions), John may well have intended “His homeland. **And his own**—masculine in Greek, “his own people” (the

Jews). **Received him not**—speaking categorically of a national rejection” [NCWB, bold in the original]. Jesus came into the world He had created, even to His own homeland, Israel, but rather than welcoming Him, the Jews rejected Him (as Messiah).

**1:12 - TO ALL WHO RECEIVED HIM.** *“But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name...”* Israel, as a whole, rejected Jesus, “but” He was not defeated in His purpose. In the Torah, we see that God chose Israel as the nation through which He would send His Messiah. Throughout the books of history and the books of prophecy, the Jews are clearly God’s Chosen People. Through them He would bring the Messiah into the world. Israel had been prepared for the coming of the Messiah, but they still rejected Him. That, however, did not annul prophecy or defeat His overall purpose, which was the salvation of the nations of the world (as promised in the Abrahamic Covenant). For “all who did receive Him” there is hope. Isaiah prophesied, “On that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will seek Him, and His resting place will be glorious” Is. 11:10). In the midst of prophecies about God’s Judgment against the nations of the world we find the bright hope: **“Many nations will join themselves to the Lord on that day and become My people”** (Zech 2:11, bold added).

**CHILDREN OF GOD.** Israel rejected Him, but “He gave them the right to be children of God” to others, to Gentiles. “He gave” is significant because no one can earn His salvation, no one can buy it, no one can discern it, and no one can conjure it up through quest, works, or magic formulas. Salvation is His free gift (John 3:16). “The right to be” may be rendered ‘To become (genesthai). Second aorist middle of ginomai, to become what they were not before” [ATR].

“Children” is used here to denote spiritual children of God, not those who owe their physical existence to Him. However, Paul clearly acknowledges that we owe our existence to Him: “For in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, **‘For we are also His offspring’**” (Acts 17:28, bold added by this writer). Robertson adds, “But one cannot follow Westcott in insisting on ‘adoption’ as Paul’s reason for the use of *huioi* since Jesus uses *huioi* *theou* in Mat 5:9. Clearly the idea of regeneration is involved here as in John 3:3” [ATR].

**TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE.** Salvation, the right to become children of God, is available to all “who believe in His name.” Salvation was never based on race or nationality, works, or religious exercises. It is available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, to those who simply trust Him to be who He says He is, and to do what He promises to do. It is as simple as that, as Paul stated it to the Philippian jailer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts, 16:31, KJV).

As stated earlier, the Prologue to the Gospel of John states the Gospel of Jesus Christ positively, but at the same time it nails the coffin lid closed forever on false religions, false gods, and false doctrine. When the world read the Fourth Gospel, it could never again justify hope in God’s salvation through secret knowledge (Gnosticism), any more than one can find salvation through Eastern Mysticism, New Age movements (Oprah Winfrey’s “many paths”), pagan religions; race, wealth, or the so-called Christian cults, such as Mormonism or Jehovah’s witnesses.

Paul and other writers make it abundantly clear that we are saved “by grace, through faith” (Eph. 2:8), so what John was inspired to write was not a fresh approach to salvation. There is nothing new on this subject in the this Gospel. What we read here does reinforce what had been spoken by Jesus, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and explained by Paul. There are basically only three theories of justification: (1) justification by works, which is clearly rejected (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:9); (2) justification by works plus grace, just as clearly rejected in Romans 11:6 and Gal. 3:3; and (3) justification by grace (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8). Anyone who reads the Gospel According to John must see that God’s salvation is available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, but only to those who believe in Him.

During March and April, 2008, controversy raged, fanned by constant media coverage, after excerpts from a sermons by Dr. Jeremiah Wright, pastor of Senator Barak Obama, one of the two Democrat candidates for the presidency. Wright was proclaimed as a brilliant theologian, a great pastor, and powerful preacher, yet, the excerpts from sermons show Wright using God’s name in vain, making blatantly racist statements, preaching a social gospel and advocating a Black Liberation Theology. When he was given an opportunity to explain his beliefs and his more shocking statements, he said, “Black theology and white theology are not the same.” This is a shocking statement for one so often called brilliant to make. We would not be surprised if one said that Muslim theology is not the same as Christian theology, but to make a distinction between black theology and white theology is heresy. Following the Jerusalem Conference in A. D. 51 (Acts 15; Gal. 2), James wrote the letter which Paul and Barnabas would take back to Antioch of Syria and read before that church. Paul and Silas would then take it with them on the Second Missionary Journey and read it to churches planted on the First Missionary Journey by Paul and Barnabas. In that letter, James expressed the opinion of those at the conference in Jerusalem, which was that salvation is available to Jews and Gentiles on exactly the same basis, which is faith in Jesus Christ.

**HIS NAME.** One’s name in the Bible denotes more than it does in America today. In the Bible, name of denotes the character of, or nature of the individual. In His name means that one must believe “in who and what he is, in all that is embodied in his person and work” [NCWB].

**1:13 - WHO WERE BORN.** “...*(W)who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.*” “Who were born” points back to “those who believe in His name” (1:12). The salvation experience is spoken of as the new birth (born again), regeneration, justification, or salvation in the New Testament. The Fourth Gospel stresses that one becomes a child of God when he or she is born again, or born from above, and not through ritual or ceremony.

**NOT OF BLOOD.** God called Abraham and promised, among other things, that he would have more descendants than anyone could number. God had chosen the Israel and entered a covenant relationship with the nation that descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Every Jew knew that the Jews were God’s Chosen People, the people through whom He would fulfill His Messianic Covenant. As we see throughout the New Testament, there were many Jews who could not imagine a Jew being excluded or a Gentile being included in God’s covenant. That assumes that the Jews observed certain rules and rituals, of course. Salvation does not depend upon one’s race, color, or

national original. Those to whom “He gave them the right to be children of God” are those who believe in Him, not those who were born of the nation of Israel.

**THE WILL OF THE FLESH.** There is absolutely nothing any human being can do to effect regeneration. God named Israel His Chosen People, and He commanded circumcision of all Jewish males, sacrifices, and rituals, but as Paul wrote, “If Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to brag about—but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:2-3).

**THE WILL OF MAN.** This excludes any and every effort of man to accomplish, achieve, or receive a right relationship with God. This verse has a special application to the world of the Twenty First Century, when we see so-called Christian groups that are nothing more than cults. Sadly, it seems that modern preachers may not be making this message clear to the world.

It was my privilege to sit on the Executive Committee of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources when the Presidential Search Committee made its recommendation for a new president to follow Dr. Jimmy Draper, whose retirement had been announced the trustees. The name submitted to the Executive Committee was that of Dr. Thom Rainer, from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Rainer was introduced to us and we had an opportunity to hear from him and ask questions before recommending him to the full board. In his electronic newsletter, dated May 5, 2008, Dr. Rainer addresses a painful issue that has an application here. Under the heading, “The Gospel Remedies Pastoral Malpractice”, he writes:

“I would consider pastoral malpractice among the greatest treasons a minister can commit against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, it is practiced weekly without inhibition.

“What do I mean by pastoral malpractice? I mean ministers who stand and preach a gospel other than God’s rightful need for punitive justice against our sin and His wrath being appeased by pouring out upon Christ judgment intended for us. He in turn sets us in right legal standing before Himself, through faith in what Jesus has done, while simultaneously giving to us His holy righteousness.

“Regrettably, too many evangelical churches have become centers for motivational speaking where congregants learn that “God helps those who help themselves;” that sin is something that keeps us from reaching our full potential, not an infinite offense against the Creator who demands from His creation unblemished righteousness.

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‘We have all heard the Gospel presented as God’s triumphant answer to human problems – problems of our relation with ourselves and our fellow humans and our environment. Well, there is no doubt that the Gospel does bring us solutions to these problems, but it does so by first solving a deeper problem – the deepest of all human problems, the problem of man’s relation with His Maker. And unless we make it plain that the solution to the former problems depends on the settling of this latter, we are misrepresenting the message and becoming false witnesses of God.’

“...How my heart pleads with God to transform our churches to being training and equipping centers that send people out into culture to be Jesus’ ambassadors. I’m not talking pious moralists who point people to their sins, but servants who through humility and loving relationships point people to an all-sufficient Savior.

“We must meet people in their context, but we must share the Gospel. Morality does not reconcile people to God; it comes through the Gospel of Christ” [Dr. Thomas Rainer, LifeWay@Heart, “The Gospel Remedies Pastoral Malpractice”, May 6, 2008].

This heresy of changing the Gospel message has not taken God by surprise, as the prophetic statement written by Paul to his young son in the ministry reveals:



“But know this: difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of religion but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

**BUT OF GOD.** Those who have a right relationship with God are those who are born again by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8). We are saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “(Y)et we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified” (Gal 2:16).

**1:14 - THE WORD BECAME FLESH.** *“The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* The Prologue to the Gospel According to John begins with the words, “In the beginning was the Word.” John uses “the Word” (Logos) to identify Jesus Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). The Word created all things, and He gives life to all people. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. This verse returns us to the Person and work of the Second Person of the Trinity, who is identified here as the Word.

This verse is a powerful summary statement about the Person and work of Jesus Christ. An incipient Gnosticism was making inroads into the teachings of the church at the time John was inspired to write this Gospel account of Jesus Christ. That had not been a critical issue when Matthew and Mark had been inspired to write the first two Gospels, not did it seem to have been a serious problem when Luke wrote the third Gospel. Now, late in the First Century, it was becoming a serious problem, a heresy introduced by Satan that was spreading through the church.

Gentiles were being saved, but they lived in a world which was being influenced by the Gnostics, who claimed special knowledge by which one could know, discern, or discover God. As stated earlier, Eastern Mysticism has its root embedded in this ancient philosophy. All Gnostics did not agree on issues or philosophies, which is not surprising. There were the Docetic Gnostics, for example, who taught that Jesus did not come in the flesh, He just “seemed” to do so.

Response to this heresy was critical, and the Holy Spirit, in this verse, nails the coffin lid shut forever on this dangerous movement. It did not end Gnosticism, and it will not end Eastern Mysticism, but it gives the world and the church the final authoritative answer to it. Just a few years later, around A. D. 88-89, John would once again be inspired by the Holy Spirit to address this issue:

“This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. **But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist;** you have heard that he is

coming, and he is already in the world now” (1 John 4:2-3, bold added).

Here, John writes that “the Word became flesh and took up residence among us.” This is the Incarnation. The Son of God emptied Himself of the glory He had in heaven that He might come to earth in human form in order to provide for our salvation. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

“Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:5-11).

**WE OBSERVED HIS GLORY.** Gnostics, who did not see Jesus, and did not know Him, made all sorts of false statements about Him, including the claim that He did not come in the flesh. How, they reasoned, could God become flesh if spirit is good and all matter is evil? John does not dignify their argument by stating it, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us the authoritative answer to that heresy. John answered the Gnostics, but Gnosticism did not go away. We know that because two or three years later, John would be inspired to begin the prologue to a glorious Epistle with these words:

“What was from the beginning, **what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands**, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us - **what we have seen and heard we also declare to you**, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3, bold added by this writer).

The Bible explains the Bible better than man can. Gnosticism did not immediately go away, nor did all heresies concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ cease, but in these verses we find the definitive answer to them.

John wrote in the First Epistle that bears his name: “Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Messiah? He is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). In the Second Epistle of John, he writes, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world; **they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh**. This is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 1:7, bold added by this writer).

**THE GLORY.** John and his fellow Apostles and disciples had witnessed His “glory as the One

and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Glory “refers to the unique splendor and honor seen in Jesus’ life, miracles, death, and resurrection” [BKC]. In *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the word “glory” is both defined and illustrated:

“glory’ (from dokeo, "to seem"), primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion. It is used (1) (a) of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way he reveals Himself in these respects, and particularly in the person of Christ, in whom essentially His ‘glory’ has ever shone forth and ever will do, John 17:5, 24; Heb. 1:3; it was exhibited in the character and acts of Christ in the days of His flesh, John 1:14; John 2:11; at Cana both His grace and His power were manifested, and these constituted His ‘glory;’ so also in the resurrection of Lazarus, John 11:4, 40; the ‘glory’ of God was exhibited in the resurrection of Christ, Rom. 6:4, and in His ascension and exaltation, 1Pet. 1:21, likewise on the Mount of Transfiguration, 2Pet. 1:17” [VINES].

**THE ONE AND ONLY SON.** God has many children, but one unique Son, and He is Jesus Christ. The Greek word (*monogenous*) stresses the uniqueness of God’s “one and only Son (John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). The word “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)” [BKC].

There are many religions in the world, but only one unique Son, and He is Jesus. We must be very careful to preach the Jesus of the Bible to a lost world, and avoid confusing the Jesus of the Bible with the Jesus of Mormonism, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, or some New Age Jesus.

**FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.** “Grace,” a “carryover from a Hebrew word for ‘loving-kindness,’ means ‘favor, kindness’ and ‘gift that brings joy.’ Christ was full of grace—and truth, which means reality” [NCWB]. Jesus declared, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

Robertson writes:

“Of grace and truth (*charitos kai alêtheias*). Curiously this great word *charis* (grace), so common with Paul, does not occur in John's Gospel save in John 1:14, 16, 17, though *alêtheia* (truth) is one of the keywords in the Fourth Gospel and in 1John, occurring 25 times in the Gospel and 20 in the Johannine Epistles, 7 times in the Synoptics and not at all in Revelation (Bernard). In John 1:17 these two words picture the Gospel in Christ in contrast with the law of Moses” [ATR].

**1:15 - JOHN TESTIFIED.** (*John testified concerning Him and exclaimed, “This was the One of whom I said, ‘The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’”*) This is a

parenthetical insertion, as indicated by the HCSB. The subject is the Word of God, and in this particular context, the Incarnation of Jesus (1:14). Barnes writes, “The evangelist now returns to the testimony of John the Baptist. He had stated that the Word became incarnate, and he now appeals to the testimony of John to show that, thus incarnate, he was the Messiah” [BARNES].

John the Baptist had a clear understanding of his role and his calling. The forerunner of the Messiah was sent to herald His coming. “This verse, a parenthesis in the prologue, encapsulates John the Baptist’s testimony concerning Jesus. In this testimony, John declares Christ’s eternal existence (Mic. 5:2) and his preeminence. **is preferred before me: for he was before me**—i.e., Jesus has priority over me because he existed before me (see 8:58)” [NCWB].

**SURPASSED ME.** Elsewhere, John will testify: “He is the One coming after me, whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie” (1:27). It was the responsibility of the most lowly slave to meet guests and stoop down and take off the sandals from the feet and wash the feet of the visitors. There is never an indication that John ever had any desire to elevate himself above Jesus during his ministry. In fact, John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

**HE EXISTED BEFORE ME.** The Apostle John writes about the John the Baptist, who preached about the pre-Incarnate Christ. He was “in the beginning” (in eternity past) with the Father (1:1ff, and He was in the world (1:11) before the Incarnation. Jesus, debating the Jews on one occasion, said, “I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). Robertson is again right on target with his comments:

“For he was before me (hoti prôtos mou ên). Paradox, but clear. He had always been (ên imperfect) before John in his Pre-incarnate state, but ‘after’ John in time of the Incarnation, but always ahead of John in rank immediately on his Incarnation. Prôtos mou (superlative with ablative) occurs here when only two are compared as is common in the vernacular Koin. So the Beloved Disciple came first (prôtos) to the tomb, ahead of Peter (John 20:4). So also prôton humôn in John 15:18 means ‘before you’ as if it were proteron humôn. Verse John 1:30 repeats these words almost exactly” [ATR].

**1:16 - WE HAVE ALL RECEIVED.** “*Indeed, we have all received grace after grace from His fullness...*” “We”, meaning “all” born-again believers in Jesus Christ have “received grace after grace.” All true believers are recipient of all that grace entails, denoting not only heaven by and by, but the life and character of heaven here and now. All true believers receive Jesus Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation. Sadly, some believe that they must first be saved and then, as a “second blessing”, receive the Holy Spirit. How tragic it is that some believers waste their time in agony and frustration seeking the Blessing God gives every believer at the point of salvation. The Gospel According to John is clear on this.

**GRACE AFTER GRACE.** The KJV, a beautiful translation, renders it: “And of his fulness have

all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16)”. The King James Version is about eighty-five percent the Tyndale translation of the New Testament. John Wycliffe had been the first person translated the New Testament into English (in 1388), but he translated it from Latin, after it had been translated from the Greek.

William Tyndale was the first to translate the New Testament from the Greek (in 1526). Dr. William R. Cooper of Middlesex, England has translated both the Wycliffe NT and the Tyndale NT into modern English, presenting us with readable letters and words, while maintaining the original Middle English spelling. Dr. Cooper has done most of this work while battling a form of cancer that should have taken his life around the year 2000! He is presently “translating” the Nesbett (Scott) NT into modern English, having already invested about three years in this challenging project. Here is the modern literal translation of Tyndale’s translation: “And of his fulness have we all received, even favour for favour” (from this writer’s complimentary 2000 First Edition copy of Dr. Cooper’s modern rendering). Interestingly, the verses are not numbered in Tyndale.

The HCSB is a word for word translation, but it is as readable as most of the phrase for phrase translations. However, we still must ask, “What does John mean by “grace after grace”? And, why does he state this here? Those questions are answered by the New Commentary on the Whole Bible:

“This verse, containing the words of John the apostle, continues the thought of the prologue, specifically 1:14. In 1:14 Jesus is said to be “full of grace and truth”; now John speaks of this fullness by way of personal testimony. He, speaking for all the apostles, received out of his fullness (cf. Col. 2:9). **grace for grace**—lit., “grace instead of grace,” conveying the idea of **continuous replacement, perpetual replenishment—one measure of grace replenishing the other in ever greater quantities**” [NCWB, bold italics added by this writer for emphasis].

This shows that the HCSB rendering is closer to the original idea. Grace is continuously replaced from individual to individual as individuals believe in Jesus Christ and receive His salvation, which can only be received by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8).

**OF HIS FULNESS.** As we continue through the Prologue, we must remind ourselves of **the stated purpose of the Fourth Gospel**: “But these are written so **that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name**” (John 20:31, bold added by this writer). We must also remember that the Holy Spirit inspired John to proclaim the Messiahship of Jesus Christ against the backdrop of Gnosticism, a pagan religious philosophy that was making its way into the church in such a way that the church had to deal with it. This Gospel would be the answer to that and all similar heresies (Eastern Mysticism, and all New Age movements, including that touted so highly in 2008 by Oprah Winfrey and her New Age mentor Eckhart Tolle). Let Robertson explain how this particular verse forces that heresy into a deep vault and seals the door on it forever. People may still be enslaved by it, but it is refuted forever here. Once again, we may turn to Robertson:

“Of his fulness (ek tou plêrômatos). The only instance of plêrôma in John's writings, though five times of Christ in Paul's Epistles (Col 1:19; Col 2:9; Eph 1:23; Eph 3:19; Eph 4:13). See Col 1:19 for discussion of these terms of the Gnostics that Paul employs for all the attributes of God summed up in Christ (Col 2:9) and so used here by John of the Incarnate Logos. We all (hêmeis pantes). John is facing the same Gnostic depreciation of Christ of which Paul writes in Colossians. So here John appeals to all his own contemporaries as participants with him in the fulness of the Logos” [ATR].

The Bible Knowledge Commentary wraps it up like this: “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” [BKC].

This verse compliments verses 14 and 15 in sealing the fate of Gnosticism and other pagan philosophies which would either deny or minimize the Person or work of Jesus Christ. It also provides an answer to false theology that parades as Christian (Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, for example).

**1:17 - ALTHOUGH THE LAW.** “(F)or although the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The emphasis on Jesus as the Agent of creation would resonate with the Gentile readers of this Gospel, but for the Jewish readers it was important to stress the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Messiah. Paul has been criticized for his “sermon” at the Acropolis in Athens because of his departure from his message in other cities. That criticism, however, is somewhat jaundiced for the simple reason that Paul always made it a point to go to the local Jewish synagogue and when given an opportunity to speak, begin with Abraham and move quickly through the Scripture to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Jews understood that, but neither the philosophers at Athens, nor the Gentile readers of this Gospel would know about Abraham, or the Messianic Covenant. In the Prologue to John, the Holy Spirit inspired the last of the apostles to declare Jesus, the Agent of Creation, to be the Son of God to the Gentiles, and the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets to the Jews. That is what he does here.

The Jews boasted of the Law even when they did not obey it, as we see very clearly in Jeremiah. At that time Judah has already witnessed the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Sargon II of Assyria in 722 B. C., but that did not lead them to repent. They boasted of the temple and paid lip service the Law and the Prophets, but in reality they dishonored the temple and disobeyed God. The Incarnation declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed that through His discourses, sermons, and signs. He paid the price for the sins of the world on the Cross and His victory was dramatically demonstrated by the Resurrection, the appearances, and the Ascension.

What John writes here is nothing new. Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been inspired to write Gospel

accounts which declared Him to be the fulfillment of the Law. Paul had proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law. Now, all the other scripture writers are dead, and all the other apostles had been martyred. So, why do we have the repetition here? First, it was the Holy Spirit who determined the content of the Fourth Gospel. In the second place, this is the evangelistic Gospel, so the purpose is to convince all people that Jesus is the Messiah; and to convince Jewish readers there had to be a clear statement of His relationship to Moses and to the Law.

The Law was given through Moses, and even though both the Law and the Prophets were from God, they were never intended to be the final revelation of God's redemptive love. The Law was given through Moses, but Moses was the instrument by which the Law was given, not the source of the Law.

**GRACE AND TRUTH CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.** Vines lists numerous usages for "grace" in the New Testament, but a simple working definition is that grace is the unmerited favor and love of God. We are saved by grace, through faith, plus nothing (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6). What we find in this verse follows the overall theme of the Prologue, but here we have a contrast between the Law and Grace. To summarize, "Moses gave something—the law. Christ himself brought something (grace and truth) in His very own person, for grace and truth were embodied in him" [NCWB]. Robertson offers critical help:

"Was given (edothê). First aorist passive indicative of didômi. By Moses (dia Môuseôs). 'Through Moses' as the intermediate agent of God. Came (egeneto). The historical event, the beginning of Christianity. By Jesus Christ (dia Iêsou Christou). 'Through Jesus Christ,' the intermediate agent of God the Father. Here in plain terms John identifies the Pre-incarnate Logos with Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. The full historical name 'Jesus Christ' is here for the first time in John. See also John 17:3 and four times in 1John and five times in Revelation. Without Christ there would have been no Christianity" [ATR].

That writer also discusses the relationship between "grace and truth":

"John's theology is here pictured by the words "grace and truth" (hê charis kai hê alêtheia), each with the article and each supplementary to the other. It is grace in contrast with law as Paul sets forth in Galatians and Romans. Paul had made grace "a Christian commonplace" (Bernard) before John wrote. It is truth as opposed to Gnostic and all other heresy as Paul shows in Colossians and Ephesians. The two words aptly describe two aspects of the Logos and John drops the use of Logos and charis, but clings to alêtheia (see John 8:32 for the freedom brought by truth), though the ideas in these three words run all through his Gospel" [ATR].

**1:18 - NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN.** "No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son—the One who is at the Father's side—He has revealed Him." I agree that "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 [BKC]. The first statement in this verse, "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" [BKC].

**THE ONE AND ONLY SON.** In the comments on the first verse of the Prologue I stressed that if you don't get it right here nothing else matters. This eternal truth is the foundation for the Gospel, and in reality, for all doctrine. So, it is not surprising that the Prologue to this Gospel opens with the statement that "the Word was God" and closes with the declaration that the Word, Christ, is the one and only Son of God. Robertson has it right:

"This is the reading of the Textus Receptus and is intelligible after *hōs monogenous para patros* in verse John 1:14. But the best old Greek manuscripts (Aleph B C L) read *monogenēs theos* (God only begotten) which is undoubtedly the true text. Probably some scribe changed it to *hōs monogenēs huios* to obviate the blunt statement of the deity of Christ and to make it like John 3:16. But there is an inner harmony in the reading of the old uncials. **The Logos is plainly called theos in verse John 1:1. The Incarnation is stated in verse John 1:14**, where he is also termed *monogenēs*. He was that before the Incarnation. **So he is "God only begotten,"** 'the Eternal Generation of the Son' of Origen's phrase" [ATR, bold added by this writer].

"God only begotten" is better than "an only begotten", which is found in some commentaries.

**AT THE FATHER'S SIDE.** This statement reveals "the intimacy of the Father and the Son (cf. the Word was 'with God,' vv. 1-2). Furthermore, the Son **has made... known** (*exe-ge-sato*, 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)" [BKC].

God moved nations like a chess player moves pawns to accomplish His Messianic Covenant, raising up Assyria to judge Israel; Babylon to take Judah into captivity until they were purged of idolatry; Persia to return a remnant to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple; Greece to give the world the ideal language for the New Testament; and Rome to set the stage for the coming of the Messiah by giving the world the greatest highway and postal system the world had ever known, as well as the safest travel by land or sea the world had ever known. Robertson shows the importance of the Greek in the following statement:

"The eternal relation of the Son with the Father like *pros ton theon* in verse John 1:1.



In John 3:13 there is some evidence for *ho ôn en tôi ouranôi* used by Christ of himself while still on earth. The mystic sense here is that the Son is qualified to reveal the Father as Logos (both the Father in Idea and Expression) by reason of the continual fellowship with the Father. He (*ekinos*). Emphatic pronoun referring to the Son. Hath declared him (*exêgêsato*). First aorist (effective) middle indicative of *exêgeomai*, old verb to lead out, to draw out in narrative, to recount. Here only in John, though once in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:35) and four times in (Acts 10:8; Acts 15:12, 14; Acts 21:19). **This word fitly closes the Prologue in which the Logos is pictured in marvelous fashion as the Word of God in human flesh, the Son of God with the Glory of God in him**, showing men who God is and what" [ATR, bold added].

**HE HAS REVEALED HIM.** Actually, God has revealed His Son in such a way that He was seen and explained to those to whom He was revealed. "The Greek indicates Jesus was God's explainer, God's explicator, even God's exegete. The Greek word (*exe-geomai*) means 'to narrate, to draw out, to lead through.' Christ came to narrate God, to draw out the meaning of God, and to lead men, so to speak, on a tour through God. In short, he came to make God known to men. He was uniquely qualified to do this because (1) he himself was God; (2) he was God's one and only Son; and (3) he was in the bosom of the Father (i.e., he had the most intimate relationship with him). This verse 1:18 mirrors 1:1 and provides **a grand climax to John's prologue**" [NCWB, bold added by this writer].

## The Testimony of John the Baptist

**1:19 - JOHN'S TESTIMONY.** "*This is John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, 'Who are you?'*" The Prologue is critical, both to this Gospel account, and to every true believer, this passage is critical in filling in the gap left by the Synoptic Gospels. The word synoptic means "seeing alike", and as any harmony of the Gospels shows, the Synoptic Gospels follow basically the same accounts, miracles, sermons, successes, and resistance from the leaders of the various sects within Judaism. The Gospel According to John (it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ), often follows the Synoptic Gospels, but it is consistent with the purpose stated in 20:31: "But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name." So, throughout this Gospel, John continually cries out to the world, "This is the Son of God! This is the Messiah! Believe in Him and you will receive eternal life (see John 3:16).

With that in mind we are ready to look at the opening words in this first section, which ties the body of the entire book together with the Prologue: "This is John's witness" (*kai hautê estin hê marturia tou Iôanou*). The Authorized Version has "the record of John", but the Greek (from *martus*) demands "witness" or "testimony". A record is a written account, but John's testimony was spoken, not written. We must also remind ourselves that *marturia* is the Greek word for martyr. Those early witnesses were risking their lives when they became witnesses for Christ, and we might add, most

never considered becoming a “**secret disciple**”. There really is no such thing as a secret disciple, for **the secret destroys the discipleship, and the discipleship destroys the secret.** *The Voice of Martyrs* magazine chronicles accounts of martyrdom in various parts of the world today, but sadly neither the media nor politicians in America will mention it lest they offend Muslims, or others who are responsible for their torture, murder, and slavery. Muslims accuse Americans of offending Islam while they murder Christians, and the American media and the political leaders seem determined not to tie this cruelty to Islam.

The author of this Gospel has already alluded to John the Baptist and his ministry (verses John 1:7, 15) and now he gives us this critical “testimony” to add after the Prologue.

“Just as the author assumes the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, so he assumes the Synoptic accounts of the baptism of Jesus by John, but adds various details of great interest and value between the baptism and the Galilean ministry, **filling out thus our knowledge of this first year of the Lord’s ministry** in various parts of Palestine. The story in John proceeds along the same lines as in the Synoptics. There is increasing unfolding of Christ to the disciples with increasing hostility on the part of the Jews till the final consummation in Jerusalem” [ATR].

**WHEN THE JEWS.** The occasion for John’s testimony follows: “when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, ‘Who are you?’” We must remind ourselves that the Apostle John was writing from Ephesus some sixteen years after the destruction of the Temple by Titus and his Roman army in A. D. 70. So, he often uses the term “the Jews” to denote the Jewish religious leaders, and those used by them for their purpose. Word of the preaching of John the Baptist, and reports that he was baptizing those who responded to his message would have spread quickly to Jerusalem, and there were always people who would report any religious activity to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. As word of the preaching of John the Baptist spread (see Mat 3:5), people continued to go out to hear him. His fame spread throughout Galilee and Judea.

**PRIESTS AND LEVITES.** The Sanhedrin was controlled by Sadducees at this time. In John 1:24 the author explains that it was the Pharisees who urged the Sadducees to investigate John the Baptist. “The Synoptics throw a flood of light on this circumstance, for in Mat 3:7 we are told that the Baptist called the Pharisees and Sadducees “offspring of vipers” (Luke 3:7). Popular interest in John grew till people were wondering “in their hearts concerning John whether haply he were the Christ” ( Luke 3:15). So the Sanhedrin finally sent a committee to John to get his own view of himself, but the Pharisees saw to it that Sadducees were sent” [ATR].

**WHO ARE YOU?** As his fame spread throughout Galilee and Judea, so it was not long before it got the attention of the Pharisees, who in turn urged the priests and Levites to look into the reports. It seems that from the character of his ministry, his preaching, and his baptisms, that many were wondering if John the Baptizer was actually the Messiah (Luke 3:15). “The great council of the nation, or the Sanhedrim, had, among other things, the charge of religion. They felt it to be their duty, therefore, to inquire into the character and claims of John, and to learn whether he was the Messiah.

It is not improbable that they wished that he might be the long-expected Christ, and were prepared to regard him as such” [BARNES].

**1:20 - HE DECLARED.** *“He did not refuse to answer, but he declared: ‘I am not the Messiah.’”* The Greek shows continuous action. Daily, John the Baptist openly answered the questions and challenges of the priests and Levites. In the manner of the modern day media, they continued to ask, and John continued to answer them.

**NOT THE MESSIAH.** This was his confession, as stressed by the repetition of the Greek verb meaning to confess. “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)...This was his confession, as stressed by the repetition of the verb (in Gr.) [BKC]. They continued to ask and John continued to deny that he was the Messiah. He was sent to herald the coming of the Messiah, not to talk about himself, so he was quick to deny any suggestion that he was the long awaited Messiah.

Were these priests and Levites hoping John was the Messiah, or were they trying to expose him as a fraud? Consider this question against the backdrop of their relentless attacks on Jesus after He declared that He was the Messiah. The Jews were indeed looking for the Messiah, but as we shall see, they had their own conception of the Person, ministry, and purpose of the Messiah. They were looking for a political/military Messiah who would deliver them from Rome and reestablish the kingdom of David, expanding the territory of that nation from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River.

**1:21 - ARE YOU ELIJAH?** *“What then?” they asked him. ‘Are you Elijah?’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ ‘No,’ he answered. ‘I am not,’ he said.”* Their “what then” is argumentative. If one has watched the White House New Conference, he or she has seen reporters go after the White House press secretary in this way. They ask a question and if they do not get the exact answer then want they re-phrase the question or repeat it until they are cut off by the secretary. Tony Snow, who died on July 8, 2008, was Press Secretary for President George W. Bush, after having served as a speech writer for his father. President Bush watched Tony Snow as he answered questions fired at him by the media, and expressed a deep appreciation for the job he was doing. President Bush, a committed Christian, was very much aware of the fact that Tony Snow had been critical of him, yet he hired him because he respected him. Snow did an outstanding job representing the president when representatives of the media were firing questions at him that were designed to get him to say anything they could use against the president. These Pharisees did not send reporters, they were sent by the Sanhedrin, so they came with the authority of the religious ruling body approved by Rome.

John had confessed that he was not the Messiah (v. 20), and now he denies that he is Elijah. “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” [BKC]. In Mark 9:11, Jesus identifies John with the Elijah

of Malachi's prophecy. Robertson asks, "Why then does John here flatly deny it? Because the expectation was that Elijah would return in person. This John denies. Jesus only asserts that John was Elijah in spirit. Elijah in person they had just seen on the Mount of Transfiguration" [ATR].

**THE PROPHET.** "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) [BKC]. For these priests and Levites, the questions flowed naturally: "Are you the Messiah?" John answered, "I am not the Messiah." Whereupon, they asked, "Are you Elijah?" This time he answered, "No, I am not." The next question might have been anticipated: "are you the prophet?" This question followed naturally after the previous denials. Moses (Deut. 18:15) had prophesied of a prophet like himself. In fact, Moses had promised a successor to himself, and that prophecy has a double fulfillment. Joshua was the initial successor to Moses, but there was Another who was coming. Jesus' name in the Hebrew is the same as that of the great leader of the Conquest of Canaan. Robertson summarizes:

"Christians interpreted this prophet to be the Messiah (Acts 3:22; Acts 7:37), but the Jews thought him another forerunner of the Messiah (John 7:40). It is not clear in John 6:15 whether the people identified the expected prophet with the Messiah, though apparently so. Even the Baptist later became puzzled in prison whether Jesus himself was the true Messiah or just one of the forerunners (Luke 7:19). People wondered about Jesus himself whether he was the Messiah or just one of the looked for prophets (Mark 8:28; Mat 16:14). And he answered (kai apekrithê). First aorist passive (deponent passive, sense of voice gone) indicative of apokrinomai, to give a decision from myself, to reply. No (Ou). Shortest possible denial" [ATR].

**1:22 - WHO ARE YOU.** "*Who are you, then?*" they asked. "*We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?*" The priests and Levites persist in asking John a series of questions, each response leading to another next question.

**WE NEED TO GIVE AN ANSWER.** If there had been any doubt, these men answer the question: these priests and Levites had been sent to investigate John and they persist in interrogating him. "These Pharisees were probably a deputation from the grand Sanhedrin; the members of which, hearing of the success of the Baptist's preaching, were puzzled to know what to make of him, and seriously desired to hear from himself what he professed to be" [CLARKE].

**WHAT CAN YOU TELL US?** As already noted, these questioners were probably an official delegation from the Sanhedrin, but so far, they had no answers to report when they returned to Jerusalem. But they are persistent: "What can you tell us about yourself?" These men were not searching for personal information about the Messiah at this point, they were trying to pin John down so they could prepare their report to the Sanhedrin.

**1:23 - I AM A VOICE.** *“He said, ‘I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord —just as Isaiah the prophet said.’”* John denied that he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the coming prophet they anticipated. Instead, he identifies himself as a “voice of one crying in the wilderness.” He sought no glory for himself and he saw his role as a herald of the coming Messiah.

**MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD.** Luke was inspired to write: “As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: **“Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!** Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low; the crooked will become straight, the rough ways smooth, and everyone will see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:4-6, bold added by this writer).

Robertson provides the basic explanation: “Make straight the way of the Lord’ (Euthunate tēn hodon tou kuriou). By this language (euthunō in N.T. only here and Jas 3:4, first aorist active imperative here) John identifies himself to the committee as the forerunner of the Messiah. The early writers note the differences between the use of Logos (Word) for the Messiah and phônē (Voice) for John” [ATR].

It has been said that some ancient kings, when planning a trip to any particular province within their domain, would send a trusted slave throughout that region, along the anticipated route. This slave would meet people along the way and cry out, “The king is coming, prepare the road (“make straight the road). In towns and villages, he would simply make the announcement to the village elders and they would take the necessary action.

To citizens who lived along the route the king would take, the slave would cry out for them to prepare the road in front of their house or the road running through their land. The king would want a comfortable trip as well as a safe one. When I was hunting with my father in my youth, he would drive us to a place near Pine Valley, a community about 12 miles east of Water Valley, MS, that was owned by my grandfather and his sisters. We had to drive some distance through the forests in the area in order to reach their land. As we drove along there were several radical detours, the cause of which was obvious. Some time in the past a tree had fallen across the road and when drivers reached that spot they would simply turn into the woods along the side of the dirt road and go around it. Others followed until the detour became the new road. There were dips in the road where cars had gotten stuck when the road was muddy. In time people would come to that place and, rather than risk getting stuck in the mud, they would go around it. Their detour in time became the new road. Why stop and repair a road on someone else’s property?!

In ancient times, according to the story, people living along the road would be expected to fill in the holes, remove obstacles, and straighten the road. Failure to do so would highlight them as people unfriendly to the king. The people could make the trip pleasant, or they could do nothing and make it uncomfortable. A detour might also provide a likely spot for an assassin, or hinder an escape. The slave who traveled ahead of the king (the “voice”) was simply following orders in order to prepare for the coming king. No one ever confused him with the king. John the Baptist was the slave who

cried out for the people to prepare the way for the coming King (the Messiah). This is consistent with the statement he will make later that he was not worthy to bend down and take off the sandals of the Messiah (1:27).

**1:24 - SENT FROM.** *“Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.”* The committee that examined John were made up of priests and Levites (members of the Sanhedrin). They had been sent at the request (or insistence) of the Pharisees.

“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” [BKC]

**1:25 - WHY DO YOU BAPTIZE?** *“So they asked him, ‘Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?’”* This dialogue is going on like a cross-examination, every answer prompting a new question. “Their question to the Baptizer was, in essence, “Since you have no official title, **why** are you baptizing?” [BKC]. The Pharisees and Sadducees had a different agenda, but it was commonly agreed that before the Messiah came, either Elijah would come, or the prophet promised by Moses. In reality, **Jesus is the Prophet!** That was a double barreled prophesy, with one sight focused on Joshua (Hebrew, Yeshua) the son of Nunn, and the other Jesus, son of Joseph, whose Hebrew name is *Yeshua*. Messianic Jews today might identify with the *Jews for Yeshua* organization.

**1:26 - I BAPTIZE WITH WATER.** *“I baptize with water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know [Him].”* That he was baptizing people was obvious. Everyone present witnessed it. If he baptized people, common sense tell one that there was a purpose in his action. They had asked, Why do you baptize then, if you are not the Messiah, Elihah. or that prophet?

“He did not deny it; nor did he condescend to state his authority. That he had given. He admitted that he had introduced an important change in the rites of religion, and he goes on to tell them that this was not all. Greater and more important changes would soon take place without their authority. The Messiah was about to come, and the power was about to depart from their hands” [BARNES].

**SOMEONE STANDS AMONG YOU.** “Present active indicative of late verb stêkô from perfect stem hestêka. John had already baptized Jesus and recognized him as the Messiah” [ATR]. The Gospel According to Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus. Matthew and Luke begin with the account of the birth of Jesus, but give the account of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3 and Luke 3). John’s baptism, Luke tells us was the baptism of repentance. Baptism is still an ordinance for those who repent.

**YOU DON’T KNOW HIM.** John had baptized Jesus; the Spirit descended in a visible form like

that of a dove, and rested upon Him; and the Father announced to John that this was His beloved Son. “This was the tragedy of the situation (John 1:11). Apparently this startling declaration excited no further inquiry from the committee” [ATR]. This obviously was not the kind of Messiah for whom they were looking, so they returned to Jerusalem as ignorant as when Jesus had confounded the Priests, Levites, and Pharisees when He visited with them when he was twelve years old.

**1:27 - THE ONE COMING.** “*He is the One coming after me, whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.*” John preceded the One of whom he prophesied in time, but he quickly adds that he does not precede Him in rank.

**WHOSE SANDAL STRAP.** When visitors arrived at the home of a wealthy family in that day they might be met by a slave who would bend down and take off their sandals and wash the road dust from their feet before they entered the home. The slave assigned to this job was not the highest ranked slave in the household. He was on the bottom rung of the ladder. John seeks no earthly position, other than that of the most humble slave to the One who is coming. “This was remarkable humility. John was well known; he was highly honoured; thousands came to hear him. Jesus was at that time unknown; but John says that he was unworthy to perform the humblest office for Jesus. So we all should be willing to lay all that we have at the feet of Christ, and feel that we are unworthy to be his lowest servants” [BARNES].

**1:28 - BETHANY.** “*All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*” “All this” points specifically to the encounters with the representatives of the Sanhedrin who were trying to determine just who he was. They demanded to know if he was the Messiah, and when he answered that he was not, they continued to question him as to his identity. These encounters happened “in Bethany across the Jordan” where John the Baptist was baptizing. “There was a Bethany about 2 miles east of Jerusalem, but there is said also to have been another in the tribe of Reuben, on the east side of the river Jordan, and in this place, probably, John was baptizing. It is about 12 miles above Jericho” [BARNES]. That other Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, will become well-known as Jesus visits with these followers, the place where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It has been the focus of attention by students of the Word for two thousand years when they study the last week of our Lord’s life.

## The Lamb of God

**1:29 - JOHN SAW JESUS.** “*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* The day after John had answered the questions of the priests and Levites who had been sent by the Pharisees, John looked up and “saw Jesus coming toward him”. The priests and Levites had demanded to know if John the Baptist was the Messiah, so when John looked up, the next day, and saw Jesus coming toward him, he made a dramatic proclamation.

**HERE IS THE LAMB OF GOD.** He had been thoroughly questioned by Jewish authorities to

determine just who he claimed to be. Seeing Jesus coming toward him, John dramatically declared, “here is the Lamb of God!” We may assume he had Isaiah 53:7 in mind: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth.”

Some have questioned whether or not John had this verse in mind, or how he could have known that Jesus was the Lamb of God. At first, His disciples did not understand the significance of this title, but in time the title would be commonly used to identify Him. Peter wrote, “but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish” (1 Peter 1:19). Isaiah 53:6 is directly applied to Christ by Philip in Acts 8:32.

At first, the disciples did not understand that Jesus was the Lamb of whom Isaiah had prophesied, but in time He taught them about his sacrificial death. Some have wondered how John the Baptist could have known to use this title for Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. He used that title of Jesus before His first disciples or the religious leaders of the day understood. Is it not possible that the One who called him to proclaim the coming of the Messiah had revealed it to him? How could he have baptized Jesus, seen the Spirit descend in a form like that of a dove and light on Him, and heard the Father proclaim Him to be His Son in whom He was well pleased without making that connection?

**1:30 - THIS IS THE ONE.** *“This is the One I told you about: ‘After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’”* John is repeating what he had said earlier about Jesus (vv. 15, 27). John points to Jesus and proclaims, “This is the One!” This is exactly what the Apostle John has written in 1:15: “John testified concerning Him and exclaimed, ‘This was the One of whom I said, ‘The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’”

**SURPASSED ME.** John had the attention of the nation, and at that very hour was receiving attention he did not desire from representatives of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. How could anyone they did not know surpass John the Baptizer? Jesus was just beginning His ministry, but John’s role was to point people to the One who by His very nature surpassed all human beings.

**HE EXISTED BEFORE ME.** Jesus is the Incarnate Savior, but He is also the pre-Incarnate Son of the Living God. Jesus Himself expressed it in a manner that Bible students will be discussing until Jesus returns: “Your father Abraham was overjoyed that he would see My day; he saw it and rejoiced” (John 8:56).

**1:31 - “I DIDN’T KNOW HIM.** *“I didn’t know Him, but I came baptizing with water so He might be revealed to Israel.”* John stated that his fame would be superseded by that of Jesus, whose priority stems from His preexistence. But why did John say, “I didn’t know Him”? “Though John and Jesus were related, as Mary and Elizabeth were relatives (Luke 1:36), nothing is known of any contacts between them in their years of childhood and adolescence. John did not know that Jesus was the coming One until He was revealed by the Father. All John knew was that he was to prepare the way for Him by **baptizing with water**. God would send His Man **to Israel** in His good time” [BKC, bold in original].



**BUT I CAME.** John will contrast His ministry with that of Jesus. “The purpose of John’s ministry was to manifest to Israel with their spiritual privileges (John 1:49) the presence of the Messiah. Hence he was baptizing in water those who confessed their sins, he means, as in Mark 1:5. The Synoptic account is presupposed all along here” [ATR].

**BAPTIZING.** John was baptizing because he had been called to baptize with water, but he could only baptize with water, whereas Jesus baptizes with the Spirit. John baptized them in water, Jesus gives believers living water. Jesus said to the woman at the well, “Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would ask Him, and He would give you living water” (John 4:10).

John says he came baptizing with water “so He might be revealed to Israel.” John came to prepare the way for the Messiah, and now he declares that the Messiah is this very Jesus of Nazareth, to whom he is pointing, and about whom he is speaking.

**1:32 - I WATCHED THE SPIRIT.** *“And John testified, “I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him.”* For the account of the baptism of Jesus and the phenomenal manifestations of His glory, see Matthew, Chapter 3. “The Fourth Gospel does not state that this descent of **the Spirit** like **a dove** occurred at Jesus’ baptism. The significant thing is that the invisible Spirit came **from heaven** and manifested Himself in a bodily (dovelike) form. John saw the Spirit as a dove **remain on** Jesus (cf. Isa. 11:2; Mark 1:10)” [BKC, bold in original].

In the Synoptic accounts, we see a manifestation of the Trinity. The Son (the Second Person of the Trinity) was baptized; the Spirit (the Third Member of the Trinity) “descended from heaven like a dove”; and the Father (the First Person of the Trinity) spoke the words John would never forget, words that would be repeated until Jesus returns. There could be no mistake in John’s mind or his heart: This truly was the Messiah!

**1:33 - I DIDN’T KNOW HIM.** *“I didn’t know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”* John did not know Jesus personally, but he certainly knew about Him. He was six months older than Jesus and his mother Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin must surely have told John about the visitation by the angel who had announced to his father that he and Elizabeth would have a son, and that son would herald the coming of the Messiah. “John and Jesus, though relatives, lived at a distance from one another: John in the desert and Jesus in Nazareth. John knew that he was the herald of the Messiah, but he did not know Jesus was that Messiah until God gave him a sign—the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus” [NCWB]. John was fully aware of the fact that the Messiah had come to earth, but he did not personally know Him. There had apparently been little or no contact between the families for many years. Considering Elizabeth’s age when John was born, she may have been dead many years when John began his ministry.

**HE WHO SENT ME.** The One who sent John to baptize with water “told” him what he should say and do. The point is, God revealed His will and purpose to John as clearly as he did to Old Testament prophets. As Francis Schaeffer so effectively declared in his Trilogy, the first three books he wrote, “He Is There” and “He Is not Silent”. God communicates with us today as He chooses, which primarily means through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

There are certain **pivotal characters** in the history of the world and none are more important than those revealed in the Bible. **Noah** was the pivotal character between the old world and the new beginning. **Abraham** is one of the most important people who ever lived. **Moses** was without doubt one of the key people who has ever lived, as God moved the world from anarchy to Divine Law. **Samuel** was the prophet God used to transition His people from the Period of the Judges to the Period of the Kingdom. **David** was the most important King in history of Israel. That was one thousand years before the coming of the Messiah. Though there were a few kings, like Hezekiah and Josiah, who sought to turn Israel back to the Lord, the key people during that one thousand year period between David and the Incarnation were **prophets**, whom the Lord used to keep His Messianic promise before the people. Then came **John the Baptist**, who came in the spirit of Elijah, a voice crying out in the wilderness, announcing the coming of the Lamb of God.

**TO BAPTIZE.** Vines defines “baptizo”, “to baptize,” is “primarily a frequentative form of bapto, “to dip,” was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plutarchus uses it of the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl (Alexis, 67) and Plato, metaphorically, of being overwhelmed with questions (Euthydemus, 277 D)” [VINES]. The word means to take beneath the surface and bring forth again, as in dipping clothes into the dye water. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the believer’s identification with Him. It is a holy ordinance ordered for all who receive Him by grace through faith.

**THE ONE YOU WILL SEE.** God had told John, “The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” The word “One” should be capitalized, first because He is God, but also because the world needs to understand that He is holy. The Synoptic Gospels tell the story of the baptism of Jesus, at which time the Trinity declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God, the Messiah. The Son was baptized, the Spirit descended in a visible form, and the Father spoke: “After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. 17 And there came a voice from heaven: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!” (Matt 3:16-17).

“This was the sign by which he was to know the Messiah. He was to see the Spirit descending like a dove and abiding on him. It does not follow, however, that he had no intimation before this that Jesus was the Christ, but it means that by this he should infallibly know it. From Mat 3:13,14, it seems that John supposed, before the baptism of Jesus, that he claimed to be the Messiah, and that he believed it; but the infallible,

certain, testimony in the case was the descent of the Holy Spirit on him at his baptism” (BARNES).

**WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Here, the New American Standard Bible translates the Greek (*en pneumati hagiōi*), “In the Holy Spirit.” “Here again one needs the background of the Synoptics for the contrast between John's baptism in water (John 1:26) and that of the Messiah in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; Mat 3:11; Luke 3:16)” [ATR].

**1:34 - TESTIFIED.** *“I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!”* There could have been no greater message for the righteous, but we will soon see that it was not welcomed by the religious establishment of the day. John had seen Jesus when he baptized Him, he had seen the Spirit descend in a visible form and rest upon Him, and he had heard the Father speak. John now testifies that, based on what he had personally seen, this Person (Jesus) is indeed “the Son of God!” “The prophesied Davidic King was God’s Son (2 Sam. 7:13), and the messianic King is uniquely the Son of God (Ps. 2:7). The title “Son of God” goes beyond the idea of obedience and messianic King to that of Jesus’ essential nature. In the Fourth Gospel this title is not applied to believers. They are called “children” (*tekna*; e.g., John 1:12) while “Son” (*hyios*) is used only of Jesus” [BKC].

The title, “the Son of God”, is often used for Jesus, and rightly so. For example, upon His calming the storm, “Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, ‘Truly You are the Son of God!’” (Matt. 14:33).

**1:35 - THE NEXT DAY.** *“Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples.”* This is history, and even if John does not provide dates, we know that this verse points to the day after John the Baptist had declared that God had revealed to him the Jesus is the Son of God. These two men were disciples of John the Baptist at this point in time. “This testimony of John is reported because it was the main design of this evangelist to show that Jesus was the Messiah... To do this, he adduces the decided and repeated testimony of John the Baptist. This was impartial evidence in the case, and hence he so particularly dwells upon it” [BARNES].

**1:36 - HE SAW JESUS.** *“When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God!’”* The Gospels do not go into details as to what Jesus was doing or where He was going. It is sufficient to know that He was walking past John and his two disciples.

**LOOK! THE LAMB OF GOD.** This is critical to the message of John, which is to specifically identify Jesus of Nazareth as the unique Son of God, and to proclaim Him to be the Lamb of God. Barnes writes, “Fixing his eyes intently upon him. Singling him out and regarding him with special attention. Contemplating him as the long-expected Messiah and Deliverer of the world. In this way should all ministers fix the eye on the Son of God, and direct all others to him” [BARNES]. This “vividly pictures the rapture of John in this vision of Jesus, so far as we know the third and last glimpse of Jesus by John (the baptism, verse John 1:29, and here). Saith (*legei*). Historical present, change from *histêkei* before. He repeats part of the tribute in verse John 1:29” [ATR].

**1:37 - FOLLOWED JESUS.** *“The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus.”* Any true student of the Word would like more information, more details about what happened this day and the day before. However, if we had all that information we might become so involved with questions and answers that we might lose our focus on the central message. We do know that these were two disciples of John the Baptist, who then became disciples of Jesus Christ. Interestingly, one commentary notes that “One of the disciples is named—Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother (1:40); and the other is left unnamed, **though undoubtedly it is the author of this Gospel — John**” [NCWB, bold added by this writer]. John, the youth who, along with this brother James, sought a higher position among the disciples, now does not mention his own name because he seeks only to focus our attention on Jesus. That, of course is what John the Baptist was doing.

**1:38 - WHEN JESUS TURNED.** *“When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, ‘What are you looking for? They said to Him, ‘ Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are You staying?”* We move now from the ministry of John the Baptist to Jesus, and John yields the stage to Jesus. It was that simple. He continued preaching, but only to call attention to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. John had seen Jesus passing by, pointed to Him, and declared Him to be the Lamb of God (vs. 36). We can be sure that if John saw Jesus passing by, Jesus missed nothing of what was happening. There is no reason to assume that Jesus did not hear John the Baptist proclaim Him the Lamb of God. In which case, it would be natural for Him to look back to see what their response might be. Regardless of that, any astute person traveling by foot in country like this would be cognizant of what was going on around them. Jesus very quickly noticed the two disciples of John who were following Him.

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?** It is amazing how many times Jesus opened the door for relationships and for ministry with a question. He might have simply spoken to the men, but the Bible tells us that he knew what was in every man. He was asking why they were following Him. Jesus did not ask whom they sought, but “what are you looking for.” “The first words of Jesus preserved in this Gospel. See Luke 2:49; Mat 3:15 for words spoken before this and Mark 1:15 for Mark's first report in the Galilean ministry” [ATR].

**RABBI.** It is interesting that they used this title, but it was probably a natural one for them at the time. Rabbi was an Aramaic title for “Teacher”, a title “which John here translates by Didaskale as he is writing late and for general readers. **Luke, a Greek Christian, does not use it**, but John recalls his first use of this term to Jesus and explains it. Matthew has it only in **the greeting of Judas** to the Master (Mat 26:25, 49) and Mark once by Judas (Mark 14:45) and twice by Peter (Mark 9:5; Mark 11:21). John's Gospel has the disciples at first addressing Jesus by Rabbi while **others address him by Kurie (Lord or Sir)** as in John 4:11, 49; John 5:7” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. When these two disciples asked Jesus where He was going they wanted to know far more than His immediate destination.

**1:39 - COME AND SEE.** *“Come and you’ll see,’ He replied. So they went and saw where He*

*was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.*” Jesus might have simply told these two men where He was going, and at any time before the beginning of His ministry that may well have been what He would have done. Now, however, He invites them to join Him. This was not a command because it not in the imperative.

**WHERE HE WAS STAYING.** In response to His invitation, the two disciples of John “went and saw where He was staying.” Believers now know that Jesus offers a clear invitation to all who would know Him. One commentary states that “A person must first come to Him; then he will see. In addition to their seeing where He stayed, these words may possibly also have a deeper theological implication” [BKC]. That may be true but we must be careful lest we forsake interpretation and resort to interpolation. Jesus does invite us to follow Him, and those who follow Him do “see” Him, but we may want to look to other passages for proof of this.

John does not tell us where Jesus was staying, but believers today who have accepted His invitation and follow Him would like to know more about Him. Here in the first chapter we might remind ourselves of the purpose in the Gospel: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are **not written in this book**. But **these are written** so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, bold added by this writer). Jesus went many places, met many people, and said many things that are not written in this book. John was the lone surviving apostle and there is no doubt that he continually answered questions about Jesus that are not answered in this Gospel.

**STAYED WITH HIM.** “They stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.” They spent the rest of the day with Him. The KJV has “for it was about the tenth hour”, but the HCSB solves the problem: it was “10 in the morning.” The Bible Knowledge Commentary presents the problem: “That hour was 4 p.m. or 10 a.m., DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE FOURTH GOSPEL COUNTED DAYS FROM 6 a.m. (as the Synoptics customarily did) or from midnight or noon. The 10 a.m. times seems better and was the official Roman usage...” [BKC].

John is writing from Ephesus at the close of the First Century, so it is natural to assume that he is using Roman time, whereas the Synoptics use Hebrew time. “See John 20:19, ‘evening on that day,’ clearly Roman time. Thus also John 19:14 (sixth hour, morning) and Mark 15:25 (third hour, nine A.M.) suit. **To his latest day John never forgot the hour when first he met Jesus**” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

**1:40 - ANDREW.** “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him.” Andrew has, from that day been simply identified as Simon Peter’s brother, and we get the feeling from the Four Gospels that this would not have disturbed Andrew, had he been told this. Andrew is seen bringing people to Jesus, and because of that certain ministries have employed his name (as in Operation Andrew).

Andrew was one of the two disciples of John to whom he proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God

(1:35). Why is the other disciple not identified? It is altogether possible that he would have been named had it been anyone other than John himself. He sought fame, glory, and power in his youth, but now the mature apostle seeks only to glorify Jesus. The formal call of Andrew and Simon, and James and John, comes a little later (Mark 1:16; Mat 4:18; Luke 3:1-11).

**1:41 - HE FIRST FOUND.** *“He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which means “Anointed One”)...”* The Greek (*heuriskei houtos prōton*) is more dramatic: the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and tell him the good news. Andrew sought his own brother Simon. *“But Aleph L W read prōtos (nominative adjective) which means that Andrew was the first who went after his brother implying that John also went after his brother James”* [ATR].

**WE HAVE FOUND THE MESSIAH!** The nation of Israel had looked for the coming of the Messiah for centuries, and now a simple fisherman from Galilee finds his brother and declares, *“We have found the Messiah!”* In Hebrew, *“Messiah”* means *“the anointed One”*; in the Greek NT it is translated *Christ (ho Christos)*.

“The idea of *“the anointed One”* comes from the Old Testament practice of anointing priests and kings with oil. This was symbolic of the Spirit and pointed to the future One who would come (cf. Isa. 61:1). The title *“Messiah”* came to be used of the future Davidic King (cf. Matt. 1:1; John 6:15). In bringing **his brother Simon** Peter to Christ, no man did the church a greater service than Andrew. Andrew appeared two more times in John (6:4-9; 12:20-22); both times he was bringing someone to Jesus. The unnamed disciple is commonly held to be John the son of Zebedee, a brother of James and author of this Gospel. In Mark 1:16-20 two pairs of brothers (Simon and Andrew, James and John) who were fishermen were called by Jesus” [BKC, bold in the original].

**1:42 - BROUGHT SIMON TO JESUS.** *“(A)nd he brought [Simon] to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, ‘You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which means ‘Rock’)”.* The most important thing anyone can do for another person is to bring him or her to Jesus. The most important thing Andrew could do for Simon was to bring Him to Jesus. This was not at all like introducing one’s brother to a celebrity, or introducing him to a new civic club. This is the Messiah!

PERSONAL ILLUSTRATION: To this very day, I recall the setting when someone pointed me to Jesus. I was active in our mission church. If the doors were open I was there. I loved Bible stories and I love *“our”* church, which is to be expected when one’s parent’s have them involved at church, and place great value on the church and its ministry in the home. We were having Vacation Bible School in the afternoon and revival services at night. One afternoon, as my friend Max and I were throwing a baseball, his older sister walked out into the yard and asked me when I was going to accept Jesus as my Savior. She could not have shocked me more if she had thrown a tub of ice water on me. I thought I was a Christian! After all, I lived with Christians; I went to church with

Christians; I played with Christians. How could I not be a Christian?

The Holy Spirit convicted me instantly that I was lost and must be saved. I knew immediately that I needed to place my trust in Jesus, yet no one led me in the sinner's prayer, and I never said a word to my parents about it. I didn't know what to say. That evening I could hardly wait for the evangelist to stop preaching so I could rush down the aisle and make my public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. That was over fifty years ago, but in mind it is as though it happened yesterday. My father provided transportation to and from church in the back of his pick-up truck for every service, and when we left the church that night, it was as though I was all alone with Jesus. After several minutes, I became conscious of my friends who were riding with us. I couldn't believe all the noise they were making! I distinctly remember wondering, "do they not know what has happened?" It never occurred to me to remind myself that on the previous night I had probably been the loudest one on the truck. That night my life was changed forever, and I will never forget Billie Jean Kanada, my friend's sister who asked me when I was going to accept Jesus as my Savior.

**YOU ARE SIMON.** Apparently, before Simon spoke, Jesus saw him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which means 'Rock'). Since Andrew had spent the day with Jesus, he might have told him about his brother Simon, but we are not given that information. Jesus often knew what others were thinking (see Luke 6:8).

**CEPHAS.** Peter is the Greek translation of Cephas ("rock"). Jesus, apparently before Simon says anything, gives him a name that would one day characterize this man in ways no human being could have imagined. Jesus knew this as surely as He knew the manner of Simon's death (John 21:18-19). Simon Peter would not manifest the characteristics of a "rock" until after the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Even then, he faltered at times. Paul tells us that he rebuked Peter to his face in Antioch for his hypocrisy when he withdrew from Gentiles when certain Jews came from Jerusalem. However, we must remember that Paul was a Hellenistic Jew, while Peter was a Palestinian Jew. The temptation would have been greater for Peter than for Paul.

"Simon's name in Hebrew was probably Simeon (Gr. in Acts 15:14; 2 Peter 1:1; cf. niv marg.). No reason is given here for the change of his name from Simon to Cephas. The common understanding is that his name indicates what God by His grace would do through him. He would be a rock-like man in the church during its early years (cf. Matt. 16:18; Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-19; Acts 2-5; 10-12)" [BKC]. One Bible scholar writes that

"The stone, or rock, is a symbol of firmness and steadiness of character--a trait in Peter's character after the ascension of Jesus that was very remarkable. Before the death of Jesus he was rash, headlong, variable; and it is one proof of the omniscience of Jesus that he saw that Peter would possess a character that would be expressed appropriately by the word stone or rock" [BARNES].

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Simon Peter was indeed a "rock" in the early days of the church after Pentecost,

but we must never exaggerate his role or his ministry. He was not the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Those who make that claim should explain his wife (and his mother-in-law, whom Jesus healed in Capernaum). Dr. William R. Cooper has written an amazing book, which though unpublished, needs to be read by serious students of the Word of God today. In this scholarly work, Dr. Cooper introduces us to the first bishop of the church at Rome. His name was Linus:

“Known in the British records as *Llyn ap Caradawc*, Linus was taken to Rome under the care of the Lady Pomponia with his sisters and brother, and under her tutelage was converted to the Christian faith. Irenaeus, in *Adversus omnes Haereses*. III. iii. 3, and Eusebius, in his *Historia Ecclesiae*. iii. 2 & v. 6., **both identify Linus as the man whom Paul mentions (2 Tim. 4:21), and they also tell us that he (not Peter!) was the first bishop (episkopos - then meaning steward or overseer) of the early Roman Christians.** A portrait of Linus, painted from life, has survived and is preserved in the church of *S. Paulo fuori le Mura* (St Paul’s-outside-the-Wall) in Rome. It is reproduced as an illustration for this paper, and it is important to note in estimating the date of the painting that **he wears the robes of a Roman patrician, and neither the ecclesiastical garb nor the ridiculous halo that adorns the later ‘pictures’ (or icons) of even his most immediate successors.** Linus survived the persecution under Nero, only to perish in ca AD 81 under Domitian, the third of the Flavian Caesars. His sarcophagus, which lies deep beneath St Peter’s in Rome (and which bears his name), was seen in the year AD 822 by the poet Maurus, and eight centuries later in 1629. Clemens Romanus, who succeeded Linus as bishop of the Roman Christians, calls him, “*Sanctissimus Linus, frater Claudiae*” - the most saintly Linus, brother of Claudia.” (Bold added by this writer)

This is a quote from Page 19 of the work, *OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH*, by Dr. William R. Cooper, Middlesex, England.

Though the above quotation states that Clement of Rome followed Linus as bishop of the church at Rome, Dr. Cooper writes that

“Clement, whom modern Catholic authors refer to as an early pope, was bishop of the church at Rome **after Linus and Anacletus**, and was thus (given the fact that Peter never was bishop of Rome) only the third bishop of that church, flourishing in the mid-90s of the first century” [Cooper, William R., *OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH*, p 53, bold added by this writer].

## Philip and Nathanael Meet Jesus

**1:43 - GALILEE.** “*The next day He decided to leave for Galilee. Jesus found Philip and told him, ‘Follow Me!’*” We are not told how long Jesus had been in Judea at this point, but the day after



Andrew brought Peter to Him He decided to return to Galilee. When I was took my first New Testament class under Professor Douglas at Mississippi College, he required his students to be able to draw a map of Palestine and locate key places in the life of Christ. It helps to picture three provinces on the west side of the winding Jordan River, with Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Sandwiched in between was Samaria, but Jews traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem normally crossed over the Jordan River before they reached the province of Samaria, and then traveled south through Perea until they were south of Samaria, at which point they crossed back over the river and began their ascent to Jerusalem. They avoided any contact with the Samaritans, whom they considered unclean (not for racial reasons as some have concluded, but for religious reasons).

**JESUS FOUND PHILIP.** Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, and some believe John brought James to Him. Here, “Jesus finds Philip.” No accidental encounter is intended here. Jesus, possibly at the request of Andrew and Peter, sought Philip and found him.

Man may think he finds Jesus, but in reality Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost, is the One who finds people. In the introduction to the Book of Ephesians in *The Bible Notebook*, I begin with three illustrations of hardened criminals who “found” Jesus. One was a twenty-two year old carnival worker, working at the Mississippi State Fair in Jackson. His name was Tommy and he had committed a brutal murder while intoxicated. I read about the crime in the *Jackson Clarion Ledger* and knew I might have an opportunity to meet Tommy when I led our Baptist Student Union mission trip from Mississippi College to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson. Tommy had asked for a priest and one came and left him some pamphlets and told him to read them and he would be back in a week. Tommy said, “I need a lot more than that!” He asked the jailer not to let the priest in to see him again. Bill, in the next cell, persuaded Tommy to listen to me when I visited. He did, and a few days later I received a letter from Tommy in which he said, “Johnny, I am trying to find God.” I answered his letter to tell him that before he ever thought about finding God, Jesus was trying to reach him, and that he would not know he needed Jesus if the Holy Spirit was not revealing that need to him. I saw Tommy a number of time, including a brief visited when I preached at his camp at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

**FOLLOW ME.** John the Baptist preached, “Repent for the remission of your sins!” Repent means a change of mind that is reflected in a changed life. It seems that Philip was also a disciple of John the Baptist. All who receive Christ are expected to follow Him, but Jesus intends for Philip to literally follow Him. Immediately! He simply said, “Follow me” (*akolouthei moi*). Robertson explains that this is a “present active imperative, a direct challenge to Philip. Often Jesus uses this verb to win disciples (Mark 2:14; Mat 8:22; Mat 9:21; Mat 19:21; Luke 9:59; John 21:19). Already Jesus had four personal followers (Andrew and Simon, John and James). He has begun his work” [ATR].

**1:44 - BETHSAIDA.** “*Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.*” The name Bethsaida means “house of fish. This was the hometown of Andrew, Peter, and Philip. While some make a strong case for two towns or villages with this name, the Holman Bible Dictionary questions that claim:

“Some scholars do propose two sites named Bethsaida: The one northeast of the Sea of Galilee, as already discussed; and another, west of the Sea of Galilee, close to Capernaum. This postulation is based on Mark 6:45, where following the feeding of the 5,000 outside Bethsaida, Jesus tells His disciples to sail to Bethsaida. However, there is no contemporary mention of two Bethsaidas, and the Mark 6 text can just as easily refer to a short trip to the known city of Bethsaida-Julias as to an unknown town” [HBD].

Robertson held that there were two Bethsaidas, “one called Bethsaida Julias in Iturea (that in Luke 9:10) or the Eastern Bethsaida, the other the Western Bethsaida in Galilee (Mark 6:45), perhaps somewhere near Capernaum” [ATR]. This writer is not prepared to dismiss two Bethsaidas.

Baithsaida was located on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee. It was near here that Jesus fed the five thousand; where He healed a blind man (Mark 8:22); and where He pronounced judgment upon the town for rejecting His message, even after the miracles they had seen ((Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13). Still, “the site of Bethsaida has yet to be identified archaeologically” [HBD].

**1:45 - PHILIP FOUND NATHANAEL.** *“Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the One Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!’”* As Andrew found his brother Simon; and presumably, as John found James; so Philip found Nathanael, whose name appears only here in the Four Gospels, but there is a note on Matthew 10:3 in the HCSB that Bartholomew was presumably Nathanael. If so, these six men who came to Jesus in this passage would be appointed as Apostles.

Philip found Nathanael and announced to him, “we have found the One Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets). Each one found one! Think what it would mean if each believer found one person each year and led them to Jesus today!

These men grown up hearing both the Law and the Prophets read each Sabbath in the Synagogue. No doubt, the hope of the coming of the Messiah was kept alive in their homes. Modern students have suggested that the people of the region longed for the coming of the Messiah, who would deliver them from the tyranny of Rome. They detested the Roman authorities who controlled them and the Roman soldiers who enforced both tribute and obedience to Rome.

Some Bible teachers believe the people longed for the One about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote. However, they may be projecting their understanding of the Messianic hopes of Israel into the hearts and minds of those ancient Jews. At first, the masses followed Him, but when they discovered that He was not there to deliver them from Rome and reestablish the territory of David, most turned and followed Him no more. Here, Philip seems to be telling Nathanael that they had found the true Messiah.

Here is a question: why did the Holy Spirit inspire John to begin like this when Matthew and Luke

begin with the Birth of the Savior and Mark begins with His baptism? We must remember that John is the lone surviving apostle, writing from Ephesus over fifteen years after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70. We must also remember that an incipient Gnosticism was confusing a lot of Gentile believers, and that it would continue to spread. The Synoptics proclaimed the Good News about Jesus; John now affirms what they wrote, but adds that which should force Gnosticism (and all such heresies) in to a sepulchre and roll the stone into its place to forever seal that lie from the hearts of believers.

The Docetic Gnostics taught that Jesus did not come in the flesh. John answers that question in the Prologue, drives another nail in the lid of that coffin here, and buries it in the First Epistle of John:

“What was from the beginning, **what we have heard**, what **we have seen** with our eyes, what we have **observed**, and have **touched with our hands**, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and **we have seen it and we testify** and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—what we have **seen and heard** we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3, bold added by this writer).

“This is how you know the Spirit of God: **Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**. But every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist; you have heard that he is coming, and he is already in the world now” (1 John 4:2-3).

Some ancient manuscripts stress that the meaning is that any spirit that does not confess that Jesus came in the flesh is the spirit of antichrist. John answers all critics here. Jesus came in the flesh; He is the Son of God, the Living Word.

**JESUS THE SON OF JOSEPH, FROM NAZARETH.** Philip knew the identity of the promised One. His name was Jesus. He goes on to identify Him by family and town. He is a real Person, and this is real space/time history.

**1:46 - CAN ANYTHING GOOD?** “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” Nathanael asked him. “*Come and see,*” Philip answered.” Is this a slam on Nazareth, or is Nathanael trying to relate the village of Nazareth to Messianic prophecy? “Nathanael knew of the poor reputation of Nazareth. Surely the Messiah would come from Jerusalem, Hebron, or some other prominent city. Jesus’ condescension still remains a puzzle to many people. How can the *Logos* be a Man?” [BKC].

It is significant that Philip did not try to engage Andrew in an argument, he simply said, “come and see.” Today, a Christian may witness to a lost person but no one has ever been argued into the Kingdom of God. The best we can do is urge one to “come and see.” Philip did that by taking his friend to see the human Jesus; we do that by sharing our testimony, opening the Scripture, and

trusting the Holy Spirit to reveal Him.

**1:47 - A TRUE ISRAELITE.** *“Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, ‘Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him.’”* As Jesus watched Nathanael approaching, He made an alarming statement: “Here is a true Israelite, no deceit is in him.” Nathanael had read the Scripture and heard it taught, but he is skeptical as he approaches Jesus. His doubt fades before the omniscience of Jesus, who announced that he was a sincere Israelite. He added, that there was no deceit in him. How could any man know that who did not know Nathanael personally? Yet, Jesus knew.

**1:48 - HOW DO YOU KNOW?** *“How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,’ Jesus answered”.* Nathanael’s was both an alarming, and yet an understandable response. How, indeed, could Jesus know of his sincerity?

**UNDER THE FIG TREE.** A fig tree would not have been hard to find in Israel, and if one sought a shade place for a time of study, reflection, and prayer, a fig tree would provide such a place. Jesus announced to Nathaniel that he saw him under the fig tree . One writer calls this “a euphemism for studying God’s Scriptures. Nathaniel, no doubt, had been studying the Scriptures concerning the Messiah. Jesus said there was **no guile** in Nathaniel—that is, there was no deceit, cunning, or falsehood in him” [NCWB, bold in the original].

**1:49 - RABBI.** *“ Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”* He may, or may not have been there when John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God. We are not given that information. He was, however, a student of the Old Testament Scriptures. He may have been a disciple of John, and he may well have been under the fig tree trying to decide whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah. Now he address Jesus as Rabbi, a term of sincere respect.

**YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD.** He is convinced! “Jesus’ supernatural knowledge moved Nathanael to confess Him as **the Son of God** and **the King of Israel**. This does not mean that Nathanael at this early date fully understood the Trinity or the Incarnation. Rather He understood Jesus to be the Son of God in the messianic sense (cf. Ps. 2:6-7). This future Davidic King would have God’s Spirit on Him (Isa. 11:1-2) and thus would have supernatural knowledge” [BKC].

**THE KING OF ISRAEL.** Nathanael uses a second title for the Messiah, showing that he was a student of prophecy.

“Whether Nathanael had heard the Baptist say this of Jesus (John 1:34) we do not know, apparently not, but Nathanael was a student of the Old Testament as Philip implied (John 1:45) and was quick to put together his knowledge, the statement of Philip, and the manifest supernatural knowledge of Jesus as just shown. There is no reason for toning down the noble confession of Nathanael in the light of Christ’s

claim in verse John 1:51. Cf. the confession of Peter in John 6:69; Mat 16:16 and Martha's in John 11:27. Nathanael goes further. Thou art King of Israel (Basileus ei tou Israêl). To us this seems an anti-climax, but not so to Nathanael for both are Messianic titles in Ps 2:1-12 and Jesus is greeted in the Triumphal Entry as the King of Israel (John 12:13)" [ATR].

**1:50 - JESUS RESPONDED.** *“Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe [only] because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.”* John uses two verbs here (apekrithê kai eipen - answered and said). “This redundant use of both verbs (cf. John 1:26) occurs in the Synoptics also and in the LXX also. It is Aramaic also and vernacular” [ATR]. The HCSB translators smoothed it out with the word “responded”, but the NASB stays with “answered and said.” Jesus often asked a question at a time like this. He would answer a question with a question; open a dialogue with a question; or probe for answers with a question.

**GREATER THINGS.** Jesus did not wait for an answer to His question, but continued, “You will see greater things than this.” Of course Nathanael had been amazed when Jesus knew his mind and his spirit. If Nathanael is in fact Bartholomew (Matt. 10:3) he would become one of the twelve apostles, and he would indeed see greater things than what he had just witnessed. However, Jesus seems to have something more specific in mind here.

**1:51 - I ASSURE YOU.** *“Then He said, “ I assure you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”* Those familiar with the KJV will note that the HCSB does not use “Verily, Verily” here. Robertson explain that “Verily, verily (Amen, amen) is a “Hebrew word transliterated into Greek and then into English, our ‘amen.’ John always repeats it, not singly as in the Synoptics, and only in the words of Jesus, an illustration of Christ’s authoritative manner of speaking as shown also by legô humin (I say unto you). Note plural humin though autôî just before is singular (to him). Jesus addresses thus others besides Nathanael” [ATR].

**YOU WILL SEE HEAVEN OPENED.** Nathanael would see many miracles, but Jesus’ words here seem to be a response to Nathanael’s declaration, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (Vs. 49). “To a reader of the OT, the allusion would be plain. Jesus used Jacob’s vision of the ladder connecting heaven to earth (Gen. 25:12-22) to point to himself as the real vehicle of communication between heaven and earth, divinity and humanity” [NCWB]. Other commentaries agree:

“From 1:48, 51 it can be inferred that Nathanael was meditating on Jacob’s life, particularly on the incident recorded in Genesis 28:12. Jacob saw the angels going up and down a ladder. But Nathanael would **see... the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.** Just as Jacob saw angels from heaven communicating with earth, so Nathanael (and the others; though **you** is sing. in John 1:50, the **you** in v. 51 is pl.) would see Jesus as the divine Communication from heaven to earth. The Son of Man, replacing

the ladder, is God's link with earth (cf. Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64). Perhaps Jesus was also indicating that He is the new 'Bethel,' God's dwelling place (Gen. 28:17; John 1:14).

"As the Son of Man, Jesus left heaven to come to the earth. Jesus used the term "Son of Man" of Himself more than 80 times. It speaks of His humanity and suffering and His work as "the ideal Man." **I tell you the truth** ("Verily, verily," kjv; lit., "Amen, Amen") occurs 25 times in John and always calls attention to important affirmations: 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24-25; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20-21, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18. Interestingly this double "Amen" does not occur in the Synoptic Gospels" [BKC].

Robertson offers essential grammatical help, pointing out that the words, "The heaven opened (ton ouranon aneôigota). Second perfect active participle of anoigô with double reduplication, **standing open**" [ATR, bold added by this writer]. He continues:

"The words remind one of what took place at the baptism of Jesus (Mat 3:16; Luke 3:21), but the immediate reference is to the opened heaven as the symbol of free intercourse between God and man (Isa 64:1) and as it was later illustrated in the death of Stephen (Acts 7:56). There is a quotation from Gen 28:12, Jacob's vision at Bethel. That was a dream to Jacob, but **Christ is himself the bond of fellowship between heaven and earth**, between God and man, for Jesus is both "the Son of God" as Nathanael said and "the Son of Man" (epi ton huion tou anthrôpou) as Jesus here calls himself. **God and man meet in Christ**. He is the true Jacob's Ladder" [ATR, bold added by this writer].

SPECIAL NOTE: The Prologue makes a statement as to the identity of Jesus that is not made in the Synoptic Gospels. He is the Word (Logos), who has throughout all eternity been with God, and He has been God. The definite article means that there can be no other God, no other Messiah, no other way to know the Father than through the Son. The proclamation is made at the beginning of the chapter and everything else in the chapter affirms that declaration, just as everything in chapters 2-21 will affirm Nathanael's words, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (1:40). The Holy Spirit inspired John to write (here and in the Revelation) that Jesus is "The Son of God", but we will see that He is much more than the "King of Israel". He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

It is interesting that neither of the Synoptic Gospels include the declaration that the Logos is God, the specific declarations of John the Baptist recorded here, or the declaration of Nathanael. Were they incomplete? The Holy Spirit is the divine Author and we can be sure He knew exactly what He was doing. Not only had He inspired the writing of the first three Gospels, He had inspired the writing of the Pauline Epistles and the General Epistles, and when this Gospel, the three Epistles of John and the Revelation were written the New Testament would be complete. Everything in the Fourth

Gospel is written to convince us that Jesus is the Son of God and to persuade lost people to turn to Him for eternal life (John 20:30-31).

CHAPTER NOTE: Why does John present the claims about Jesus that are not specifically made in the Synoptic Gospels? There is no simple answer for that question, but the following article which appeared in a June 24, 2008 Broadman Press release under the title: *CBF workshops: Mark a Gnostic gospel; Falwell's character slammed; ...* By David Roach & Erin Roach provides some insight:

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--A new interpretation of Mark's Gospel, character slams on the late Jerry Falwell and rejection of Jewish evangelism were among the topics aired at workshops June 19-20 during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Memphis, Tenn. Dozens of workshops were presented during three time slots at the meeting. Baptist Press attended six of the workshops in order to gain a sampling of the material presented. A statement in the General Assembly Guide says, "The opinions and views presented in General Assembly ministry workshops are those of the workshop presenters and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of, or endorsement by, The Fellowship or its members.

"Holding to the principles of soul freedom and church freedom, General Assembly workshop presenters do not speak for the Fellowship as an organization or for any of the Fellowship's members. The ministry workshops are a time for learning and exchanging ideas and are not indicative of personal or organization doctrinal positions." **NEW INTERPRETATION OF MARK**

The Gospel of Mark was probably a Gnostic gospel that made it into the canon of orthodox Christian Scripture because either early church leaders failed to recognize it as Gnostic or because it was too popular to suppress, John Killinger said June 20 in his workshop "A Dramatic New Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark." Killinger, executive minister and theologian in residence at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, suggested in a workshop the previous day (covered by Baptist Press) that in the current age, the church should no longer preach that Jesus is God incarnate. "The more I've thought about it, the more I am convinced -- now hold onto your chair Baptist Press if you're here -- I am convinced that this Gospel is a Gnostic Gospel, that Mark was one of those thousands and thousands of Gnostic Christians," Killinger said. Gnostics were a cult during the first three centuries of Christianity who taught there was certain secret spiritual knowledge to which only a select group had access. Killinger pointed out that many other Gnostic gospels were written but not included in the Christian canon. "You know, the Gnostics lost," Killinger said. "The orthodox Christians won. They were the Nashville of their day. They overpowered and took possession of the property. They had the orthodox faith. But all over the empire, there were little pockets of Christians who didn't see eye to eye with them." The evidence that Mark was a Gnostic gospel is the fact the resurrection account is hidden throughout the book rather than at the end, he said. Especially in

Mark 4-6, there are several stories about dramatic transformation that could be hidden resurrection accounts, Killinger said. Interpreting Mark as a Gnostic gospel helps explain several puzzling features in Mark such as Jesus' insistence that His followers keep His identity a secret, the book's high regard for women and the truncated resurrection account, Killinger said. Killinger's church affirms homosexuality as normative and not sinful, and on its homepage has a link dedicated to the "gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered community."

Certain liberal groups have watered down the Gospel, corrupted sound doctrine, compromised moral issues, polluted worship, cheapened grace, and muddied the waters of salvation in America. The most popular preachers in America today overlook sin, minimize the need to repent, abstain from sermons on hell, and distort the line between true Christianity and New Age gods. The First Chapter of the Gospel According to John answers these people once and for all time.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FIRST SIGN (Changing Water into Wine)

CHAPTER NOTE: In the Prologue, Jesus is declared through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to be the Word (Logos), the One who was with God from the beginning, the One who is God. This writer recently read somewhere about someone who challenged, "How can God have a Son?" The other person responded, "how can our heavenly Father not have a Son. Think about it. How can He be a Father without a Child?" John declared Jesus to be the Agent of Creation; John the Baptist was sent to proclaim: "The true light, who gives light to everyone" (John 1:9), and all who believe in Him become children of God (1:12).

John wrote, "The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Moving beyond the Prologue, John proclaimed Him to be "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). Nathanael, an obvious student of the Old Testament Scripture, declared, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49).

Now, through a series of signs, sermons and lessons by Jesus Himself, historical references, eye witness testimonies, and a series of "I AM" sayings, everything we have read in the Prologue is verified and affirmed. Everything in the Fourth Gospel is there for a purpose: "But these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). When Jesus told Peter what manner of death he would die, Peter pointed to John and asked, "what about him?" To which, Jesus said, "If I want him to remain until I come,



what is that to you?” (21:23). Jesus did not leave John on earth until His return, but He did leave him here long enough to give us this Gospel account.

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to John, not the Gospel of John. We usually refer to it as John’s Gospel, but in fact it is the Good News about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit had already inspired three other Gospel accounts: two by Jewish writers, Matthew and Mark; and one by a Gentile, Luke. Any Harmony of the Gospels (like A. T. Robertson’s or the more recent one from B & H Publishing Group) will show why the first three Gospels are called Synoptic Gospels (meaning “seeing alike”). John completes the set, not by simply providing us with another Gospel account that parallels the Synoptics, but by affirming them through additional records, signs and teachings. What we read here is a Gospel account of life, works, and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not a chronological history of the life of Christ. However, it is historically more accurate than any secular historical account ever could be. This Gospel is uniquely evangelistic, as we see in Chapters Three. Now, we move on to the First Sign in the Gospel According to John.

**2:1 - A WEDDING.** *“On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and...”* Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist. Andrew and another disciple (John?) had followed Him and visited with Him. Andrew had gone to find Simon his brother and led him to see the Messiah (John may have gone to get James to introduce him to Jesus). Philip had gone to find Nathanael, who proclaimed Him to be the Son of God. After this, Jesus had left Judea to go back to Galilee. While John does not tell us that Jesus went directly to this wedding in Cana, the Scripture seems to show that this was three days from the time Jesus started back to Galilee after Jesus found Philip (1:43), and seven days since John 1:19. It would have taken most of that time to come from Bethany near Jericho in Judea (1:28) to Cana.

**CANA.** Cana was the home of Nathanael (21:2), and it is mentioned as the home of a nobleman in 4:46. Cana was a small town about six miles northeast of Nazareth. We would do well to remind ourselves that we are reading space/time history here. This account involved real people doing real things at a real place at a real time in history.

**JESUS’ MOTHER.** We know from the Synoptics that the mother of Jesus was Mary, but John did not give her name anywhere in this Gospel (2:12; 6:42; 19:25-27). “In his Gospel, John never named himself or the mother of Jesus. (Jesus’ mother went to the home of the beloved disciple (John 19)” [BKC].

**2:2 - JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES.** *“...Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well.”* Jesus was invited to the wedding, along with His disciples. Who were “His disciples”? They were Andrew and Simon; possibly John and James; and presumably Nathanael and Philip (1:40-49). “Unlike John the Baptist, who was called to a lonely and austere life (Mark 1:3-6), Christ identified himself with human society in every legitimate activity (cf. Luke 7:31-36). Jesus’ presence at a wedding implied his unspoken approval of this God-ordained relationship. (Compare Christ’s comments about marriage in Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-9.)” [NCWB].

**2:3 - JESUS' MOTHER.** *“When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother told Him, ‘They don’t have any wine.’”* When Jesus’ mother discovered that the host at this wedding ceremony had run out of wine, she did something that was both natural, and at the same time especially intriguing. First, she turned to the One Person to whom she may well have been turning for a number of years when there was a need. If, as students of the New Testament usually assume, Joseph had died, Jesus as the oldest son would have assumed responsibility for His mother and His siblings. In which case it would have been natural for Mary to turn to Jesus.

There is another explanation that seems to fit the circumstances especially well. Is it not reasonable to assume that, with the recent changes in His life, Mary would not have known that the time had come for Jesus to begin the work for which He had come? He may have already turned over His household responsibilities (and the carpentry shop?) to his brothers. He had gone to Judea for an extended stay, during which time He had been baptized and had met the first of his disciples. He had just returned to Galilee and Mary may have had reason to believe the time had come for Jesus to declare Himself to be the Messiah. When they ran out of wine at the wedding feast, what would have been more natural, from a supplies standpoint, than for Her to turn to Jesus. If He had confided in her that the time had come for Him to begin His ministry, what would have been more natural for a mother than to make this announcement in order to provide Him with an opportunity to do something about this need, or to make some kind of statement? What minister of the Gospel today who grew up in a godly home cannot remember when his mother sought to encourage him, or to find an opportunity for him. I well remember going home from college and learning that my mother had a friend or relative who wanted me to preach in their church.

We are not told that Mary knew what Jesus was going to do when she went to Him with the news that they had run out of wine. However, it seems that she anticipated some action. It was a serious matter for the host to run out of wine or food at a wedding feast. There would have been great concern over this on the part of the host and others involved in planning this wedding celebration. There would have been a large crowd present - an ideal time for the First Sign!

**WINE.** When I was thirteen years old my father in the ministry, M. C. Waldrup, asked our church to sign a pledge never to drink, serve, or sell an alcoholic beverage. I signed that pledge, and I have never violated it. I don’t boast that I do not drink alcoholic beverages because there is no temptation to do so. I could provide enough testimonies within my own family, going back a generation or two, to motivate me to abstain. Southern Baptists have traditionally taught total abstinence. But that is not what we consider an essential Baptist doctrine. In fact, it is not even a Baptist distinctive. It is a conviction that, considering all the damage done to society by the consumption of alcoholic beverages, Christians should abstain from the use, both for themselves and for others.

When this is mentioned, we can expect someone to object: “Jesus drank wine!” Of course He did. Wine was essential in that day. They had no bottled water, no water purification plants, no soft drink machines in every service station and convenience store. In Appendix A, I have included an article I wrote a number of years ago which deals with the use of wine in New Testament times. It shows that

wine was not only consumed, its use was essential in that day. At the same time, its use was not a threat to the individual or to society. If diluted, three parts water to one part wine (as in the Greek society, and probably in the Jewish community), there was little danger of intoxication or addiction. On the positive side, it purified the water.

It is amazing that we are continually bombarded with public service ads which warn us of the danger of smoking, but they promote alcohol and gambling. The one who smokes primarily damages his own health (that is not to deny he harm from second-hand smoke), and the person who drinks too much is often a threat to others. Of course, the distributors are continually encouraging those who sell alcoholic beverages to drink responsibly. While I would prefer to see those who consume alcoholic beverages drink responsibly (rather than irresponsibly), I would encourage Christians think responsibility and abstain from its use. Please see Appendix A for more on the difference in wine drinking today and in New Testament times.

**2:4 - WHAT CONCERN.** *“What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?” Jesus asked. “My hour has not yet come.”* Some have read the KJV rendering, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come”, and wondered if Jesus was being disrespectful of His mother. Our first response is that Jesus would never violate the Ten Commandments by showing disrespect for His Mother. We would be right. Jesus was not telling her that He would no longer have anything to do with her. In fact, one of the last things He did while on the cross was to commit the care of His mother to the very disciple who recorded this incident.

The use of the word “woman” could be used to show kindness and gentleness [BKC]. It is reasonable to assume that He had talked with her about His ministry and since He was accompanied by His disciples, she knew the time had come. She just wanted to help him out a little. Mary is His biological mother, but the time has come to remind her that she cannot direct His work. “(T)he use of *gunai* instead of *mêter* (Mother) does show her she can no longer exercise maternal authority and not at all in his Messianic work. That is always a difficult lesson for mothers and fathers to learn, when to let go” [ATR].

**MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME.** Interestingly, “This phrase is used frequently in John (7:30, 39; 12:23, 24; 17:1) to designate the hour of Christ’s glorification through death and resurrection. The occasion was premature for the commencement of Christ’s ministry of miracles, but in response to his mother’s faith (2:5) Jesus performed the desired miracles anyway as a preview of his coming glory. As with most of the miracles described throughout Scripture, Christ performed the necessary supernatural act with a minimum of fanfare or extravagance. God receives greater glory through quiet displays of divine power than through superficial showmanship. [NCWB]. Robertson explains that

“This phrase marks a crisis whenever it occurs, especially of his death (John 7:30; John 8:20; John 12:23; John 13:1; John 17:1). Here apparently it means the hour for public manifestation of the Messiahship, though a narrower sense would be for Christ's intervention about the failure of the wine. The Fourth Gospel is written on the plane of eternity (W. M. Ramsay)

and that standpoint exists here in this first sign of the Messiah" [ATR].

**2:5 - DO WHATEVER.** *"Do whatever He tells you," His mother told the servants.*" It seems that Mary understands that she now must yield to her Son, though she does not seem to know what He is going to do, or how he will meet the need for more wine. For twenty-nine years, she has been His mother and He has been her son. Now He must be the Lord, and she must become His servant. This was quite an adjustment in their relationship, but one for which she was fully prepared.

**2:6 - SIX STONE WATER JARS.** *"Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30 gallons."* The host had six stone water jars or pots "set" there for the purpose of ceremonial washing, or the ritualistic washing of Jewish guests. They might have been used for other purposes at other occasions, but here they would have been kept in a convenient place so that guests could wash their hands before eating.

These water jars would have been filled before the first guests arrived for the wedding. This was an old tradition, as the following verse will illustrate: 'But Jehoshaphat said, 'Isn't there a prophet of the Lord here? Let's inquire of the Lord through him.' One of the servants of the king of Israel answered, 'Elisha son of Shaphat, **who used to pour water on Elijah's hands, is here**' (2 Kings 3:11, bold added).

When guests arrived at the home of a prominent citizen a slave would meet them, bend down and take off their sandals and wash the dust from their feet. At meal time, they would pour water on the hands of diners. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He is the One coming after me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to untie" (1:27). While that is important for us to remember, there is another point that the Bible student should see here. In this Gospel account, the miracles are called signs, and if we do not see the sign we miss the point of the story.

With that in mind, it is important to remember that there were six water pots. Jewish readers of this Gospel would not miss that. In a system that assigned special significance to certain numbers, this number was especially significant. For example the number 1 stood for unity; 2 stood for added strength; 3 was the divine number (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); and 4 was the universal number (the four winds; for corners of the earth). The number 7, a combination of the divine number and the universal number, was used to express perfection or completion. The number 10 stood for human completion (ten fingers, ten toes). A number was intensified by multiplying it by 2 ( $2 \times 7 = 14$ , as in the three groups of 14 generations in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1). It was also intensified by multiplying it by ten (or any multiple of ten -  $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1000$ ;  $12 \times 12 = 144$ , and  $144 \times 1000 = 144,000$ ).

**2:7 - FILL THE JARS.** *"Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim.*" Mary had told the servants to do what Jesus told them, and He told them to fill the jars with water. They filled them to the brim. There may have been some water in each of the pots, but the point here is not how much water they had to draw from the well in order to fill the jars "to the brim". We might say today that they were running over. Some writers make the point that these

water pots had never been used for wine. Barnes held that they were filled to the brim so everyone would know that no wine could have been added, but that misses an important point, as we shall see.

**2:8 - NOW DRAW.** *“Then He said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant.’ And they did.”* Jesus instructed the servants to fill the six water jars to the brim and they did it. Now here is a very important point: Jesus did not say, “Dip out some of the water from the jars and take it to the chief servant.” He said, “Now draw some out.” This is a “sign”, so this statement is very important. Unfortunately, many students of the Word miss the point here. Robertson wrote, “Apparently the water was still water when it came out of the jars (verse John 2:9), but was changed to wine before reaching the guests. The water in the jars remained water” [ATR].

Another writes, “**The master of the banquet**, in charge of the festivities, would not know he was drinking from the purification jars. For a Jew this would be unthinkable. The servants dipped out the water, which had become wine” [BKC]. However, **Jesus did not tell the servants to dip water from the jars set there for ritualistic washing; He told them to draw some more, and the word means to draw from a depth.** In the area in which I live there are many wells that are no longer in use, but before the community got a water system each family had to draw water from the well for personal consumption, to water livestock, and to water plants. My friend Don Antley, a faithful deacon, had a pump installed in his well and he waters his lawn and various plants from this well to keep from using chlorinated water on his grass and plants.

During the Second World War, after my father was drafted, I had to stay for a period of time with my Aunt Effie, and from time to time, Aunt Effie would send me to the well to “draw” a bucket of water. Later, she might ask me to “dip” water from the water bucket and fill a glass. Even as a seven or eight year old child, I knew that dip meant to dip from a bucket, which I had filled by drawing water from the well.

I grew up in the Mississippi Delta where every home had a number 3 pitcher pump, and like most young boys, I spent a lot of my time on the farm pumping water for household use, as well as water for a lot of livestock. We didn’t need to work out in a gym for an hour, we worked out two or three times a day pumping water. The farmer would drive down a “point” and add sections of pipe as they were needed until he found good water. We had one pump on our place where my father reached good, cold water at fifteen feet. Wells in the hills were often much deeper.

Until electricity reached rural areas, you could go into any home and see a white two gallon water bucket, with a dipper in it, or hanging near it. Off to the side you would see a “wash pan”. When people came in from the field for lunch, they would stop, dip water from the water bucket and pour it into the wash pan and then wash their hands. They would then throw out that water.

In all my life I never saw one person wash his hands in the water bucket, or drink from the wash pan! They knew the difference. We can be sure those servants knew that Jesus meant for them to draw more water from the well after they had filled the six water jars.

**2:9 - TASTED THE WATER.** *“When the chief servant tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom...”* The servants took the water they had drawn from the well into the chief servant and he tasted it after it had become wine. Some think they dipped the water from one of the water jars, but I am convinced that the water that was changed to wine, **the seventh drawing**, had come from the well (drawn from a depth). The servants knew they had drawn it from the well, but the chief servant did not know it. When he tasted this wine he called the bridegroom and asked him about it.

**2:10 - THE FINE WINE.** *“(A)nd told him, ‘Everybody sets out the fine wine first, then, after people have drunk freely, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.’”* Traditionally, the host served the best wine first when the taste buds were more sensitive. The chief servant was surprised that the groom had saved the best for last. The servant was not implying that the guests were drunk, but that they had “drunk freely”. It was the custom to serve the inferior wine after they had drunk enough that their taste buds would not have been as sensitive as they would have been when they first tasted it.

**2:11 - THIS FIRST SIGN.** *“Jesus performed this first sign in Cana of Galilee. He displayed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”* Matthew, Mark, and Luke record numerous miracles, and refer to countless others. John records a limited number of signs, each of which affirms the claims made about Him in Chapter One. He is the Word; He is God; He is the Lamb of God who takes a way the sins of the world; He is the Son of God. If there is a sign, the purpose is for people to see and believe. But what is symbolized here? The number 6 represented that which was near perfection, but fell absolutely short of it. The number 7 is the number for perfection. **What is it that came closest to perfection without reaching it. Judaism!** Judaism was the only true religion until Jesus came. No other religion came close to it. Yet, in Judaism both the Law and the Prophets pointed to One who was coming to fulfill all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Covenant.

What does the number 7 stand for in this sign? Jesus! Jesus, in giving them this sign, was making a profound and dramatic statement. **Jesus had miraculously changed the water of Judaism into the new wine of Christianity!** He is the One who fulfilled all the hopes of the original covenant God made with Adam in the Garden of Eden, the Abrahamic Covenant (2,000 B. C.), and the Davidic Covenant (1,000 B. C.). Jesus will go forth with his disciples and disciple them for three years before His crucifixion. They will see that He is the fulfillment of all those Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. If there had been an inauguration service for Jesus, this would have been the sign of affirmation.

**HE DISPLAYED HIS GLORY.** He displayed his glory in this first sign, but it was going to get better, and it will still get better in the future. **“Jesus’ act of changing water into wine was a display of glory, and yet this display was but a preview of the glory he would manifest in resurrection. Then “his hour” would finally come, and then he could change every dying situation into a living one. The miracle of changing water into wine was a foretaste of what was to come when**

his hour of glorification would come” [NCWB].

**HIS DISCIPLES BELIEVED IN HIM.** They had seen His glory and they believed in Him! What did they believe? How much did they believe? As we shall see, they did not fully understand what Jesus taught them until after the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers, but they believed that He was the Messiah. They believed that before they left Judea for Galilee, but now they are even more convinced. After Andrew visited with Jesus, he “He first found his own brother Simon and told him, ‘We have found the Messiah!’” (1:41). Jesus had given them a clear sign, and now their belief in Him is affirmed. Their belief grew deeper.

SPECIAL NOTE: The Synoptic Gospels record numerous miracles. John does not record the same ones, but the ones included in the Fourth Gospel are called signs. If Jesus’ purpose in this sign was simply to display His power it would have been no challenge for Him to have changed all the water in the six water jars into wine. However, if His purpose was to give His disciples a sign that He was beginning His ministry on earth by declaring that He fulfilled all Messianic prophecies, it seems reasonable to assume that only the water drawn from the well, the seventh drawing, was changed to wine. The Six water pots, set out for ritualistic cleansing, contained an estimated 25 gallons each, and if all the water had been changed into wine that would have been a very large amount. Let’s do the math. **Those six water pots held about 150 gallons of water (6 X 25 = 150 gallons).** If they diluted the wine at a rate of one part wine and three parts water, that would mean that they would have had 600 gallons (or 38,400 ounces for their consumption). If there had been 100 people present, and each had consumed 16 ounces (1600 ounces), there would have been a lot left over. In fact, there would have been enough for each person to have had 24 pints each!

Jesus could have turned the oceans into wine if it had served His purpose, but what He did was to give the people a sign. **He had come to fulfill all their Messianic hopes.** Man’s hope was no longer in the Law, but the grace of God.

**2:12 - TO CAPERNAUM.** *“After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.”* Jesus left Cana and traveled to Capernaum with his disciples, his mother and his brothers. Yes, these were his biological brothers. If we were supposed to believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary this would have been a good place to include it. Instead, what we see is Mary and her other sons following Jesus to Capernaum. “Jesus’ move **to Capernaum** on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee **for a few days** marks an interlude in His life. Though Capernaum is northeast of Cana, **He went down** because of the decline in land elevation toward the sea. From this point on He seemed to be alienated from His family (Mark 3:21; 31-35; John 7:3-5) and His hometown of Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:14)” [NCWB].

## JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE COMPLEX

**2:13 - THE JEWISH PASSOVER.** *“The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to*

*Jerusalem.*” The Synoptic Gospels simply refer to the Passover but John was writing for Gentile readers some sixteen years after the destruction of the temple, so it is natural for him to write “the Jewish Passover was near.” It is interesting that John “mentions the passovers in Christ’s ministry outside of the one when Christ was crucified, this one and one in John 6:4. There may be another (John 5:1), but we do not know. But for John we should not know that Christ’s ministry was much over a year in length” [ATR]. There was a tremendous pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover each year, and the only information we have about the life of Jesus from the time of his return from Egypt until His baptism was a Passover visit when he was twelve years old.

The Passover was important to every true Jew, but it was especially so for Jesus. “The four Gospel accounts indicate that Christ attended every one of the official Jewish festivals in spite of the widespread hypocrisy and commercialism that accompanied them” [NCWB]. Yahweh had given His Chosen People the Passover to commemorate their deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and as a promise of blessings to come. Vines explains that Passover is:

“(T)he Greek spelling of the Aramaic word for the Passover, from the Hebrew pasach, ‘to pass over, to spare,’ a feast instituted by God in commemoration of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and anticipatory of the expiatory sacrifice of Christ. The word signifies (I) ‘the Passover Feast,’ e.g., Matt. 26:2; John 2:13, 23; John 6:4; John 11:55; John 12:1; John 13:1; John 18:39; John 19:14; Acts 12:4; Heb. 11:28; (II) by metonymy, (a) “the Paschal Supper,” Matt. 26:18, 19; Mark 14:16; Luke 22:8, 13; (b) ‘the Paschal lamb,’ e.g., Mark 14:12 (cp. Exod. 12:21); Luke 22:7; (c) ‘Christ Himself,’ 1Cor. 5:7” [VINES].

**JESUS WENT UP TO JERUSALEM.** How appropriate it was that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, even though the temple complex had been commercialized and corrupted. Little could those pilgrims realized that the true Lamb of God, the hope of Israel, the Messiah was walking among the great throng of people making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt. The people did not know it, but the fulfillment of all their hopes was in Jesus of Nazareth, who went up with them that day to Jerusalem.

**2:14 - THE TEMPLE COMPLEX.** “*In the temple complex He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and [He also found] the money changers sitting there.*” The temple complex in Jerusalem included the sanctuary (the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place), at least four courts (one each for the priests, Jewish men, Jewish women, and Gentiles), as well as numerous covered walkways and a number of gates. The Holman Bible Dictionary states that the temple in Jerusalem was:

“A place of worship, especially the Temple of Solomon built in Jerusalem for national worship of Yahweh. Sacred or holy space is the meaning of our word temple, very like the two Greek words, hieron (temple area) and naos (sanctuary itself) which are translated “temple” in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the language is usually beth Yahweh or beth Elohim, “house of the Yahweh” or “house



of God” because He is said to have dwelt there” [HOLMAN BIBLE DICTIONARY IN The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, HBD].

“...Solomon’s Temple There were three historical Temples in succession, those of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod in the preexilic, postexilic, and New Testament periods. Herod’s Temple was really a massive rebuilding of the Zerubbabel Temple, so both are called the “second Temple” by Judaism. All three were located on a prominent hill north of David’s capital city, which he conquered from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-7) [HBD].

The temple was a place of worship. In the Old Testament it symbolized the presence of Yahweh with His people. Tragically, there came a time when people loved the temple more than they loved Yahweh (see Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon, Jer. 7). Solomon’s temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B. C., when Babylon invaded Judah and took away captives for the third time. They Lord returned a remnant under Zerubbabel in 536 B. C. to rebuilding the temple, but before that He had told Jeremiah that when the remnant returned, the City of Jerusalem would symbolize His presence with His people.

As we see in this passage, worship of Yahweh had become corrupt again. The religious leaders were focused on ritual and ceremony rather than worship of the Lord. It is tempted to judge those ancient Israelites for polluting worship, until one considers what has happened to once great churches, and once great denominations in America and Europe today. The really disturbing thing is that modern Christians have every advantage over those ancient Israelites. To mention but two advantage, we have the New Testament, and we have the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost to indwell, empower, and illuminate each believer.

**PEOPLE SELLING.** When people arrived at the temple, they had to make their way through a highly commercialized court of the Gentiles before they reached the courts of the Jewish men and the Jewish women. There, booths were set up where people sold oxen, sheep, and doves for worship. Sadly, profit was more the motive than worship.

“The buying and **selling** of animals in the area was probably rationalized as a convenience for the pilgrims coming into Jerusalem. But abuses developed, and the pilgrim traffic became a major source of income for the city. With **money** to be made, worship easily became corrupted. The money changers were another convenience for the pilgrims. Temple dues had to be paid in the acceptable Tyrian coinage, and a high percentage was charged for changing coins” [BKC].

Some worshipers traveled a great distance to be in Jerusalem for Passover, and for them it made sense to wait until they got to Jerusalem and buy an animal in the temple complex. Otherwise, they might travel for many days to get to the temple complex and then have a priest disqualify their lamb. They could be sure there would be no such censorship of an animal bought in the temple complex. The dominant party at the temple, the Sadducees, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, angels, or anything supernatural. The Pharisees boasted of their belief in all three, but they had also

polluted the worship of Yahweh. To such people, their profit was the driving force behind the three great feasts or festivals. Worship under such people had become very corrupt.

**MONEY CHANGERS.** Money changers provided a service, but for a price. People from various countries had to obtain temple coins for their offerings, which provided an opportunity for money changers, but it seems these money changers were more concerned with their profit than with worship.

SPECIAL NOTE: Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the cleansing of the temple at the end of our Lord's ministry on earth, at the time of His Royal Entry into Jerusalem. Without John's account we would not know that he cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry, as well as at the close three years later. "The vindication of God's house from profanation was the first and the last care of our Lord; and it is probable he began and finished his public ministry by this significant act" [ADAM CLARKE'S COMMENTARY in The Bible Navigator electronic Bible Library, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, CLARKE].

**2:15 - A WHIP.** *"After making a whip out of cords, He drove everyone out of the temple complex with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables."* Moved by righteous indignation at the corruption the place of worship, Jesus picked up some cords and platted a whip from them. When that was done, He drove all the people involved in this trade from the temple complex, along with their animals. He then poured out the coins and turned over the tables of the money changers.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, but the earthly Jesus was no wimp. These people may have tried to resist a less powerful man, but they fled before Jesus. "His effectiveness in cleansing the sacred area of commercialism lay not so much in his small rope whip as in the intrinsic power of his spoken command. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a partial fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-4" [NCWB].

**2:16 - GET THESE THINGS OUR OF HERE!** *"He told those who were selling doves, 'Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace!'"* Jesus, assuming the authority that was eternally His, drove out those who were polluting His Father's house. It was a place of worship, but they had converted it into a house of profit.

"(B)ecause Christ still regarded the Jewish temple in Jerusalem as "**my Father's house**" (cf. Luke 2:49), he exercised his prerogative as the "Son over his own house" (Heb. 3:6) to rid the outer courtyard **of the temple** (called *hieron* in Gk.) of greedy merchants and money-changers. His effectiveness in cleansing the sacred area of commercialism lay not so much in his small rope whip as in the intrinsic power of his spoken command. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a partial fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-4" [NCWB].

SPECIAL NOTE: This would be a good place to pause and consider the many ways one may corrupt

worship today. A lady once told me she had “spent a fortune trying to get someone to pray people out of purgatory.” She added, “Now, I know there is either heaven or hell. There is no purgatory.” I don’t know why I had never thought to ask the question before, but I upon her words I found myself asking, “How do you do that?” She said, “That’s easy. You just write a check and take it to a priest, and if it is not enough he will tell you. I have taken three different checks to priests for five thousand dollars each.” When one of her sons died, her youngest son asked if she would pay to have get him out of purgatory and she said, ‘No. There is no purgatory.’ Now, this would be a good place to list ways in which evangelical Christians may pollute worship. What about the little boy who goes to church on Sunday morning so keyed up over a promised trip to the mall that the Sunday School teacher cannot settle him down in class? How about the teenager who writes notes or sends text messages during the worship service? Or consider, the adult who comes to church, but his mind is on the business trip he has planned immediately after the service.

**2:17 - HIS DISCIPLES.** *“And His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for Your house will consume Me.”* His disciples were reminded of the Scripture, “because zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult You have fallen on me” (Ps. 69:9). This verse, written one thousand years earlier, “speaks of the fact that the Righteous One would pay a price for His commitment to God’s temple. This **zeal for** God would ultimately lead Him to His death” [BKC]. Robertson adds, “Westcott notes the double effect of this act as is true of Christ’s words and deeds all through John’s Gospel. The disciples are helped, the traders are angered” [ATR].

**REMEMBERED.** It is interesting that the disciples remembered this verse from Psalms. Other than the best known Psalms, like Psalm 1, Psalm 8; Psalms 23-24, how many verses from the Psalms come to mind when someone mentions an event in the life of Jesus while He was on earth? Only those who have spent a lot of time reading the psalms, hearing them read, or singing them could be expected to remember this particular verse.

**ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE.** The Jews of Jeremiah’s day had a zeal for the temple, but it was not a zeal that honored God. In sober, if not shocking words, Yahweh instructed Jeremiah to say to the leaders of Judah:

“This is what the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Correct your ways and your deeds, and I will allow you to live in this place. **Do not trust deceitful words, chanting: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.** Instead, **if you really change your ways and your actions,** if you act justly toward one another, if you no longer oppress the alien, the fatherless, and the widow and no longer shed innocent blood in this place or follow other gods, bringing harm on yourselves, **I will allow you to live in this place,** the land I gave to your ancestors forever and ever” (Jer 7:3-7, bold added for emphasis).

Those people had treated the temple like some kind of magic charm that would force Yahweh to protect it and them. Those ancients did not want a personal relationship with the Lord of Hosts, they preferred rituals that might obligate Him to protect them and bless them. The Jewish leaders of

Jesus' day had commercialized the temple and its sacrifices to the point that true worship was devalued, especially by those who were making a profit from it. We can be sure today that the Lord approves only true worship in His church today.

One who is concerned about the way others conduct themselves in the Lord's house today must prayerfully seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit in addressing the problem. One may lead by example, pray for those who are irreverent before carefully addressing the issue. For example, two people who are trying to prepare for worship are both distracted as other worshipers enter the sanctuary and greet each other. One person chooses to wait reverently for the service to begin, but the other decides to remind them that he is trying to get ready to worship the Lord. If others feel chastised they may not experience worship that day. Sincere believers must understand that their actions may manifest either the fruit of the Spirit, but they may manifest the works of the flesh.

**2:18 - WHAT SIGN.** *“So the Jews replied to Him, “What sign [of authority] will You show us for doing these things?”* These merchants had the permission of the Sadducees and Pharisees to set up their booths, and probably paid them for the concession stand. They had set up their booths under the authority of the leaders of the temple. What, sign of authority could Jesus give them for His actions? From a human standpoint, one understands their request. They had set up their concessions under the highest authority in Judaism.

Some have speculated that they may have heard of the sign Jesus had given at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, but there is no way to prove that. At this point in His ministry, did they recognize Him? Three years later they most definitely would recognize Him. As a matter of fact, they probably never forgot Him after he cleansed the temple this first time.

**2:19 - JESUS ANSWERED.** *“Jesus answered, ‘Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.’* This is still early in the ministry of Jesus on earth, but both His disciples and His adversaries would soon discover that Jesus often did not respond to questions the way they expected. They asked a question on one level, the only one they knew, and He answered them on an entirely different level. They were concerned about authority over one sanctuary, the temple in Jerusalem, but Jesus responded with a proclamation about a different sanctuary, His own body. Either the Jewish authorities or the merchants demanded a sign that He had the authority to challenge their authorization for this trade in the temple complex. Paul reminds that the Jews demanded signs (1 Cor. 1:22).

“But instead of giving in to their demand, **Jesus** gave a veiled saying. As with His parables in the Synoptics, one purpose of an enigmatic saying was to puzzle the hearers who opposed Him. He desired that His hearers ponder the saying in order to perceive its significance. **Destroy this temple** is in the form of a command, but the sense is ironic or conditional. At Jesus' trial He was accused of saying He could destroy the temple and **raise it again in three days** (Matt. 26:60-61). A similar charge was made against Stephen (Acts 6:14)” [BKC, bold in original].

**I WILL RAISE IT UP IN THREE DAYS.** Jesus clearly has in mind His resurrection from the dead, and just as clearly He states that he would rise from the dead on the third day. It is amazing that His disciples did not really believe until John entered the open tomb and believed, as we shall see later in this study.

QUESTION. Did Jesus not know they would not understand Him? And, if He knew that, why would he have said it? The Bible teaches that He knew what was in every man, so He knew. As to why He said it, He knew that the Holy Spirit would call this promise to their minds after Pentecost (John 16).

**2:20 - THIS SANCTUARY.** *“Therefore the Jews said, ‘This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?’”* Surely, Jesus had known what they would think when He said, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.” He was talking about His body, but they were thinking about the glorious edifice from which He had just driven the traders. Herod’s temple, which was in fact the renovated and restored Zerubbabel’s Temple, the Second Temple, rebuilt after the return from Babylon and dedicated in 516 B. C.) Solomon’s Temple had been destroyed in 586 B. C. when Babylon invaded Jerusalem for the third time, fulfilling the prophecies God had told Jeremiah to proclaim. Herod’s temple had only taken “46 years to build”, some parts of the temple complex were still under construction. Clarke explains that

“The temple of which the Jews spake was begun to be rebuilt by Herod the Great, in the 18th year of his reign: Joshua. Ant. b. xv. c. 11, s. 1; and xx. c. 9, s. 5,7. But though he finished the main work in nine years and a half, yet some additional buildings or repairs were constantly carried on for many years afterwards. **Herod began the work sixteen years before the birth of our Lord: the transactions which are here related took place in the thirtieth year of our Lord, which make the term exactly forty- six years.** Rosenmuller. Josephus, Ant. b. xx. c. 8, s. 5,7, has told us that the whole of the buildings belonging to the temple were not finished till Nero's reign, when Albinus, the governor of Judea, was succeeded by Gessius Florus, which was eighty years after the eighteenth year of Herod's reign” [CLARKE, bold added by this writer].

**2:21 - HE WAS SPEAKING.** *“But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body.”* They were speaking of Herod’s Temple, He was speaking of His own body. They were understandably confused. Who else had ever died and brought himself back from the dead. People simply did not talk this way! This was the earliest recorded statement made by Jesus about His resurrection, and if He had not mentioned it again we would understand why the disciples had not understood the promise of the resurrection until after the risen Christ appeared to them.

**2:22 - WHEN HE WAS RAISED.** *“So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.”* The simple fact is, Jesus did mention His resurrection again, and they still did not believe

until after He was raised.

**THEY BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURE.** They believed, “not an isolated passage, but the OT at large as it testifies to Christ’s resurrection (e.g., Ps. 2:7; 16:9, 10; Isa. 25:8)” [NCWB]. Jesus had taught them the Old Testament Scripture, but before that they had been taught in the synagogue school as children, and later in the regular synagogue services.

**THE STATEMENT JESUS HAD MADE.** After Jesus was raised from the dead, His disciples began recalling the various times He had told them that He would be put to death and then he would be raised on the third day. Most believed after Jesus had appeared to them, but John believed when he saw the open tomb. Here, John tells us that after Jesus was raised from the dead, the disciples believed the Scripture, and they remembered the words of Jesus and believed them.

**2:23 - AT THE PASSOVER.** *“While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing.”* “The feast of unleavened bread followed for seven days right after the passover (one day strictly), though to pascha is used either for the passover meal or for the whole eight days” [ATR]. Little did these people appreciate the fact that all the hopes and promises of Passover would be fulfilled in this Jesus whose zeal for His Father’s house had led Him to drive out the money changers and other traders.

**MANY TRUSTED IN HIS NAME.** Many people believed in Jesus’ name after they had seen Him cleanse the temple and do other signs. At first look, this seems to be good news, but as we shall see, all of these people did not fully understand what He was saying or what He was doing. People have a tendency to make shallow commitments to anything new or novel.

**2:24 - WOULD NOT ENTRUST HIMSELF.** *“Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to them, since He knew them all...”* Robertson explains what the Greek intends here: “(autos de Iêsous ouk episteuen hauton autois). ‘But Jesus himself kept on refusing (negative imperfect) to trust himself to them.’ The double use of pisteuô here is shown by Acts 8:13 where Simon Magus ‘believed’ (episteusen) and was baptized, but was unsaved. He merely believed that he wanted what Philip had” [ATR].

**2:25 - HE HIMSELF KNEW.** *“...And because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man.”* Jesus needed no psychologist to help Him to understand Himself, and He needed no sociologist to help Him understand others. He did not need anyone to explain man to Him. As the Agent of Creation, He had created man in His own image. No one has ever known what was in man as did Jesus.

To sum up the last two or three verses, I turn to the New Commentary on the Whole Bible:

“These verses show that the intellectually persuaded supporters of Christ were not truly his followers at all. The word-play John uses here brings this out; they are said to believe in him (or, trust in him), but Jesus would not

commit himself (or, entrust himself) to them. In both instances, John plays upon the one Greek word, *pisteuo*-. In any case, Jesus would not entrust himself to these men because he knew that what is in man can not always be trusted (see Jer. 17:9, 10)” [NCWB].

## CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER NOTE: As we have already seen, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels. That word means seeing alike. Any Harmony of the Gospels will show the first three Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ follow a parallel course through His life on Earth: His works, His sermons and lessons, His death, burial, and resurrection. Matthew and Luke were inspired to give us an account of the birth of our Savior, with Mark starting with His baptism. It does not take long to see that John does not follow the path of the Synoptic Gospels. There was no need for more repetition, and the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scripture, will preserve it until the end. The first Gospel account of the life of Christ had been written a generation earlier than the Gospel According to John. The Fourth Gospel is often called the Evangelistic Gospel, and the third chapter makes a strong case for that title.

The Holy Spirit did not inspire John to write The Fourth Gospel because the Synoptics were incomplete or inadequate. The first three Gospels has been written a number of years earlier, and we can be safe in assuming that they had been circulated widely. The church had the Pauline Epistles and the Epistles of Peter in addition to the Synoptics. Now, the Holy Spirit would inspire the lone surviving apostle to complete the Scripture with five books: The Gospel According to John, the Three Epistles of John, and the Revelation.

We have three accounts of the Life of Christ. Now, the Holy Spirit inspires the one apostle who was kept alive well beyond the martyrdom of this fellow apostles to write the Gospel which would provide texts for evangelistic sermons until Jesus returns. It provides Bible stories and Sunday School lessons like the Synoptics, but it uniquely lends itself to personal evangelism. If any Christian wants to be prepared to witness to a lost person, he should memorize John 3:16, which has been called “The Gospel in a Nutshell”, or “The Little Gospel”.

Now, putting Chapter Three into perspective, we have the declaration: in Chapter One, that Jesus is the Word, He is with God, and He is God. He is the source of both life and light. He was God Incarnate, the Lamb of God. Nathanael called Him the Son of God, the King of Israel. In Chapter Two, Jesus illustrates, with the First Sign, that He is the Messiah, and then goes on to demonstrate his Sovereignty over the Temple. Now, with that background, we move directly into an account of the witness of Jesus to Nicodemus, a religious man who came seeking answers.

### Nicodemus Visits See Jesus

**3:1 - THERE WAS A MAN.** “*There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*” There was a man. This, as Francis Schaeffer often reminded his generation, is space/time history. John introduces us to a real person, living in a real place, at a real time, doing something that is distinctly historical, even though he would have never imagined that we would be reading about it two thousand years later. The man had a name: Nicodemus. He is introduced to us as a Pharisee. There were a number of sects among the Jews of that day, the dominant ones being the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, angels, or anything supernatural. Pharisees challenged them on all these points. *The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament* (after this, NCWB) notes that:

“Though most of the Jewish leaders scoffed at the words and works of Christ throughout his entire earthly ministry, a few religionists exercised the spiritual and intellectual honesty to approach Christ with a sincerely inquisitive attitude. Nicodemus was one of these. He has often been criticized for his secretive, nighttime rendezvous with Christ, but the fact remains that Nicodemus did come to hear and receive, as his later actions affirm (John 7:50, 51; 19:39)” [NCWB].

**A RULER OF THE JEWS.** In spite of their serious differences, the Sadducees and the Pharisees dominated the Sanhedrin. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (after this, BKC) carries the note that “The Sanhedrin had 70 members who were responsible for religious decisions and also, under the Romans, for civil rule. Two Sanhedrin members who appear in a favorable light in the New Testament are Joseph of Arimathea (19:38) and the Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39; 22:3). The Sanhedrin put Jesus on trial (Luke 22:66). Nicodemus later rebuked the Pharisees for condemning Jesus without hearing Him (John 7:50-51), and he helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus (19:39-40)” [BKC].

The Pharisees were very religious, while the Sadducees were more political. The irony is that the Sadducees had the ear of the Roman governor, and for some time the appointment of a man to serve as high priest came from this sect. The Pharisees were exceedingly religious, and they guarded their position on the Sanhedrin with proverbial zeal.

**3:2 - THIS MAN CAME.** “*This man came to Him at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.’*” John tells us Nicodemus came by at night to see Jesus. That he came at all is remarkable, considering his position, and the potential political fallout from other members of the Sanhedrin, both Pharisees and Sadducees. That he came at night still whets the imagination, even after two thousand years.

Let me stress that there is no reason to assume that he was slinking around at night because of cowardice. Nicodemus may well have been in the temple complex when Jesus drove out the money changers and traders. It is obvious that he had heard Jesus speak at some point, and he may well have heard about His turning water to wine at the wedding in Cana. Since he wanted to know more



about Jesus, it is only natural that he would seek out Jesus at a time when he might have a little time with Jesus alone, without the bustling crowds, or the scrutiny of the other Pharisees and the Sadducees.

**RABBI.** A rabbi was an esteemed teacher of the Jews. “Technically Jesus was not an acknowledged Rabbi of the schools, but Nicodemus does recognize him as such and calls him ‘My Master’ just as Andrew and John did (John 1:38). It was a long step for Nicodemus as a Pharisee to take, for the Pharisees had closely scrutinized the credentials of the Baptist in John 1:19-24z” [ATR].

Nicodemus may well have rehearsed his introduction: “we know that You have come from God as a teacher.” Did the “we” refer to the whole Sanhedrin, or only to the sect of the Pharisees? Or, was this simply the ministerial “we”? Nicodemus may well have discussed this with a few close friends among the Pharisees. And if so, they had concluded that Jesus must be a teacher sent from God. “The titles ‘Rabbi’ and ‘Teacher’ are polite and flattering on one hand, but they showed Nicodemus’ inadequate comprehension of who Jesus is. The words ‘from God’ are in an emphatic position in the Greek” [BKC].

**THESE SIGNS.** The cleansing of the temple complex would have been well known to Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees, but there is a clear indication that they were aware of various signs performed by Jesus. They had concluded that Jesus “no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.” Based on these signs, Nicodemus had concluded that this obscure Galilean must have been sent by God as a teacher. “The **signs** had pointed out Jesus as God’s Man (**God was with Him**), and Nicodemus wanted to talk to Him as one Rabbi to another” [BKC].

**3:3 - JESUS REPLIED.** “*Jesus replied, ‘I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’*” Jesus, who did not commit Himself to those who seemed to believe in him when He cleansed the temple complex (2:24f), also knows what is in Nicodemus’ mind and responds to the innermost thoughts and needs.

**I ASSURE YOU.** Bible students who are familiar with the KJV anticipate the words, “Verily, verily” when reading the Gospel of John. This is a phrase which Jesus used to underscore the certainty of a statement. In the Synoptics, it is literally, “Amen, I say to you.” In John, only Jesus is quoted as saying this. Literally, it is “Amen, amen, I say to you.” Jesus is about to make a statement of great importance, a statement of eternal consequences. Nicodemus must not miss it.

**UNLESS SOMEONE IS BORN AGAIN.** This is the condition of the third class in the Greek: undermined, but with the possibility of fulfillment. Robertson explains that this is the “First aorist passive subjunctive of gennaô. Anôthen. Originally ‘from above’ (Mark 15:38), then ‘from heaven’ (John 3:31), then ‘from the first’ (Luke 1:3), and then ‘again’ (palin anôthen, Gal 4:9). Which is the meaning here? The puzzle of Nicodemus shows (deuteron, verse John 3:4) that he took it as ‘again,’ a second birth from the womb” [ATR]. Jesus, however, would instruct him. He did not hesitate to correct his overall thinking on issues.

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** All who would see the Kingdom of God must be born again. One

can only be born again from above, or through the grace of God. No individual can accomplish this for himself, and no one else can accomplish it for him or her. The Book of Hebrews stresses that Jesus is our supreme High Priest, as well as the supreme sacrifice (the Lamb of God). The earthly high priest, of the order of Aaron, had to go into the Most Holy Place once each year to make atonement for himself and for Israel. All earthly sacrifices pointed to Jesus, who made the once for all sacrifice (as High Priest), and offered Himself as the once for all sacrifice (the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world). The Reformers called this the finished work of Christ. All who would be born again must believe in Him, and all who believe in Him will see the kingdom of God.

**3:4 - BUT HOW.** *“But how can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked Him. ‘Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?’* Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, and a member of the Sanhedrin, was an authority on the Law and the Prophets, but he is totally baffled. How can this be? The hypocrisy and superficiality of the Pharisees was often condemned by Jesus, but there is every reason to believe that Nicodemus is sincerely seeking answers here. “Nicodemus was certain Jesus did not mean something absurd (such as a reincarnation or a **second** physical birth), but yet he did not grasp the nature of regeneration” [BKC].

“Nicodemus was probably familiar with the notion of re-birth for proselytes to Judaism for the Gentiles, but not with the idea that a Jew had to be reborn. But ‘this stupid misunderstanding’ (Bernard) of the meaning of Jesus is precisely what John represents Nicodemus as making” [ATR]. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (Judaism), a teacher of the Jewish religion, but he must have felt like a school boy who had been asked a question for which he could not even imagine an answer. His question, “How can anyone be born when he is old?”, shows that he understood Jesus to mean that one must be born again, or born a second time.

**CAN HE ENTER.** Nicodemus asked, “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?” He clearly understood Jesus to be saying that one must be born again in a literal sense. He is asking, how can that be? Since the Pharisees consider a conversion by a Gentile to Judaism a rebirth, some have concluded that Nicodemus finds it incredible that the term would be used of a Jew. Barnes saw this question as an indication of the prejudice of the Pharisees toward Gentiles [BARNES], but, while it is true that they did hold a strong bias against Gentiles, there is not sufficient evidence to prove that this was what prompted the question here.

**3:5 - BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT.** *“Jesus answered, “ I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* Nicodemus has asked how it was possible for a mature person to enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born again (3:4). Jesus’ answer settles forever the essentiality of the second birth, and clearly defines the meaning of it. “Born of water” denotes the physical birth. Today, it is not uncommon for a woman to tell a friend where she was “when my water broke”, but there was a time when one would not use that expression in mixed company. That made it a little more of a challenge to explain the meaning from the pulpit. Jesus tells Nicodemus that one must be born physically, and then he must be born of the Spirit before he can “enter the kingdom of God.”

When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. T. J. DeLaughter came into the classroom one day and began his lecture by telling us about an experience he had just had on the way from his car to his office. As he was walking across the campus he spotted a black janitor, whom he addressed by name. He asked him, "How are you today?" The janitor replied, "I'm just fine, just fine. I've been born twice, I've died once, and I ain't never gonna die again!" Dr. DeLaughter said, "That is not exactly the way we say it in the classroom, but he was exactly right."

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** Just what is the kingdom of God? Nikita Kruschev charged that Christians preached pie in the sky by and by. Do we have to wait until we go to heaven to be a part of the kingdom of God? Or do we become a citizen of the kingdom of God when we are born again? Paul addressed his Epistle to the Philippians with the words, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi..." (Phil 1:1). Those saints had two addresses, one in Philippi, and one in Christ Jesus. In that sense, the kingdom of God denotes all who have been born again. The sovereignty of God denotes the reign of God in the hearts of believers. In Christ we can "have our cake and eat it too"! We can enjoy all the benefits of His sovereign reign in our lives here on earth without taking anything away for His eternal reign in Heaven.

**3:6 - BORN OF FLESH.** *"Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit."* Jesus naturally amplifies the statement He had just made, and explains what He meant by saying that one must be "born of water and the Spirit" (vs. 5). He also answers the question Nicodemus had asked: "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (Vs. 4). One must be born physically in order to have life on this earth, and one must be born again spiritually in order to have eternal life. "The sharp contrast between flesh (sarx) and Spirit (pneuma), drawn already in John 1:13, serves to remind Nicodemus of the crudity of his question in John 3:4 about a second physical birth" [ATR].

**3:7 - DO NOT BE AMAZED.** *"Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again."* We may infer that Nicodemus was indeed amazed; and while Jesus knew what was in his heart, this man who was an authority on the religion of the Jews was showing his amazement at what he was hearing.

**BORN AGAIN.** Repetition of the statement with which Jesus had begun this conversation ("Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God") is natural. It was important for Nicodemus to understand what He was saying, as it is important for us to understand it today. Sadly, there are a lot of people who profess to be Christians who obviously do not understand that in order to be a Christian we must be born again. One salesman, calling from California, assured me that he was a Christian, but, he added, "I'm not what you call born again." I assured him that the only true Christian are the ones who are born again.

**3:8 - THE WIND BLOWS.** *"The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."* Jesus' method of teaching is no less amazing than this statement: "you must be born again." Many people employ illustrations from nature very effectively, but when we study the Four Gospels we

realize that no human being could ever aspire to His insight, method, and ability to state something with absolutely clarity. Today, meteorologists show us maps and tell us to expect heavy winds to blow from the southwest to the northeast, and they can tell us if there is any evidence as to whether or not these winds are potentially a threat to us. They tell us that a storm is building off the coast of Africa which may develop into a hurricane and head for Florida, of Louisiana. When Jesus was on Earth, one could only hear the sound of the wind and possibly wonder where it was coming from or where it was going.

**BORN OF THE SPIRIT.** Just as we cannot see the wind, we cannot see the Spirit. Just as the wind is real, so is the Holy Spirit real. Just as the wind brings rain which is essential for gardens and crops, so the Spirit brings that which is essential for eternal life.

SPECIAL NOTE: Jesus mentions both the wind and the Spirit, both of which are from the same word in Greek (*pneuma*).

“We could also add ‘breath’ as a word which translates *pneuma*. All three words are used to describe the revitalization of the dead bones in Ezekiel 37, a passage which Jesus alluded to here and apparently expected Nicodemus to understand (3:10). God’s Spirit is like wind and like breath; it has free movement and vivification power. **so is everyone that is born of the Spirit**—“The believer shows by deed and word that an invisible influence has moved and inspired him. He is himself a continual sign of the action of the Spirit, which is freely determined, and incomprehensible by man as to source and end, though seen in its present result’ (Westcott)” [NCWB].

**3:9 - HOW?** “*How can these things be?*” asked Nicodemus.” The ruler of the Jews is totally baffled. The authority on the Old Testament Scriptures hasn’t a clue as to what Jesus is saying. Was Nicodemus willing to understand Jesus, or was he simply trying to argue with Him? Some writers have not been especially kind to Nicodemus here, but I am not sure that is being fair to him. Barnes, for example, held that Nicodemus was still, at this point, not willing to accept Jesus’ doctrine unless he understood it:

“and we have here an instance of a man of rank stumbling at one of the plainest doctrines of religion, and unwilling to admit a truth because he could not understand how it could be, when he daily admitted the truth of facts in other things which he could as little comprehend. And we may learn,

1st. That men will often admit facts on other subjects, and be greatly perplexed by similar facts in religion.

2nd. That no small part of men's difficulties are because they cannot understand how or why a thing is.

3rd. That men of rank and learning are as likely to be perplexed by these things as those in the obscurest and humblest walks of life.

4th. That this is one reason why such men, particularly, so often reject the truths of the gospel. And,

5th. That this is a very unwise treatment of truth, and a way which they do not apply to other things. If the wind cools and refreshes me in summer--if it prostrates the oak or lashes the sea into foam--if it destroys my house or my grain, it matters little how it does this; and so of the Spirit. If it renews my heart, humbles my pride, subdues my sin, and comforts my soul, it is a matter of little importance how it does all this. Sufficient for me is it to know that it is done, and to taste the blessings which flow from the renewing and sanctifying grace of God" [BARNES].

**3:10 - ARE YOU A TEACHER?** *"Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied.*" Jesus answers a question with a question. It was a well known fact that Nicodemus was a "ruler of the Jews", and as such he was "a teacher of Israel". Some commentaries assume that Nicodemus had adopted something of an obstinate attitude and conclude that Jesus is debating yet another arrogant Pharisee. I have approached this from a different perspective. He was indeed a member of a sect Jesus often associated with arrogance and hypocrisy. Nicodemus did seek out Jesus and approached Him privately at night, but we are not told why he did so. I see no reason to assume that he was not sincerely looking for answers when he approached Jesus. If his purpose had been to expose Jesus as a heretic, he could have done like so many other Pharisees and challenged Him in front of an audience or before other Pharisees.

With that in mind, there is still the question: how was it that he did not understand Jesus? The simple fact was that he was so thoroughly grounded in the Law and the Prophets that he could not conceive of anything he had not studied (or taught). There are professing Christians who teach evolution to students on a regular basis. When the modern creation science movement was launched, thanks in part to the work of a brilliant hydrologist by the name of Henry Morris, one could anticipate strong and often hostile opposition from scientists who embraced evolutionist, but some of the strongest attacks came from pastors and professors in Christian colleges and seminaries. Francis Schaeffer was one Christian who saw the movement develop, understood the Scripture, and spoke out powerfully and convincingly for special creation, for the biblical account of creation.

QUESTIONS: This would be a good point to ask a lot of pastors, "How can you be a preacher of the Word of God and not believe in Creation, the providence of God, the Sovereignty of God, substitutionary atonement, or the return of Christ? How can the "reverend" Barry Lynn, the Executive Director of Americans for the Separation of Church and State, crusade against the spread of the Gospel in the public arena in America? How can he not see the connection between the moral tail-spin which is going on in America, and the fact that America chose to reject Him as Creator and assign Him some lesser role in our society? How can so many modern teachers deny that America was founded on Christian principles? How can one be a teacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and

deny Him access to our society? How can they not see that the Gospel is no longer “Good News” in America, as it is to many in places like China today? Is it possible that he who said, “there are none so blind as he would will not see”, knew of which he spoke?

**3:11 WE SPEAK WHAT WE KNOW.** *“I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept Our testimony.”* Once again, Jesus speaks with authority and sincerity: Amen, amen, I say to you (verily, verily in the KJV). Jesus is speaking with divine authority and with genuine sincerity. Jesus assured Nicodemus, “We speak what We know.” Note that the “We” in the HCSB is capitalized. He is not speaking of a consensus among a budding new sect within Judaism, He is assuming the authority which is uniquely His, knowing that this would be the testimony of all those who sincerely follow Him. Some agree with the Bible Knowledge Commentary that “Nicodemus was ignorant of the realm of which Jesus spoke. He represented the nation’s unbelief and lack of knowledge. Jesus, like the prophets, spoke to the nation about divine themes but the Jews rejected His witness” [BKC].

**OUR TESTIMONY.** “Our testimony” is clearly contrasted to the limited testimony of the Pharisees. In the Ryrie Study Bible Notes (The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville - after this, RSB) there is the note that “The *testimony* theme is found throughout John (3:31-36; 5:31-47; 8:12-20)” [RSB]. Again, the “Our” is capitalized in this translation. Does this imply the testimony of the Father and the Son (as in Ch. 8)?

**3:12 - YOU DON’T BELIEVE.** *“If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven?”* Here, the “plural pronoun indicates that Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus as if Nicodemus represented the Jews” [NCWB].

**HOW WILL YOU BELIEVE.** Jesus continues using the plural pronoun, denoting the position of the Pharisees, not just that of Nicodemus. If they did not believe what Jesus told them “about things that happen on earth”, how could they believe what He told them “about things of heaven”?

They did not, and could not. Paul write in the First Epistle to Corinth that some things are spiritually discerned and that those in and of the flesh could not under stand them. The Pharisees, unlike the Sadducees, believed in the resurrection, so you would think they would have been more open to the teachings of Jesus.

**3:13 - NO ONE HAS ASCENDED.** *“No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.”* How can John say that “no one has ascended into heaven”, when both Enoch and Elijah were taken up into heaven without physically dying on earth? The possible answer is that those two men were “taken up” into heaven by God. They did not ascend in their own power, as would Jesus. “In many early manuscripts the last clause is omitted. However, it is generally thought that this statement was deleted very early in the transmission of the text because of the difficulty it presents—namely, how could Christ be located in heaven and earth simultaneously? Taking the last clause as genuinely Johannine, we can understand it to mean that Christ, while on earth, still had his being, his nature, even his habitation with the Father in heaven”

[NCWB].

**3:14 - MOSES LIFTED UP.** “*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up...*” See the entire account in Numbers 21. “Reference to Num 21:7 where Moses set the brazen serpent upon the standard that those who believed might look and live” [ATR]. Nicodemus or any other “teacher of Israel” (vs. 10) knew the story well. Jesus’ use of the Old Testament should be a lesson to us today for those who devalue its message (as some do).

**THE SON OF MAN MUST BE LIFTED UP.** In this verse, “Jesus provided Nicodemus with another illustration from the in which He

“compares his being **lifted up** on the cross to **Moses’** lifting up of **the serpent** on the pole. As the lifted-up serpent became the remedy for those rebellious, serpent-bitten Israelites who looked upon the brass serpent for deliverance, **so Christ, lifted up on the cross, becomes the cure for sin and death to those who believe in him.** Numbers 21:6-9 declares “look and live”; John 3:14-16 declares “believe and live.” As the brass serpent was in the likeness of the fiery serpents (it did not contain the poison they possessed), so Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh (he did not have any sin in him)—see Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21. A look at the brass serpent brought life to those who were perishing; faith in Jesus brings eternal life to those who would otherwise perish forever” [NCWB, bold in the original].

**3:15 - EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.** “(S)o that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.” WOW! Ever since we began reading the first words of this powerful chapter we have had our minds on verses 15-18, which qualify the Fourth Gospel to be called the Evangelistic Gospel. This, not discounting Romans 10, may be called the Evangelistic Chapter in the Bible. “The thought of elevation to heaven (v. 13) leads to the thought of Jesus being **lifted up** (cf. 8:28; 12:32). **Moses** raised a bronze **snake** on a pole as a cure for a punishment due to disobedience (cf. Num. 21:4-9). **So** Jesus would **be lifted up** on a cross for people’s sin, **so that** a look of faith gives **eternal life** to those doomed to die” [BKC].

This verse states the provision for salvation about as simply as any in the Bible. If anyone (and the HCSB uses “everyone” here) wants to receive eternal life he or she must simply believe in Jesus. This means to commit oneself totally to Him, not simply to believe that He lived two thousand years ago. When I was thirteen years old, I was called into the ministry - and if any preacher does not sense a specific call to the ministry, he must prayerfully examine his relationship with the One who calls preachers and missionaries into His service. When I went to Mississippi College, and later to seminary, there was a battle raging between those who held various Eschatological positions, primarily Pre-millennialists and A-millennialists. However, over the past two decades the issue has been Calvinism.

When I was a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I served for some

time as chairman of the Broadman and Holman Committee. One day, the chairman of the board visited with our committee and while he was there he asked about an author whom he considered a hyper-Calvinist. A member of the committee challenged his view, and went on to offer a defense of Calvinism. After only a few minutes, I said, “Since it doesn’t seem that we are going to be able to settle this issue this morning I would like to suggest, since our time is limited, that we move on to our next matter of business.”

We did not settle the Calvinism debate that day, but I have a suggestion for those who are still debating the subject. **Follow John Calvin’s example!** Follow Calvin’s example. I go to the Bible, **just like Calvin did**, trusting the Holy Spirit to illuminate my mind and heart so that I might understand His Word. When I go to the Word of God, this is what I find: **“everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.”**

I am not likely to settle the debate with this one quote, because the debate will now move to that which enables one to believe. Does one have to be elected and regenerated before he can make a decision for Christ (because he is dead in sin and dead people cannot make a decision for Christ)? Or does the Holy Spirit convict the individual of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come (see Ch. 16) before he can believe.

This is a debate that will not be continued here. Instead, this writer will accept it at face value, with respect to friends on both sides of the debate. Barnes held that the Lord meant “Whosoever puts confidence in him as able and willing to save. All who feel that they are sinners, that they have no righteousness of their own, and are willing to look to him as their only Saviour” [BARNES].

**3:16 - FOR GOD.** *“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”* From the very first day I began working on this volume, there was the thought in the back of my mind that this was where I was headed in this study. As a matter of fact, I have for years wanted to do this kind of study from the Gospel According to John. The thought has always been exciting to me: the Prologue, the Signs, the I Am sayings, plus all those passages that parallel the Synoptics. But this verse is absolutely amazing! I simply did not feel adequately prepared on a number of planes to undertake this challenge. Then I read a statement about this passage in the New American Commentary. I bought the entire set as it was published, with the exception of the volumes LifeWay Christian Resources gave me when I was on the board of trustees. Then, I downloaded the commentary on the first half of John to The Bible Navigator, and it is from that volume that I quote:

“When turning to vv. 16–18, which contains what probably is the best known verse in Christian Scripture (3:16), the reader finds **one of the primary theological summaries concerning salvation in the New Testament. Yet the reader must take great care not to lose the marvelous balance in this wonderful summary. Interpreters should deal with a minimum of the three verses I am treating together because it takes at least that many verses here to obtain the correct meaning.** Verse 16 serves as a statement of fact involving the agency (the Son) God



used to bring salvation to the world. Verse 17 expands on God's intention and clearly identifies God's Purpose in sending the son. Verse 18 provides a pointed reality statement concerning the present nature of judgment, a reality no reader should fail to understand. Only when the three verses are allowed to hang together does the reader begin to grasp the full meaning of the coming of Jesus and the Johannine message of salvation expounded here" [*New American Commentary*, B & H Publishing, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, The Bible Navigator - after this, NAC, bold added by this writer].

Millions of children have memorized this verse in the King James Version: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This verse presents the Gospel in a nutshell. It summarizes that which we read in the Synoptics, in Romans, Ephesians, and First John. More people have probably been led to faith in Jesus Christ (in the power of the Holy Spirit) through this verse than almost any other in the Bible. No wonder it has been called "The Little Gospel."

**LOVED.** God commands love of all who follow Him. He does not suggest, He demands it! If He commands it, and he very definitely does (see 1 John), it is obviously important to Him, and that should tell us something about Him. It does! It tells something about his attributes, His character, his motives. It also distinguishes Him from all who whom any claim of godhood might be made. "God is Love", and He is love He must obviously express (emanate) love, and that love must have both an object and a purpose. It does!

The word used here for "Loved" is *êgapêsen*. It First aorist active indicative of *agapaô*, "the noble word so common in the Gospels for the highest form of love, used here as often in John (John 14:23; John 17:23; 1Jn 3:1; 1Jn 4:10) of God's love for man (cf. 2Th 2:16; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4). In John 21:15 John presents a distinction between *agapaô* and *phileô*. *Agapaô* is used also for love of men for men (John 13:34), for Jesus (John 8:42), for God (1Jn 4:10)" [ATR]. People often, in an effort to simply the term, risk confusing people. The late W. O. Vaught used to preach that *agapao* is mental attitude love, whereas *phileo* denotes a warm, personal love. In the New Testament, God usually loves the Son with a *phileo* type of love, and He loves people with an *agapao* type of love, which had led some preachers to declare *agapao* Christian love, and *Phileo* a love for one's fellow man, or fellow woman. There is also familial love, and romantic love in the New Testament.

The greatest expression of love ever is expressed in this verse. God loved us so much that He gave up His one and only Son to suffer, bleed, and die for our sins.

**THE WORLD.** The word for world here is *ton kosmon*. It denotes all men and women, people of all races and nationalities, the whole human race. "This universal aspect of God's love appears also in 2Co 5:19; Rom 5:8. That he gave (*hôte edôken*). The usual classical construction with *hôte* and the indicative (first aorist active) practical result, the only example in the N.T. save that in Gal 2:13. Elsewhere *hôte* with the infinitive occurs for actual result (Mat 13:32) as well as purpose (Mat 10:1), though even this is rare" [ATR].

**IN THIS WAY.** God’s love for all people may be expressed in any way that serves His purpose, but here He specifically shows the depth of His love for us in a way that defies the imagination. Anyone who rejects His love is left to deal with His wrath. Such is His character and nature, and this distinguishes Him from all the false deities that Satan, with man’s help, has ever created.

**HE GAVE.** Genuine love, true love, is giving, not taking. It is selfless, never self-serving. Since God is the greatest Subject of love, it stands to reason that His would be the greatest manifestation of love the world has ever known. His love was given freely, but not thoughtlessly; it was given freely, but never carelessly. This compounds the sin of rejecting His love. In fact, all who reject His love will also discover that He is a holy God. The God of mercy and grace is also a God of justice, and those who reject His gift will discover the wrath of a holy God.

**HIS ONE AND ONLY SON.** The Greek “His one and only Son” (“His only begotten Son” in the KJV) is *ton huion ton monogenê* in the Greek. The meaning is not simply that God has one singular Son, but that He has a unique Son, a one and only Son (see also John 1:14, 18; John 3:18). Another writer has: “**His unique Son** (cf. Rom. 8:3, 32). The Greek word translated **one and only**, referring to the Son, is *monogene-*, which means ‘only begotten,’ or ‘only born-one.’ It is also used in John 1:14, 18; 3:18; and 1 John 4:9” [BKC].

**SO THAT.** Robertson explains that “The rest of the sentence, the purpose clause with *hina-echêi* precisely reproduces the close of John 3:15 save that *eis auton* takes the place of *en autôi* (see John 1:12) and goes certainly with *pisteuôn* (not with *echêi* as *en autôi* in verse John 3:15) and the added clause “should not perish but” (*mê apolêtai alla*, second aorist middle subjunctive, intransitive, of *apollumi*, to destroy). The same contrast between “perish” and “eternal life” (for this world and the next) appears also in John 10:28. On “perish” see also John 17:12” [ATR].

**EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.** God’s salvation, eternal life, is His free gift to all who meet one requirement: belief in His one and only Son. This is not simple acknowledgment that an historical Jesus lived two thousand years ago. That kind of belief has no more benefit to us than believing that Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar lived and conquered vast parts of the known world. This is a belief that casts all one’s hopes on the Object of that faith. I can say I believe my new desk chair will hold support me, but if I never sit in it, it is worthless to me. “On man’s side, the gift is simply to be received, not earned (John 1:12-13). A person is saved by believing, by trusting in Christ” [BKC].

**IN HIM.** The One in whom any person must believe is the “one and only Son” of God, Jesus Christ. The New Testament is very clear on this: “**There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12, bold added by this writer). Recent polls show that a shocking number of church members do not believe that Jesus is the only way to go to heaven. They may be listening to the news networks, to teachers who do not believe, or even to preachers who are not clear on the subject, but if they believe this, they will have to stand before One Person to give an account, and that one Person is Jesus Christ.

**WILL NOT PERISH.** “**Perish** (*apole-tai*) means not annihilation but rather a final destiny of ‘ruin’ in hell apart from God who is life, truth, and joy” [BKC]. When I enrolled in seminary, students who were a year or two ahead of me told me that there had been a professor there who had taught the theory of annihilation: they taught that there that there is no hell for the lost. They simply cease to exist, like animals. Once a new president, Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, was installed that professor did not last very long at that seminary. The Bible is very clear, and our warning must be clear to the world: those who reject Jesus will have their wish granted forever. They will be cast into hell with the devil and all his demons, with all the vile and wicked people of all ages, and all others who do not believe in Jesus Christ (see Rev. 20). There will be conscious, eternal torment for all who do not believe in God’s one and only Son.

There is another point that should be mentioned here, and that was called to my attention by my long-time friend, Dr. Connie Ward, who has given this verse a lot of thought. He has asked a number of New Testament scholars about the grammatical construction, and they agree, but neither they nor most commentaries have much to say about it. After looking t a number of commentries, I consulted A. T. Robertson (WORD PICTURES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT):

“... (T)he purpose clause with hina-echêi precisely reproduces the close of John 3:15 save that eis auton takes the place of en autôi (see John 1:12) and goes certainly with pisteuôn (not with echêi as en autôi in verse John 3:15) and the added clause "should not perish but" (mê apolêtai alla, **second aorist middle subjunctive, intransitive, of apollumi, to destroy**). The same contrast between ‘perish’ and ‘eternal life’ (for this world and the next) appears also in John 10:28. On "perish" see also John 17:12" [ATR, bold added by this writer].

That to which Dr. Ward referred is that “perish” is in the middle voice, and his interpretation is that when one does not believe in Jesus Christ, he destroys himself! For the one who rejects Jesus Christ, destruction that just happens to him, it is something he brings upon himself. So much for those who demand to know how a God of love can send one to hell. The one who rejects Jesus Christ destroys himself, and that means the lost person has no one to blame for his condemnation to spend eternity in hell but himself.

**HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.** “Eternal life is a new quality of life, which a believer has now as a present possession and will possess forever (cf. 10:28; 17:3) [BKC]. God is the greatest Giver, and eternal life is His greatest gift to those who believe in His one and only Son. “A new quality of life, not an everlasting “this-life.” Here begins another major theme of John: the dual one of redemption and judgment. It reappears at 5:22; 8:15; 9:39; 12:47. Here the emphasis is on the fact that men judge themselves. The acquitted are those who have believed in Him; the condemned are those who have rejected Him” [RSB]. Volumes have been written on the meaning of eternal life, some of which distinguish between eternal life and everlasting life. There is a difference but that distinction will not be argued here. We will leave that to the pastors and evangelists who make a personal appeal to people to believe in Jesus Christ.

SPECIAL SUMMARY. It is a rather long quote, but it seems in order to summarize this verse and the Believer's Study Bible carries the late Dr. W. A. Criswell's summary:

“This precious and well-known verse speaks of the divine love which moved God to provide salvation for the world through His Son. There are two words used for “life” in the Greek N.T. *Zoe*, meaning “life” in its absolute sense, as God has given it, is used in this verse. It signifies spiritual life in John. This word is frequently used for “eternal life” with its special emphasis upon the quality of life and its endless duration through the ages to come. This life is available only through belief in God's Son. The biblical concept of “eternal life” is more than immortality, and it involves not only the soul but also the body. From creation man was made for never-ending life, not for death. The death and resurrection of Jesus provide the basis for and give the picture of the divinely appointed redemption-life (cf. Heb 9:14). “Life” in its purest and noblest sense is inextricably joined to regeneration (cf. Titus 3:5). John uses the Greek adjective *aionion* (“eternal”) only in the expression “eternal life” (vv. 15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3). As in rabbinic tradition, it has the meaning of “the life of the age to come” (cf. Dan 12:2). To have eternal life means more than to live forever. The stress is more on the quality than on the quantity, though both are affirmed. Furthermore, John reveals it to be not only an eschatological and future possession but also a present reality (cf. 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 5:13). This is the life Jesus offers to the world. The other word translated “life” (*bios*, Gk.) denotes “manner of life” (1 Tim 2:2), “period or duration of life” (Luke 8:14), or “means of livelihood” (Mark 12:44)” [BELIEVER'S STUDY BIBLE - after this, BSB] .

**3:17 - FOR GOD DID NOT SEND.** “*For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*” Anyone who reads that verse 16 must be aware of the fact that those who believe in Jesus go to heaven and those who do not believe in Him go to hell. Either if forever. This verse, and the following verses qualify, or perhaps amplify, the statement made about those who perish. If there is ever any doubt as to what John 3:16 means, see John 3:17-18!

Man deserves condemnation, but Jesus did not come to condemn, He came to save. Barnes rightly states that “God might justly have sent him for this. Man deserved condemnation, and it would have been right to have pronounced it; but God was willing that there should be an offer of pardon, and the sentence of condemnation was delayed. But, although Jesus did not come then to condemn mankind, yet the time is coming when he will return to judge the living and the dead, Acts 17:31 2Co 5:10 Mt 25:31-46” [BARNES].

**THAT THE WORLD BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.** God's greatest desire is for everyone created in His image to be saved. He takes no pleasure in the death of one lost person. He could not express this more clearly than He did in Ezekiel: “Tell them: As I live”—the declaration of the Lord God—“**I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person should**

**turn from his way and live.** Repent, repent of your evil ways! Why will you die, house of Israel?" (Ezek 33:11).

I have read every novel Louis L'Amour wrote (with one possible exception), some many times. I love the authenticity of his descriptions of the places of which he wrote. I have talked with people who said they had lived in Colorado or New Mexico, and they were amazed at how well he knew the area. After his death, his wife made the statement that he could write about a place he not seen in thirty years as if he were looking at it as he wrote. He was a brilliant man. He was also an experienced man of the world. He had been a professional boxer, a soldier, a sailor on merchant vessels, and he had been a cowboy and a miner. He had a gift for describing fights, ships, guns, mining, and cattle drives. He found himself stranded as a teenager during the Depression and ended up helping an old cowboy find dead cows on the prairie and dress them out for their hides. Later he would often walk into the desert to "survive" for a couple of weeks. He wanted to know the country and he wanted to know the hardships.

Sadly, Louis L'Amour totally missed it when it came to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He seemed to respect the shamanism of the Native Americans as much as he did Christianity. At least, it came across that way in some books. In *The Walking Drum*, he is far more complimentary of the advancements of civilization among the Muslims than among the Christians of Europe. Francis Schaeffer, however, made the point that the advancements made by Islamic people had peaked and were in recession at the time of the Reformation.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about Louis L'Amour was his attitude toward evangelicals. He would have a "sky pilot" (a preacher) tell someone he needed to be saved, only to have his hero say something like, "I don't need to be saved, I have never been lost!" He may have been Eisenhower and Reagan's favorite writer as early as the Second World War, but he was spiritually blind.

The simple fact is that all are lost who are not in Jesus Christ. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world: it is already condemned. He sent His Son into the world to save all who believe in Him. Those who die and go to hell are those who look the only Creator and the only Redeemer in the eye and say, "I don't want you!", or "I don't need you". God loved even those people enough to send His Son to die for them. Why then is it so hard for some to believe that a holy God would cast those who hate His gift and reject His Son into hell? Let me be even more graphic. The day is coming when all saints will agree in judgment with Him. If our mother, father, sister, or brother rejects Jesus Christ and is cast into hell, we will say with Him, "Amen. There is no place in heaven for anyone who rejects Jesus."

Judgment is not a statement about how insignificant and invaluable man is; it is a statement about how big, how holy, how just, and how righteous God is. That God would have sent His one and only Son to suffer, bleed, and die for fallen man is the most amazing thing that I can imagine. Man can never figure this out on his own, but once he is saved and indwelt with the Holy Spirit it will be revealed to him through prayer, serious Bible study, and the preaching and teaching of the Word.

**3:18 - ANYONE WHO BELIEVES.** *“Anyone who believes in Him is not judged, but anyone who does not believe is already judged, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.”* “Anyone” in this verse supports the “everyone” (whosoever) of 3:26. I once heard the late H. R. Herrington, long time pastor of First Baptist Church, Rayville, Louisiana, say, “the only thing requires of anyone to be saved is the one thing everyone can do, and that is to believe in Jesus Christ.”

**ALREADY JUDGED.** The KJV has “condemned”. “The instrumental means of salvation is believing in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. But people who reject the light of the *Logos* are in the dark (1:5; 8:12) and are therefore **already** under God’s judgment. They stand **condemned**. They are like those sinful, dying Israelites who willfully rejected the divine remedy (Num. 21:4-9). A believer in Christ, on the other hand, is under “no condemnation” (Rom. 8:1); he ‘will not be condemned’ (John 5:24)” [BKC]. Clarke stressed that the one who dies not believe in Jesus

“Continues under the condemnation which Divine justice has passed upon all sinners; and has this superadded, He hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God, and therefore is guilty of the grossest insult to the Divine majesty, in neglecting, slighting, and despising the salvation which the infinite mercy of God had provided for him” [CLARKE].

**3:19 - THE JUDGMENT.** *“This, then, is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.”* Regardless of claims to the contrary, this verse stresses the judgment designed by God for all who reject His Son. God’s judgment is never without reason or purpose, and never without a specific target. Furthermore, there is never a miscarriage of justice with Him, as there may be in a human court. We must have justice in our courts, but the proceedings must be submitted continually to scrutiny by higher courts, the media, and others to be sure there is no abuse. When one ties justice in a particular case to an upcoming election, or to whether or not the accused has prominent family members living within the jurisdiction of the district attorney or the trial judge, there is the risk of a miscarriage of justice. That is never the case with God. He is not only holy, He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent; therefore, He does know, and He can accomplish His purpose. Furthermore, He is indebted to no man. No one will escape His judgment except through Jesus, His one and only Son.

**LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD.** What is the basis for judgment? Jesus, the Light of the World has come into the world. That alone makes all men culpable in God’s court.

**MEN LOVED DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT.** Please see **Appendix B** for a brief note by Francis Schaeffer on the Fall. We must understand that a love for darkness is the natural state of fallen man. A small child does not make some decision by which he brings this darkness into his life. All he has to do is be alive. A small child breaks something and immediately thinks (1) How can I hide my action?; (2) How can I convincingly deny my guilt?; or (3) How can I place the

blame on my brother or my friend? No one trains him to do that, it comes naturally because it has been our nature to do so since the Fall. Parental training can help them to see that they should admit mistakes and accept responsibility, but it is not a natural part of their make-up.

The simple fact is that men love darkness. That is all men and all women. The reason given here is inspired by the Holy Spirit: Their deeds are evil. “Men love darkness not for its own sake but because of what it hides. They want to continue undisturbed in their evil (*pone-ra*, “wicked”; cf. v. 20 which has a different word for evil) **deeds**. A believer is also a sinner (though a redeemed one), but he confesses his sin and responds to God (cf. 1 John 1:6-7). In the ultimate sense, man’s love of darkness rather than God the **Light** (John 1:5, 10-11; 1 John 1:5) is his love for idols. He worships and serves “created things rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25)” [BKC].

When John writes that men loved darkness, the root of the Greek word he used is *agape* (êgapêsan to skotos), which may come as a surprise to those who claim that *agape* is Christian love and *philos* is human love. Here, evil men love evil with *agape* type of love. This is a mental attitude kind of love, not simply an emotion. Their mind set (the mental processor) is completely darkened to the point that men naturally rebel against the light and seek darkness.

Robertson reminds us that “Job (Job 24:13) spoke of men rebelling against the light. Here to skotos, common word for moral and spiritual darkness (1Th 5:5), though *hê skotia* in John 1:5. “Darkness” is common in John as a metaphor for the state of sinners (John 8:12; John 12:35; John 46; 1Jn 1:6; 1Jn 2:8, 9, 11)” [ATR]. Continuing:

“Jesus himself is the only moral and spiritual light of the world (John 8:12) as he dared claim to his enemies. The pathos of it all is that men fall in love with the darkness of sin and rebel against the light like denizens of the underworld, “for their works were evil (*ponêra*).” When the light appears, they scatter to their holes and dens. *Ponêros* (from *ponos*, toil, *poneô*, to toil) is used of the deeds of the world by Jesus (John 7:7). In the end the god of this world blinds men’s eyes so that they do not see the light (2Co 4:4). The fish in the Mammoth Cave have no longer eyes, but only sockets where eyes used to be. The evil one has a powerful grip on the world (1Jn 5:19)” [ATR].

**3:20 - PRACTICES WICKED THINGS.** “*For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.*” Everyone who lives in moral and spiritual darkness “hates the light and avoids it.” Interestingly, he often avoids the light while claiming to be enlightened. He may even set himself up as a guardian of the light, but he still loves the darkness that covers his life “so that his deeds may not be exposed”. In June of 2008, presidential candidate Barak Obama made a speech in which he declared, “This is no longer a Christian nation”, yet he set before the nation his concept of what is good for the country. Many in the news media have been echoing that same thought for many years, gloating over what they call enlightenment, when in reality they celebrate the victory of darkness over the light.

**DEEDS MAY NOT BE EXPOSED.** Fallen man hates the light because it exposes his evil deeds, just as a good light might expose the poisonous snake in the carport. It was the barking of my dog Bear that led me to the back door several years ago with a good light, where I found a Copperhead mocassin within one step of the door, but not clearly visible in the light of the large mercury light some distance away. Again, it was Bear whose barking brought me out into the carport where I found a Copperhead between the front wheel of my golf cart and the brick wall of the house. In both cases, the danger was revealed when I shined a bright light on it.

The Light of the world exposes the evils of the world. Barnes wrote that we learn the following things from this verse:

“1st. That one design of the gospel is to reprove men. It convicts them of sin in order that it may afford consolation.

2nd. That men by nature hate the gospel. No man who is a sinner loves it; and no man by nature is disposed to come to it, any more than an adulterer or thief is disposed to come to the daylight, and do his deeds of wickedness there.

3rd. The reason why the gospel is hated is that men are sinners. ‘Christ is hated because sin is loved.’

4th. The sinner must be convicted or convinced of sin. If it be not in this world, it will be in the next. There is no escape for him; and the only way to avoid condemnation in the world to come is to come humbly and acknowledge sin here, and seek for pardon” [BARNES].

**3:21 -LIVES BY THE TRUTH.** *“But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”* In his native state, man loves darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil (3:19), but once a person is born again (vs. 3:3), he is miraculously transferred from the realm of darkness to the realm of light, and that by Jesus, the Light of the World. The person who lives in sin cannot see the light. He lives his life in spiritual darkness, but when one lives by the truth set forth in this chapter, he “comes to the light” and from that time forward his works will testify that they are “accomplished by God”, and not by man. They are of the Spirit, not the flesh.

By means of references to the theme of light and darkness “previously introduced in the Prologue (1:4–8), the concluding three verses of this section expand our understanding of both those who are condemned and those who are accepted. Here the idea is expanded by the clear indication that what one does reflects who one is. Darkness, hating, and doing evil together are set against light, living by the truth, and the works done through God” [NAC].

## Jesus and John the Baptist

**3:22 - JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES.** *“After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized.”* “After this” denotes His epochal



meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where He stayed for some time, during which they baptized people who came to Him. “Jesus did not himself administer the ordinance of baptism, but his disciples did it by his direction and authority, John 4:2” [BARNES].

Jerusalem was in Judea, but John is telling us that they left the city of Jerusalem and moved out into the country side. A distinction is made between the city of Jerusalem and the providence of Judea. As in Acts 1:8; Acts 10:39, as well as “1Macc. 3:34; and in 2Macc. 1:1, 10” [CLARKE]. At this time, Jesus was probably traveling with His first six disciples, Andrews and Simon, James and John, and Philip and Nathanael.

**3:23 - JOHN ALSO WAS BAPTIZING.** *“John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized...”* This, we know, is John the Baptist, since the Apostle John does not use his own name in this entire Gospel account of the life and ministry of our Lord. As already noted, the once ambitious, self-centered, self-seeking young disciple matured in spiritual life he lost himself for the glory of his Lord. His works were “shown to be accomplished by God” (3:21).

It is interesting that John the Baptist is still baptizing, even after pointing to Jesus and proclaiming Him to be the Lamb of God (1:36). Why did he continue to baptize? The obvious answer is that he continued doing what he was sent to do, to point people to Jesus.

**BECAUSE THERE WAS PLENTY OF WATER THERE.** John was preaching the only gospel he knew: Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand! The obvious conclusion is that John was baptizing believers by immersion. I was still a young pastor when someone brought visitors from England and introduced them to me in the middle of the week. After we visited for a little while, the British couple asked if I had anyone to baptize. They wanted to see someone baptized by immersion! We did not have anyone to baptize at that time.

The mode of baptism here is immersion. Vines defined the word in this way: ‘baptism,’ consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from bapto, ‘to dip’), is used (a) of John’s ‘baptism,’ (b) of Christian ‘baptism,’ [VINES]. When Dr. Jimmy Draper was president of LifeWay Christian Resources, he shared presented his list of Baptist Essentials in one of his reports to the trustees. He stressed that these are the essentials. “There are many distinctives, but these are the essentials.” I asked Dr. Draper for permission to use his list and it was graciously granted. I spent a lot of time with Jimmy Draper over a period of years and I never found him to be anything but gracious. The Baptist Essentials, as listed by Dr. Draper, are:

1. Salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing.
2. The Lordship of Jesus Christ
3. Sufficiency of Scripture
4. Autonomy of the Local Church
5. Religious Liberty
6. Trinitarian view of God (One in essence, three in person)

## 7. The Great Commission

Nowhere does this list contain the words, “once saved, always saved”; or Baptism By Immersion. Those are distinctives, not essentials. Baptism by immersion is required for membership in a local Baptist church, but not for one’s salvation. According to this verse, both Jesus and John were in the same area because there was “plenty of water there.” We are not told that there was any difference between the purpose in baptism as it was performed by John the Baptist and that practiced by the disciples of Jesus.

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I went with a group to the Hinds County Jail every Thursday afternoon to witness to people there. I led this mission trip for two and one half years and for over one year I preached at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman early every Sunday morning at 8:00 o’clock, even when I had to drive in snow and ice. One warm Sunday morning, Chaplain Roscoe Hicks told me he wished I had something to wear to help him baptize some prisoners. After some discussion, He went home and found me some of his old clothes and I helped him baptize a large number of prisoners, under the watchful attention of armed guards who surrounded us. They did not have a lake or pond, so he had asked someone to construct a baptistry which looked like an oversized horse trough. Such was his conviction that those who believed in Jesus Christ for His salvation should be baptized. He had made arrangements for them to be accepted into the membership of local churches. I probably baptized 44 or 45 people in two different services. The chaplain would baptize about half of the candidates and I would baptize the rest, while being guarded by trustees, men with rifles, and women with revolvers.

**PEOPLE WERE COMING AND BEING BAPTIZED.** Large numbers of people were apparently still coming to hear John, and now they are coming to the area to hear Jesus. “Baptized” is the “Imperfect active of baptizô. ‘He was baptizing.’ The six disciples were with him and in John 4:2 John explains that Jesus did the baptizing through the disciples” [ATR].

**3:24 - SINCE JOHN.** “(S)ince John had not yet been thrown into prison.” It is so like the aged apostle John to add an historical footnote. John the Baptist had not yet been arrested and imprisoned.

**3:25 - A DISPUTE.** “Then a dispute arose between John’s disciples and a Jew about purification.” *The New American Commentary* offers the following comment: “The contrast between Jesus and John the Baptizer is brought into focus by John’s disciples, who apparently had been engaged in a dispute or “argument” (zetesis) with a Jew over purification or “ceremonial washing” (katharismou; cf. 2:6)” [NAC]. John does not gloss over a dispute, even when it concerns the disciples of John the Baptist. We should note that **this is not a dispute between the disciples of Jesus and those of the Baptist.**

Disputes often develop within a local church, sometimes over substantive issues, but more often over something trivial, such as the color of the carpet, or who sang the last solo. Looking back, we should not be surprised that such a dispute arose. Satan will take advantage of every opportunity to generate a dispute, and knowing how the devil works, one would wonder if there had not been a dispute as the number of Jesus’ disciples increased and the number of John’s disciples decreased.

A number of years ago, I preached a mini-series of sermons under the title, **FAMINE IN THE LAND OF PROMISE**. The message focused on the call of Abraham, his journey to the Promised Land, his faithfulness demonstrated in his building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord when he stopped. Then, I dealt with his shocking behavior when he entered the Land of Promise only to find a famine there. He fled to Egypt, where he told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister, not his wife, because he was afraid Pharaoh would kill him and take Sarah for his wife. The Lord revealed the lie to Pharaoh, who ordered Abraham to leave Egypt, after which he returned to the place of the altar he had build when he first entered the land. At one point I asked, how could Abraham, of all people, do such a shameful, reprehensible thing? The answer lies in the fact that one does not expect to find a famine in the land of promise. Satan can use that shocking development to persuade one to flee to Egypt, whereas the Lord seeks to persuade us to build and altar in the Land of Promise and call on the name of he Lord.

Both the hope and the fulfillment of “the Promise” was Jesus. He was standing on the Earth, proclaiming through many and mighty works to be the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of both the Abrahamic Covenant (2000 B. C.) and the Davidic Covenant (1000 B. C.). John the Baptist had proclaimed Him to be The Lamb of God. Jesus demonstrated through various signs that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. The apostle John would write that he and the other disciples had seen Him with their own eyes, touched Him with their own hands, and heard Him with their own hands (1 John 1:1ff). One would be justified in concluding that it cannot get much better than that - not on this earth! Yet, a dispute developed between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew who challenges them about Jesus.

**A JEW.** It is interesting that John would mention “a Jew” in relating this disturbance. The KJV has “Jews”, but the best manuscripts have “a Jew” [NCWB]. There were many disputes between the Jews and Jesus’ disciples, but this seems to have been a challenge to the disciples of John the Baptist by one particular Jew.

While the Gospel According to Luke is the only Gospel written by a Gentile, the Fourth Gospel was written by a Jew who had been living among Gentiles for many years, a Jew who was writing to what was more and more a Gentile church. Students of the Word do not miss the use of the singular here:

“The mention of an unnamed Jew (or Jews in some manuscripts) has led some scholars to speculate about the original text. Some have suggested that the dispute was between the disciples of John and “of Jesus.” Such a suggestion would mean a change from Ioudaiou to Iesou and is not totally impossible. If such a change took place, then it could fit a later context by contrasting the devotees of both as suggested in Acts 11:16; 19:1–5. But there is no textual evidence to support such a theory. Moreover, the probable distance between both groups makes the suggestion less likely” [NAC].

**PURIFICATION.** A dispute developed between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew over purification (see John 2:6 for the an earlier use of the word). Representatives from the Sanhedrin

had challenged John's right to baptize those who believed his announcement that the Lamb of God had come (John 1:25). This dispute focused on the teaching of Judaism on the subject of purification, which this Jew seems to have related to the baptism of John. "The Jews had various kinds of baptisms or dippings (Heb 6:2), 'baptisms of cups and pots and brazen vessels' (Mark 6:4). The disciples of John came to him with the dispute (the first known baptismal controversy, on the meaning of the ceremony) and with a complaint" [ATR].

**3:26 - THEY CAME TO JOHN.** *"So they came to John and told him, 'Rabbi, the One you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is flocking to Him.'" The disciples of John the Baptist came to him with the report that Jesus was in the area, and that He was baptizing. We must remember that this is not a dispute between the disciples of Jesus and those of the Baptist.*

**RABBI.** This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that when we see the word Rabbi in the Gospels the word is usually used of Jesus. In fact,

"The designation of the Baptizer by his disciples as "Rabbi" (Lord, Master, or Teacher) is unquestionably intended by the evangelist to pinpoint the contrast between John and Jesus because 3:26 is the only place in the Gospel where the title "Rabbi" refers to someone other than Jesus (cf. 1:38; 6:25; 9:22; 11:8; as well as 20:16, where the heightened form "Rabboni" is used after the resurrection). The disciples of John the Baptist were obviously concerned to protect the popularity and prestige of their teacher, and they wanted the Baptizer to counter Jesus' growing popularity by taking some affirmative action on his own behalf. Disciples of teachers are often more zealous for their teachers' perspectives than the teachers themselves, and thus history is replete with many examples of the excesses of disciples, as in the case of the Arminians and Calvinists" [NAC].

**3:27 - JOHN RESPONDED.** *"John responded, "No one can receive a single thing unless it's given to him from heaven." John's response to the question raised by a certain Jew concerning the growing number of disciples following Jesus and the dwindling number still following John helps us to understand why Jesus would say that no man born of woman has ever been greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11). Indeed, John's greatness is seen in his reply: "No one can receive a single thing unless it's given to him from heaven." "God is sovereign in bestowing His blessings on one's ministry. If Jesus' movement was expanding, then it must have been in the will of God. This principle of God's sovereignty is stressed in John (cf. 6:65; 19:11) as well as elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:7)" [BKC].*

**3:28 - YOU CAN TESTIFY.** *"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of Him.'" They had heard John the Baptist point to Jesus and declare Him to be the Lamb of God, so they should not have been surprised that the disciples of Jesus would increase while the disciples of John would decrease. Since John was the forerunner to the Messiah, it was reasonable to expect that Christ himself would be more successful than his forerunner. It was as*

though John was saying, “I came, not to form a separate party, a peculiar sect, but to prepare the way so that He might be more successful, and that the people might be ready for his coming, and that He might have the success which he has actually met with. You should rejoice, therefore, at that success, and not enter it, for his success is the best proof of the greatness of my word, and of its success also” [BARNES].

**3:29 - THE GROOM.** *“He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom’s friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom’s voice. So this joy of mine is complete.”* John uses an illustration with which they could identify. At a wedding, the groom receives the bride, and all his friends rejoice in it.

NOTE: Anyone who studies the Gospel According to John should always keep in mind the Prologue to this Gospel. In it Jesus is proclaimed to be the Son of God; He is one with God; He is the Lamb of God; the One who brings light and life to men and women. The NAC comments on the significance of John’s statement:

“To clarify for his disciples what he meant, therefore, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom’s marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom’s shout and often for receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride. Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom. Just as he had earlier willingly turned over his disciples to Jesus in a self-giving act (1:35–37), here he expressed his genuine joy that Jesus was being accepted by the people. This brief parable, therefore, serves as a powerful illustration.

“The symbol of marriage, of course, has been employed as a striking picture of the relationship between Christ and his church and as Schnackenburg correctly observed has given rise to “the allegory of the Church as the bride of Christ” (e.g., Eph 5:23–33; Rev 19:7–8)” [NAC].

**3:30 - HE MUST INCREASE.** *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* Jesus declared that no man born of woman would ever be greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 1:11), and this statement is all the proof we need. His greatness is seen, not in houses and land, not in gold and silver, not honors and degrees, but in his absolute submission to Jesus. Jesus must increase and John must decrease in every way that mattered.

“It has to be (see John 3:14). **He is to go on growing (present active infinitive auxanein) while I go on decreasing** (present passive infinitive elattousthai, from comparative elattôn, less). These are the last words that we have from John till the despondent message from the dungeon in Machaerus whether Jesus is after all the

Messiah (Mat 11:2; Luke 7:19). He went on to imprisonment, suspense, martyrdom, while Jesus grew in popular favour till he had his *via dolorosa*. ‘These last words of St. John are the fulness of religious sacrifice and fitly close his work’ (Westcott)” [ATR, bold added by this writer].

Every Christian should make this the philosophy of his or her life. Jesus must keep on increasing in honor, prestige, influence, recognition, and power, and the individual believer must keep on decreasing in all areas of his or her life. The pastor, evangelist, or denominational who grows in humility and meekness does so because of his desire to see Christ receive all the glory and honor. However, if that person is egocentric, filled with pride, arrogant, or condescending in his relationship with others, he dishonors Christ. He is increasing and Christ is decreasing in his life. There is a temptation for those who receive honors, appointments, or a call to a highly visible position to promote themselves, or to glory in their position or advancement.

It was my privilege to work with Dr. Jimmy Draper for several years when he was president of LifeWay Christian Resources. I was on the board of trustees, and at my first Tuesday, I had driven in from my sister’s home in Mt. Juliet, arriving around 6:30 for breakfast. At 5:00, when the first plenary session was over, I had no place to go, so I decided I would go to my car and read. Those who were staying in the local hotel had time to return to their room and freshen up and dress for dinner and the evening session.

I found myself walking down the hall with Dr. Draper, whom I had met a number of years before. He had also led us through our orientation the previous June. I knew him, but I would be learning a lot more about him in the coming years. That afternoon, he asked if I was going back to the hotel, and when I told him that I was staying with my sister, he asked me to go with him his office and visit while he checked on messages. We visited for about an hour that day. Later on, I would work more closely with him when I was chairman of the Nominating Committee. He told me that I would be on the board long enough to elect his successor. When he announced to our committee that he would be retiring within a few years, he asked us to keep that in mind. Sometime later, he talked with us about the fact that the chairman of the board and the vice-chairman would be on the presidential search committee. I had nominated the current chairman and a friend nominated a vice-chairman at that meeting. I stressed that day that I had an agenda. Dr. Draper looked at me, but before he could say anything, I added, “I don’t want to see anyone on the search committee with an agenda. I would like for our committee to begin by asking the Lord to lead them to the right person for the job, and I would like for them to avoid being influenced by anyone who might be promoting himself for that position.”

When Rick Evans, the Presidential Search Committee chairman, reported to the executive committee that they had narrowed the search down to three people, I asked, “Did anyone who was positioning himself for the job make the final three?” Rick Evans said, “No. Not one of them.” They began by praying that the Lord would lead them to His choice. When Dr. Thom Rainer was introduced to the executive committee at the next meeting, we voted unanimously to recommend him to the full board. He was elected, and for the next year, Dr. Draper helped prepare him for the job. Dr. Rainer was even more amazed than I with the humility and selflessness of Jimmy Draper, and he made it a point

to comment on it from time to time. In fact, Dr. Rainer manifested humble appreciation for Dr. Draper on many occasions. I was personally aware of the commitment on the part of the outgoing president: he was determined to see Thom Rainer increase while he decreased in visibility and influence. This was no show, it was a sincere commitment.

At the retirement banquet for Jimmy Draper, someone asked us how many of us had ever received a personal note from Dr. Draper. There were some six hundred people in that banquet hall, and the majority of them were holding up their hands. Jimmy Draper, had for fifteen years been president of perhaps the most influential institution in the history of evangelical Christianity, yet he was a man of humility and service, a man who loved others, and remembered them. I learned in time that when he was a pastor, it was not uncommon for him to take someone out of prison or off the street and let them stay in his home while he helped them find a job and get on their feet. One neighbor referred to his home as the Draper Motel, because of all the people he had taken in over the years. With Jimmy Draper, Christ was continually increasing, while he was continually decreasing.

## The One from Heaven

SPECIAL NOTE ON 3:31-36: The Apostle John declares the testimony of John the Baptist about Jesus. “Then John burst forth into a glowing eulogy concerning the Savior from heaven, pointing out that the One who is filled with heavenly truth, endowed with the limitless power of the Spirit, and endowed with all the Father’s love and honors is certainly worthy of our faith. To receive him is to enjoy eternal life now and forever, and to reject him is to endure the just anger of God for eternity” [NCWB].

**3:31 - THE ONE.** *“The One who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The One who comes from heaven is above all.”* The New American Commentary offers an overview of verses 31-33:

“Having thus concluded the final testimony of the Baptizer, **the evangelist turned to summarize the implications of chap. 3 by drawing together the messages in both the Nicodemus and John the Baptist stories.** Earth and heaven are vastly different realities, and those whose origins are linked with each of these realities are themselves very different. The message is that those who are from the earth can hardly be considered in the same realm of discourse as the one who came from heaven. **The authentic messenger or agent from heaven is utterly superior to any and all (pantón) earth-oriented persons** (3:31), for he has seen and heard the realities of heaven and bears witness to those realities (3:32)” [NAC, bold added by this writer].

**FROM THE EARTH.** Remember the Prologue to John’s account of the life, works, and teachings of the Messiah. Jesus Christ, the eternal Word (1:1ff) is the unique Son of God who created all things. As the Agent of Creation, He transcends time and space. Here, John amplifies

that truth with a contrast between the One from above and the person of this world. Robertson writes: “Of the earth (ek tês gês). John is fond of this use of ek for origin and source of character as in John 1:46; 1Jn 4:5” [ATR]. A distinction must be made between the finite and the infinite. Man, the one from the earth is limited in understanding. He speaks the things of the earth.

**FROM HEAVEN.** The one from the earth is finite, the One from above is infinite. “Jesus is the one that comes out of heaven (ho ek tou ouranou erchomenos) as he has shown in John 1:1-18. Hence he is ‘above all’ [ATR]. The One who had come down from above is Jesus, the very One Nicodemus had sought out, the One about whom John had given such a wonderful testimony. He is the One by whom all things were created (1:1ff); He is “the true light, who gives light to everyone...” (John 1:9). Nathanael declared, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (1:49). John proclaimed Him to be the Lamb of God. He is above all men. The Lord reveals the significance of this great truth in the Book of Isaiah:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.” [This is] the Lord’s declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8-9).

**3:32 - HE TESTIFIES.** “*He testifies to what He has seen and heard, yet no one accepts His testimony.*” Jesus came to earth and testified to what He had seen and heard. “What Jesus spoke came from His previous vision of and communion with the Father in heaven (cf. 1:1, 14). Yet in spite of this clear reliable witness, mankind as a whole has rejected His message (cf. 1:11)” [BKC].

**SEEN AND HEARD.** John offers his personal testimony in 1 John: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us” (1 John 1:1-2). In that passage, the emphasis is upon what John and the other disciples had seen, heard, and observed. Here, the emphasis is upon what Jesus has seen and heard. The two verbs, “seen” and “heard” (ho heôraken kai êkousen) are “perfect active indicative followed by aorist active indicative, because, as Westcott shows, the first belongs to the very existence of the Son and the latter to his mission. There is no confusion of tenses here” [ATR].

**NO ONE ACCEPTS.** This is a generalization, for while crowds did not accept Him, individuals did believe. Large crowds kept coming to Jesus for some time, but that did not mean that they accepted Him as Savior and Lord (John 1:11; John 2:24). It was a fickle crowd whose interest was superficial at best. Jesus was never deceived by the crowds because He knew what they were thinking. Barnes got it right: “The words no man are here to be understood in the sense of few. Though his doctrine is pure, plain, sublime, yet few, comparatively, received it in faith. Though multitudes came to him, drawn by various motives (John 6:26), yet few became his real disciples, Mat 26:56; 7:22” [BARNES].



**3:33 - ACCEPTED HIS TESTIMONY.** *“The one who has accepted His testimony has affirmed that God is true.”* While the crowds did not accept Him (vs. 32), individuals did accept his testimony. “The message of Jesus has not been universally rejected as verse 32 by itself might indicate. One who receives it gives his attestation or certification to the fact **that God is truthful** (cf. v. 21). To reject this testimony is to call God a liar (1 John 5:10)” [BKC]. The one who accepts the testimony of Jesus attests to the truth that Jesus proclaims the message of God, and affirms that God is true.

**3:34 - GOD SENT HIM.** *“For God sent Him, and He speaks God’s words, since He gives the Spirit without measure.”* This is a powerful summary statement which holds before us all we have read up to this point, and prepares us for that which will follow. John records one debate between Jesus and the Jewish leaders: “Even if I testify about Myself,” Jesus replied, “My testimony is valid, because I know where I came from and where I’m going...” (John 8:14). In John 3:16, we read that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” to come and die for the sins of the world. One commentary states:

“Thirty-nine times the Gospel of John refers to Jesus being sent from God (vv. 17, 34; 4:34; 5:23-24, 30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-39, 44, 57; 7:16, 28-29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44-45, 49; 13:16, 20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21). This affirms Jesus’ deity and heavenly origin, as well as God’s sovereignty and love in initiating the Son’s Incarnation (cf. Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9-10, 14)” [BKC].

**HE SPEAKS GOD’S WORDS.** That God sent His Son, and His son “speaks God’s words” is a powerful summary of the proclamations made in the Prologue. Jesus will underscore this fact throughout His Ministry: “And if I do judge, My judgment is true, because I am not alone, **but I and the Father who sent Me** [judge together]. Even in your law it is written that the witness of two men is valid. I am the One who testifies about Myself, and **the Father who sent Me testifies about Me**” (John 8:16-18, bold added by this writer).

**HE GIVES THE SPIRIT.** This is another powerful statement about the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit came upon Jesus (without measure) and He spoke God’s words. “**Without measure**” means that “God has put no limit to the Spirit’s relation to the Son. God has given the Holy Spirit in his fulness to Christ and to no one else in that sense” [ATR].

**3:35 - THE FATHER LOVES THE SON.** *“The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands.”* This writer has stressed that the Prologue to John’s Gospel nails the casket lid shut on any and every false doctrine concerning the person, nature, character, and mission of Jesus Christ. It refutes the worship of false gods as clearly as it rejects the false worship of the true God. Adam Clarke sums it up like this:

“A principal design of John is, to show that Christ was infinitely above every teacher, prophet, and Divine messenger that had ever yet appeared. The prophets had various

gifts: some had visions, others dreams; some had the gift of teaching, others of comforting, etc.; but none possessed all these gifts: Christ alone possessed their plenitude, and is all things in all” [CLARKE].

**GIVEN ALL THINGS INTO HIS HANDS.** We have seen that the Father loves His Son; and that He sent His Son. Now we are told that God gave His Son full authority over all things. He had absolute authority over the elements (He walked on water!); over diseases (He healed lepers); over demons (He cast them out of people); and over the temple (He cleansed the temple complex).

**3:36 - THE ONE WHO BELIEVES.** “*The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.*” This verse mirrors John 3:16-18. God’s provision for our salvation is amazing in its simplicity, phenomenal in its power, and wondrous in its purpose. The only thing anyone is required to do to be saved is the one thing everyone can do, and that is to simply believe in Him. Everyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life.

**THE ONE WHO REFUSES.** The New Testament is filled with warnings of the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ. Those who believe receive eternal life, but those who refuse Him will not see life. Rather, they will perish in hell, the place prepared for those who refuse God’s Son. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes (QuickVerse Electronic Library - BSB) explains that:

“Both verbs in the passage (*pisteuon* and *apeithon*) are present participles in the Greek, indicating **continuous belief or continuous disobedience**. *apeithon* (“to be disobedient”) is the opposite of *peithomai* (“to allow oneself to be persuaded”). **One, therefore, either allows himself to be persuaded and gains life, or willfully defies the word of God, refuses to be persuaded, and therefore does not ever have spiritual life.** His only expectation is wrath” [BSB, bold added by this writer].

Clearly, man has but two options:

“trust **in the Son** or reject **the Son** (cf. vv. 16, 18). Unbelief is tragic ignorance but it is also willful disobedience to clear light. **God’s wrath** is mentioned only here in the Fourth Gospel (but cf. Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). “Wrath,” God’s necessary righteous reaction against evil, **remains** (*menei*) on the unbeliever. This wrath is future but it also exists now. Endless sin and disobedience will result in endless punishment (Matt. 25:46)” [BKC].

# APPENDIX A

## THE USE OF WINE IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

By  
Johnny L. Sanders, D. Min.

How popular is home wine-making? The question appeared recently in a weekly magazine. The answer was that every month, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the U.S. Dept. of the Treasury licenses a new 5,000 heads-of- households. The American Wine Society, a Hobby group, reports (1975) membership as 12,000 with a 30% annual increase.

"Pop" wines, advertised so freely on TV, radio, magazines, and billboards, have contributed to a serious and growing problem among young people. People like to joke about the amount of beer consumed by servicemen but it is no joke to three million American veterans who are now alcoholics.

Alcohol is a major problem, but when one takes a stand against beverage alcohol, some "sleeper" comes up with the same old worn-out protest, "But Jesus drank wine! They drank wine at the Last Supper, didn't they? The answer is, "yes." Wine was used at the Last Supper. But the answer to the implied question (Is not modern drinking the same as that practiced by the Jews at their feasts and social function?) is no. There is a difference.

An article by R. H. Stein, "Wine Drinking in N. T. Times" which appeared in the June 20, 1975 issue of "Christianity Today" (p. 9) is helpful in understanding the difference in wine drinking in N. T. times and modern social drinking. Stein pointed out that in ancient Greece wine was stored in large jugs called AMPHORAE. When used it was first poured into large bowls called KRATERS and mixed with water. From these kraters cups (KYLIX) were filled. It is important to note that before the wine was consumed it was mixed with water. The cups were filled from the kraters and not the amphorae.

The ratio of water to wine mentioned by ancient writers varied from 1 to 20 parts water to 1 part wine. Common ratios mentioned are: 2-1, 3-1, 4-1, 5-2 (the larger number represents the water). "Sometimes the ratio goes down to 1 to 1 (and even lower), but it should be noted that such a mixture is referred to as 'strong wine.' Drinking wine unmixed, on the other hand, was looked on as a Scythian or barbarian custom" (Stein).

Wine was not only a common beverage in ancient times. It was used for medical purposes

as well as a solvent for medicines. Wine is mentioned often in ancient writings. Plutarch wrote, "We call a mixture 'wine' although the larger of the component parts is water." Writers simply called the mixture wine without explaining the ratio. But if straight wine or unmixed wine was intended it was called 'strong wine' or strong drink.

It seems reasonable to assume that the practice among the Jews was similar to that mentioned above. In several places in the O. T. a distinction is made between wine and 'strong drink.' In Lev. 10:8-9 we find the Lord addressing Aaron, "Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting..."

OTHER REFERENCES: (1) Num. 6:3; (2) Deut. 14:14-26; 29:6; (3) Judges 13:4, 7, 14; (4) I Sam. 1:15; (5) Pro. 20:1; 31:4, 6; (6) Isaiah 5:11, 22.

Both the Talmud and the 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia suggests that a mixture of three parts water to one part wine was customary. Therefore, it may be safe to assume that the wine used at the Last Supper was a mixture of 3 parts water to 1 part wine.

Yes, Jesus drank wine. Yes, the apostles drank wine. But no, the modern use of alcoholic beverages does not parallel the use of wine in N. T. times. "To consume the amount of alcohol that is in two martinis by drinking wine containing three parts water to one part wine, one would have to drink over twenty-two glasses" (Stein). There is a striking differences in modern social drinking and the use of wine in those days.

In ancient times safe drinking water was often very difficult to find. Unfermented fruit juice would soon spoil and milk would sour. The only answer to a very acute problem was real, fermented wine. The wine helped purify the water and the water stretched the wine supply. When one took an extended trip the only safe, reliable drink was this mixture of water and wine. It was not only practical, it was essential.

Today safe water, coffee, tea, refrigerated milk and juices and cold soft drinks are available to most people whether at home or on the road. These drinks are not only safer than wine, beer and liquor, they are usually less expensive. Seldom does a family become destitute because of a father's addiction to coffee or tea. The same cannot be said of alcoholic beverages.

Lost men generally associate the drinking of alcoholic beverages with worldliness and sin. Many unsaved people can only be reached by one who lives a separated life. Any Christian who drinks beverage alcohol places his testimony in serious jeopardy and to deliberately jeopardize one's witness is a serious offense against God and the unsaved. Knowing this, the man who drinks is seeking the minimum in service and loyalty, and avoiding the maximum. Those who try to justify their drinking may often be trying to determine just how little they can do for God and still be called a Christian by others. It is easy to tell when someone is rationalizing to try justify compromise.

"If the drinking of unmixed wine or even wine mixed with a ratio of one to one with water

was frowned upon in ancient times, certainly the drinking of distilled spirits in which the alcohol content is frequently three to ten times greater would be frowned upon a great deal more" (Stein).

Habakkuk warns in 2:15, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also..." On cigarette packages there is a warning: "The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health." Should there not be an even stronger warning attached to alcoholic beverages?

"At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Read Proverbs 23:29-32.

## APPENDIX B

### Francis Schaeffer on Evangelism

#### VINTAGE SCHAEFFER

In, *TWO CONTENTS, TWO REALITIES*, Francis Schaeffer showed why he ranked with C. S. Lewis and Carl F. H. Henry as some of the most brilliant Christian apologists of the Twentieth Century. The following quotes are from a paper sent to all participants of the International Congress on World Evangelism, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1974.

In this work, Schaeffer says:

“There are four things which I think are absolutely necessary if we as Christians are going to meet the need of our age and the overwhelming pressure we are increasingly facing. They are two contents and two realities.

The First Content: Sound Doctrine

The Second Content: Honest Answers to Honest Questions

The First Reality: True Spirituality

The Second Reality: The Beauty of Human Relationships

Here are some excerpts:

“The first content is clear doctrinal content concerning the central elements of Christianity..... We must have the courage to make no compromise with liberal theology and especially neo-orthodox existential theology.”

He said there may be borderline things where we have

“differences among ourselves, but on the central issues there must be no compromise. Evangelicals can fall into something which really is not far from existential theology without knowing it. One form of such ‘evangelical existentialism’ is the attitude, if not the words, ‘Don’t ask questions, just believe.’ He adds, “It is not more spiritual to believe without asking questions.”

“Moreover, we must be very careful to emphasize content in our message....the gospel we preach must be rich in content.”

“What we need to do is to understand our age to be an age of very subtle religious and political manipulation, manipulation by cool communication, communication without content. And as we see all these things, we must lean against them. We have a message of content; there is a system to Christianity. It is not *only* a system, true enough; it is not a dead scholasticism, true enough; but it is system in that the person who accepts Christ as his Savior must do so in the midst of the understanding that prior to the creation of the world a personal God on the high level of Trinity existed. And if they “accept Jesus Christ as their Savior” and do not understand that God exists as an infinite- personal God, and do not understand that man is made in the image of God and has value, and do not understand that man’s dilemma is not metaphysical because he is small, but because man revolted against God in a space-time Fall, in all probability they are not saved. If we ‘evangelize’ by asking for such ‘acceptance of Christ as Savior,’ all we have done is guarantee that they will soon drift away and become harder to reach than ever.”

Schaeffer continues after a few more comments:

“Another way to fall into an ‘evangelical existentialism’ is to treat the first half of Genesis the way the existential theologian treats the rest of the Bible. The first half of Genesis is history, space-time history, the Fall is a space-time Fall, or we have no knowledge of what Jesus came to die for, and we have no way to understand that God is really a good God. Our whole answer to evil is the historic, space-time Fall....”

On Human relationships, Schaeffer wrote:

“Now, if we are called upon to love our neighbor as ourselves when he is not a Christian, how much more - ten thousand times ten thousand times more - should there be beauty in relationships between Bible-believing Christians, something so beautiful that the world would be brought up short. We must hold our distinctives. Some of us are Baptists, some of us hold to infant baptism, some of us are Lutheran, and so on. **But to true Bible believing Christians across all lines, in all camps, I emphasize: if we do not allow beauty in the way we treat each other, then in the eyes of the world in the eyes of our children, we are destroying the truth we**

**proclaim**” (bold added by this writer).

Note: Schaeffer used beauty here rather than love to emphasize the way the word love has been corrupted in the world of his day.