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JOHN
CHAPTER
ONE

BEGINNINGS OF THE GOSPEL

THE PROLOGUE, 1:1-18

The prologue of the fourth gospel presents a summary of the book. Here the essential facts concerning the life of Jesus the Messiah are declared: His deity, incarnation, and mission. John declares that the incarnate God has entered into human life to bring life and light to as many as believe in Him. The rest of the gospel unfolds, elaborates, and demonstrates this truth.

There are many divergencies among scholars over the analysis and interpretation of the prologue.¹ But there is a growing consensus that the repetition of key words (“Word,” “life,” “light”) within the prologue reflects the poetic character of Hebrew parallelism.² It has been further argued that the prologue is chiasmic in structure. Chiasm may be defined as a literary figure or structural principle that consists of “placing crosswise” words, ideas, sentences, or passages to provide symmetry and emphasis. Culpepper presents a convincing study on

1. J. S. King, “The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel: Some Unresolved Problems,” *Expository Times* 86 (1975): 372-75.
2. Eldon Jay Epp, “Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 129.

the conceptual parallels of the prologue and offers the following analysis:³

- A. Word with God, 1-2
 - B. What came to be through the Word: creation, 3
 - C. What we receive through the Word: life, 4-5
 - D. John sent to testify, 6-8
 - E. Incarnation; response of the world, 9-10
 - F. The Word and His own, 11
 - G. Those who accept the Word, 12*a*
 - H. Become children of God, 12*b*
 - G.' Those who believed in the Word, 12*c*
 - F.' The Word and His own, 13
 - E.' Incarnation; response of the community, 14
 - D.' John's testimony, 15
 - C.' What we have received from the Word: grace, 16
 - B.' What came to be through the Word: grace and truth, 17
 - A.' Word with God, 18

The chiasmic structure of the prologue focuses on v. 12*b* and reflects John's leading concern to bring the readers to a faith-relationship with God as His spiritual children (cf. John 20:31).

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE WORD, 1:1-5

John opens his gospel with several declarations concerning the "Word" (*Logos*). The *logos* was an established, first-century philosophical concept that John drew upon, added to, and enriched to communicate something about the Person of Christ (cf. 1:14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13).⁴

Scholars debate whether the concept of the *logos* has its roots in Jewish or Hellenistic thought. God creates by His word (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:9), and in the Hebrew Scriptures the *word* of God is often personi-

3. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (October 1980): 1-31.

4. For further study on the *logos*, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), pp. 321-29; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 115-26; G. A. Turner, "Logos," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 3:953-58.

fied as an instrument for the execution of His will (Pss. 33:6; 107:20; 119:89; 147:15, 18). This concept also appears in the Apocrypha (Ec'us. 1:1-20; 24:1-22; Wisdom 9:1) and Jewish Targums (paraphrastic translations of portions of the Old Testament into Aramaic), where the Aramaic term *memra* ("word") is substituted for the divine name of God. Thus, in Jewish thought, the *logos* concept is associated with the personification of God's revelation.

Philo (c. 20 B.C.-A.D. 54), an Alexandrian Jew, also made frequent use of the term *logos*. Philo accepted the philosophical ideas of the day and attempted to bring about a synthesis of Greek philosophy with Old Testament theology as he interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures. In his writings, Philo used the word *logos* to denote the intermediate agency by which God created material things and communicated with them. The *logos* was conceived of as a bridge between the transcendent (holy) God and the material (evil) universe. For Philo and those of Hellenistic (Greek) worldview, the *logos* constituted a mediating principle between God and matter.

In the past, many scholars were persuaded that John drew primarily upon Hellenistic thought in his use of the *logos* concept. More recently, scholars are giving greater credence to the possibility that John drew his *logos* concept from Jewish thought. Considering the data, it seems likely that John drew upon a concept familiar in both Greek and Jewish thought.

There are various shades of meaning of this term that would have theological and philosophical significance to both Jews and Greeks of John's day. John drew upon this familiar *logos* concept but gave it new and fuller meaning.

For John, the *logos* is no mere mediating principle; the Logos is a personal being. For John, the *logos* is no mere personification of God's revelation; the Logos is God's revelation in the flesh. In his use of *logos*, John amplifies and applies a familiar concept. He identifies the Logos as a divine Person who reveals God to man.

IN RELATION TO GOD, 1:1-2

1:1 The prologue is "bracketed at the beginning and end with assertions of the deity of the Logos."⁵ John begins by affirming the eternal existence (v. 1a), personal distinctiveness (v. 1b), and divine nature

5. Ed L. Miller, "The Logos Was God," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (April-June 1981), p. 68.

of the Logos (v. 1c). John first declares that the Logos antedates time and goes back to eternity past. He existed with God since the beginning of time.

John goes on to state that the Logos was “with” (*pros*), but distinct from, God (v. 1b). The Logos is seen to be a separate entity from God—not a mere attribute or extension of the Father. This distinctiveness is with regard to personality, not divine essence. The word *with* speaks of a “face to face” relationship. The Logos is in a close relationship (fellowship) with God, yet exists as a distinctive Person.

John concludes his trilogy on the Logos by revealing that the Logos is no mere personification or principle (v. 1c). The Logos, he declares, is truly a divine Person.

The *New World Translation* of the Bible, published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, translates this third affirmation “the Word was a god.” It is argued that the absence in the Greek text of the definite article (“the”) with *theos* (“God”) means that the Logos (Jesus) is merely “a god,” a “semi-deity.” The deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity are thus denied.

But the apostle John expressed the truth in the best way possible. Had he used the article with *theos* he would have expressed the error of the third-century heretic Sabellius, who held that the Father and the Son were one Person. This would have contradicted John’s previous statement, which distinguished God the Father and the Logos. Having just asserted that the Logos was “with” God, John could not now say that the Logos was identical with God.⁶ The Logos is not to be identified as God the Father but has the same divine essence or attributes. The absence of the article emphasizes the character and the divine quality of the Logos. As Kent notes, “By placing *theos* first in the clause, John gave it the emphatic position, and by employing it without the article, he stressed the qualitative sense of the noun.”⁷ For a similar construction without the article, see John 4:24.

1:2 In v. 2, John combines the first and second clauses of v. 1 (“in the beginning” and “with God”) to emphasize that the Logos did not come to have a relationship with God but was with God *from the beginning*.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

7. Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Light in the Darkness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), p. 7.

IN RELATION TO CREATION, 1:3

1:3 In relationship to creation, the Logos is revealed to be the active agent, the Creator of “all things.” Paul expresses the same thought in Col. 1:16-17 (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2). Every created thing came into being by the activity of the Logos.

IN RELATION TO MAN, 1:4

1:4 John introduces two themes that will be developed throughout the gospel—life and light. The Logos has life in Himself and is a source of both physical life (John 5:25; 11:25) and spiritual life (14:6) to others. The word *life* (*zōē*) occurs thirty-six times in John. Seventeen times it is used with the adjective *eternal* (*aiōnios*) with no apparent difference in meaning. John’s purpose in writing was to elicit belief that would issue in life (20:31), both in its quantitative (10:28) and qualitative aspects (10:10). Believers in Jesus Christ enjoy spiritual life in Him because of the new birth (quality of life) and eternal life after death because of the resurrection (quantity of life).

The Logos is “the light of men.” The term *light* is used metaphorically in John to refer to the illumination from God that penetrates spiritual darkness to bring spiritual light. Jesus is the light personified (John 8:12; 9:5) and is a source of spiritual light to mankind. Because Ps. 36:9 indicates that God is the ultimate source of light and life, v. 4 supports John’s affirmation that the Logos is divine (1:1).

IN RELATION TO EVIL, 1:5

1:5 Verse 5 introduces another major theme in John’s gospel—the opposition of light and darkness. *Darkness* is used by John to refer to the realm of spiritual evil—the satanic world system set in opposition to God and His people (John 12:35). Unbelievers love the darkness (3:19), but believers have no part in it (8:12). Jesus, the Logos, is the light of the world (8:12; 9:5), which penetrates the world’s darkness.

The last phrase, best translated “the darkness has not overcome (or overtaken) it,” indicates that in this spiritual conflict darkness is not able to extinguish the light. Light is preeminent over the darkness. Though opposed, Christ was victorious in His mission of bringing the spiritual illumination of His Person to the unbelieving world set against God.

The contemplation of God, His character, and His creative work in vv. 1-5 should not simply fill our minds with theological facts. When

God revealed Himself to Moses, he bowed low and worshiped (Ex. 34:6-8).

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE WORD, 1:6-13

The Logos has been identified and described. Now John recounts Jesus' presentation to the world and reports the two responses—rejection by His own and acceptance by others.

ANNOUNCED BY JOHN, 1:6-8

John the Baptist was sent from God to prepare the way for the coming of the Logos. The announcement of His coming and circumstances of His birth are recorded in Luke 1:5-25. The angel declared to Zacharias that John would minister in the "spirit and power of Elijah" to lead people to repentance and "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

1:6 Verse 6 marks a significant stage in redemptive history—the coming of John, the introducer of the Messiah (cf. John 1:19-34). The apostle tells of the origin of John's mission. Like other prophets (Ex. 3:10-15; Isa. 6:8), he did not come on his own but was commissioned and sent "from God" (cf. Mal. 3:1).

1:7 The purpose of John's ministry is to "testify concerning that light." The words "as a witness" focus on John's activity and introduce another major theme in the fourth gospel. The noun "witness" (*marturia*) occurs fourteen times in John, and the verb "to bear witness, testify" (*martureō*) occurs thirty-three times. The primary usage of this term is with reference to the character and significance of the Person of Christ. Charles notes that the apostle's task is to build his case for who Jesus is. He accomplishes this by using key witnesses, even up to the final courtroom appearance before Caiaphas and Pilate.⁸ John the Baptist is the first key witness (cf. John 1:29-34).

1:8 The ultimate purpose of John the Baptist's witness is to elicit belief in Jesus, the Light. The word *believe* (*pisteuō*) introduces the major theme of John's gospel, the gospel of belief. *Believe* occurs ninety-eight times in John and means essentially "trust." The biblical concept of belief moves beyond mere intellectual assent to reliance, commitment, and obedience to the Person of Christ (cf. John 3:36).

8. J. Daryl Charles, "Will the Court Please Call in the Promise Witness?: John 1:29-34 and the 'Witness'-Motif," *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 72.

The theme of belief and its antithesis (unbelief) can be traced throughout the gospel.

Lest any should mistake John the Baptist for the Messiah (cf. John 1:20), the apostle clarifies that he was only the witness, not “the Light” Himself.

1:9 The divine Logos is identified in v. 9 as the “true light” in contrast to false claimants. Belief itself does not save. The object of faith is essential. A faith that saves must be placed in truth. Truth is another of John’s favorite concepts.⁹ The adjective “true” (*alēthinos*) appears nine times and is used of that which is genuine, not counterfeit.

The words “that gives light to every man” should be understood to refer to general illumination (cf. Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20), not universal salvation (cf. John 5:29).

It is debatable whether the phrase “coming into the world” refers to “every man” or to “the true light.” Because it is used elsewhere with clear reference to Jesus (cf. John 3:19; 6:14; 12:26; 17:37), John probably intends it to refer to the incarnation, a subject he will introduce shortly (1:11).

Verse 9 contains the first appearance of a significant word in John’s writings—*kosmos* (“world”). This word is used by John in several different ways. It can refer to the entire created order (John 17:5) and the earth in particular as the dwelling place of mankind (11:9; 16:21). By extension (i.e., metonymy), *kosmos* can refer to the people who inhabit the world (3:16; 12:19). John also uses the word *kosmos* to refer to the fallen and alienated humanity at enmity with God (1:10; 7:7; 17:25). Although there is nothing intrinsically evil about the *kosmos*, it has turned away from its Creator and shown its hatred for Christ.

REJECTED BY HIS OWN, 1:10-11

1:10 John records that even though the incarnate Logos was the Creator of the world (John 1:3), mankind failed to recognize and acknowledge Him as such. Used with reference to persons, the Greek word *ginōskō* (“recognize”) means to realize and acknowledge what one is or claims to be. The unbelieving world did not recognize its own Creator.

1:11 Not only was He ignored by the world in general, He was rejected by His own Jewish people. “That which was his own” refers

9. See Morris’s helpful analysis of this concept (*The Gospel According to John*, pp. 293-96).

to all that He had a right to possess—a land, a people, a throne—all that was His by covenant promise (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16). Yet His own people did not “receive him.” The word “receive” (*paralambanō*) is used in Matthew 1:24 of Joseph taking Mary as his wife. A relationship of trust and commitment is implied. Such a relationship with Christ was what the Jewish people refused.

Many people experience rejection in life. Due to various circumstances, they face rejection by friends, co-workers, and family members. It is some consolation to know that Jesus has walked this path. He experienced rejection and knows how to comfort His own.

RECEIVED BY INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS, 1:12-13

1:12 Verse 12 describes the blessing that comes to those who “receive” Christ. Such persons are privileged to enter into God’s own family. The words “received him” are further defined by the phrase “to those who believed in his name.” John uses a distinctive faith-formula, “believe into” (*pisteuein eis*), meaning to “believe into Jesus.” Used with *pisteuō*, the conjunction *eis* (“into”) implies personal surrender and commitment. Although John does not even mention the words *repent* or *repentance*, belief “into” suggests the same turning from the sin of unbelief that repentance involves.¹⁰

John speaks of believing “in His name.” In ancient times, one’s name was more than just a personal designation. It was a reflection of one’s character and attributes. People were often named or renamed for some noticeable character trait (cf. Num. 13:16; Matt. 16:18; Luke 1:31). The name of Jesus speaks of His person, His attributes, all that He stands for in relationship to His deity and messiahship. To believe in the name of Jesus is to trust in His person as God-man and Redeemer. This involves personal relationship, not merely intellectual assent.

Those who take this personal step of faith have the rightful authority to become “children of God” (*tekna theou*), sharers in the spiritual life of the Father. The importance of this truth is highlighted by its prominence as the center of the prologue (see p. 36). Two important phrases are used in the New Testament to describe the believer’s relationship with God: “children of God” and “sons of God.” The latter emphasizes the believer’s heritage and position. The former emphasizes the believer’s nature and character. As a child shares certain

10. George Allen Turner, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John,” *JETS* 19 (Fall 1976): 273.

characteristics or features with his natural father, so believers by new birth “participate in the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). This is not to suggest that they become “gods.” Rather, they partake in the moral and spiritual nature of God. True children of God will reflect in their own lives some of the characteristics of their Father (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).

1:13 John explains in v. 13 how one becomes a member of God’s family. The three expressions “natural descent,” “human decision,” and “husband’s will” are all ways of referring to conception and physical birth. The Jews placed a lot of stock in their physical heritage. They believed that God would favor them merely because of their Abrahamic ancestry. John repudiates such a view. It is not through physical descent but through spiritual birth that one enters God’s family. The word *born* (cf. John 3:1-8) is a strong metaphor for a completely new beginning.

The theological point here is that becoming “children of God” takes place as a result of God’s work, not ours. New life is of God’s initiation and power.

THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD, 1:14-18

John proceeds to demonstrate how the coming of the Logos fits into God’s plan to reveal Himself to man.

THE INCARNATE WORD, 1:14

1:14 The most astounding fact of history is that the divine Logos took on humanity while giving up nothing of His deity (cf. Phil. 2:6-8). The term “flesh” (*sarx*) refers here to physical, human life. Jesus, the God-man, partakes of the fullness of deity and the fullness of humanity. The words “and made his dwelling among us” (a powerful metaphor for God’s presence) can be traced back to Noah’s prayer that God would “dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:27). Indeed, God dwelt among the descendents of Shem when He manifested His presence in the Tabernacle during the wilderness wanderings (Ex. 40:34-38). As the Shekinah had dwelt among the Israelites, so the Logos dwelt among humanity (“us”).

John testifies that he personally saw the glory of the Logos. The word “glory” (*doxa*) can refer literally to brightness or splendor or metaphorically to fame and renown. John witnessed both. He was with Jesus at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8) and saw His reputation magnified by His miracles and teaching (John 2:11).

The expression “the One and Only” (NIV) or “only begotten” (NASB) is a translation of the Greek word *monogenēs*. There is some debate as to whether *genēs* is derived from *gennaō* (“beget”) or *genos* (“kind”). Jesus is either the “one-begotten” or the “one-kind” divine Logos. Because the same term is used of Isaac (Heb. 11:17), who was not Abraham’s only son (cf. Gen. 16:15-16), it is most likely that it refers to a “unique” or “one-of-a-kind” Logos. The weight of the linguistic evidence supports this conclusion.¹¹ The expression emphasizes the deity of the Logos and His unique relationship with the Father (cf. John 1:18; 3:16, 18).

The incarnate Logos is described as “full of grace and truth.” Although “grace” (*charis*) occurs only three times in John (1:14, 16, 17), it is one of the great themes of the Bible. The word speaks of favor, help, or goodwill that one grants to another. “Truth” (*alētheia*) is one of the major themes of the fourth gospel. The word occurs twenty-five times and may refer to reality as opposed to mere appearance, or describe fidelity of character.

The words “grace and truth” are reminiscent of the frequently occurring word group in the Hebrew Scriptures “love and faithfulness” (*hesed we’emeth*; cf., Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15). Taken together, these words emphasize the attributes of kindness and fidelity reflected in the character of God. These attributes have the fullest and most exquisite display in Jesus. He incarnates God’s favor and communicates God’s truth. As Messiah and Savior, Jesus is the totally dependable reality.

THE WITNESS OF JOHN, 1:15

1:15 The apostle has described the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:6-8), and now he records his testimony. To understand the inherent riddle in John’s testimony one must realize that in antiquity most people believed chronological priority meant superiority. The older were honored and revered because of their age. This principle seems not to apply in the case of John and Jesus. John was older than Jesus by six months (cf. Luke 1:26, 36). Yet the divine Logos is the superior of the two because He existed before John the Baptist’s incarnation. John testifies to the preeminent and preexistent Logos.

11. For further study, see Colin Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:75-76; J. V. Dahms, “The Johannine Use of Monogenes Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 29 (April 1983): 222-32.

As the introducer of Jesus, John the Baptist was a man of great privilege. But with privilege John shows great humility. God can trust humble people with privileged ministry because He is assured of receiving glory.

THE REVELATORY WORD, 1:16-18

1:16 It is not at all clear whether v. 16 continues the testimony of John the Baptist (cf. v. 15) or contains the reflections of the apostle. Comparing vv. 15-16 with vv. 30-31 would suggest that the apostle interrupts John the Baptist's words in v. 16 with his own concluding reflections (vv. 16-18).

John declares that the fullness of grace found in the divine Logos has provided an abundance of blessing for believers. Christ is the source of the believers' blessings. The word *fullness* suggests the abundance of His resource. The expression "one blessing after another" translates the words "grace in place of grace." The idea is that of an unending supply of divine grace. As one gracious blessing is appropriated, another is made available in its place.

It has been suggested that Exodus 33:13 (NASB) provides the background for the expression "Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor [grace] in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee, so that I may find favor [grace] in Thy sight." The implication is that favor is given to one who has already received favor.¹² In his careful study of this phrase, Hodges favors this approach and suggests that Israel's national history could truly be summed up as the story of "grace after grace."¹³

1:17 The "grace and truth" that is said to characterize the Logos (see comments on v. 14) is given further emphasis in v. 17. John compares the Mosaic revelation ("the law") with that which God reveals in Christ. John is making more of a comparison than a contrast. There was, of course, grace (Gen. 6:8; Ex. 33:17) and truth (Ex. 34:6) in the old, or Mosaic, economy. But this revelation was of a "preliminary character."¹⁴ Now through God's revelation in Jesus Christ, grace and

12. Morna D. Hooker, "The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret," *New Testament Studies* 21 (October 1974): 53.

13. Zane C. Hodges, "Grace After Grace—John 1:16," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (January-March 1978): 44.

14. W. J. Dumbrell, "Law and Grace: The Nature of the Contrast in John 1:17," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (January 1986): 34.

truth have come to their greatest realization. Jesus incarnates the fullest measure of divine grace and truth.

Verse 17 contains John's first use of the designation "Jesus Christ." Jesus is the name Gabriel instructed Mary to name her son (Luke 1:31). It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* and means "salvation of Yahweh." The term *Christ* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Messiah*, meaning "anointed one." This word is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to anointed priests and kings. The anointing of a public leader was a religious act that gave recognition to the spiritual dimension of the office. The anointed official served to represent God in the outworking of His theocratic purposes. The term is used in Psalm 2:2 and Daniel 9:25-26 of the promised descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), destined to rule the nation of Israel. The double title is used only twice in John (1:17; 17:3), but it is used frequently in Acts and the epistles. John uses it here in a solemn and climactic way to emphasize that Jesus is the promised one who comes as God's official representative and ruler.

1:18 John concludes the prologue by revealing the purpose of the incarnation—to give those in darkness a revelation of the truth of God. Because God is spirit (John 4:24), His essential being cannot be seen. He has manifested Himself by glorious appearances in times past (cf. Ex. 33:18–34:8; Isa. 6:1-5), but never was He fully revealed. Yet the incarnation has provided a means for God to be fully revealed and known.

There is a significant textual issue here in verse 18. Some manuscripts read *monogenēs huios* ("one-of-a-kind Son"), and others read *monogenēs theos* ("one-of-a-kind God"). With the acquisition of the Bodmer Papyri, particularly P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵, both of which read *monogenēs theos*, the external support for this reading has been notably strengthened. The text strongly supports a Johannine affirmation of Christ's deity. Jesus *is* God.

As the Logos shares deepest intimacy with God, He is thus in a position to reveal deep truths about the Father. The words "at the Father's side" may be literally rendered "in the bosom of the Father." This divine Logos has fully explained and revealed the Father. Jesus literally "leads the way to" and "declares" (*exēgeomai*, from which *exegete* is derived) the character of God.

In the prologue John has summarized the advent of the Messiah in words that would communicate to both Jew and Gentile of the first century. John introduces the major themes of his gospel and shows

how Christ came to deliver man from spiritual darkness and reveal the fulness of God's grace.

THE BEGINNINGS OF BELIEF, 1:19–4:54

The first chapters of John's gospel focus on the beginnings of belief. Here the first disciples are introduced and the first miracles are recounted. The response to Christ's Person is initially quite positive. Two of John the Baptist's disciples follow Him. Nathanael acknowledges Jesus as the "Son of God," the "King of Israel." In these chapters John records the positive response to Jesus by Jews, Samaritans, and by a Gentile nobleman.

THE WITNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, 1:19-34

John the Baptist functioned as Jesus' introducer. It was his job to prepare a believing remnant of Jews to welcome the Messiah when He should appear on the scene (cf. Matt. 3:1-6 and Isa. 40:3; Luke 1:13-17 and Mal. 4:5).

THE IDENTIFICATION OF JOHN, 1:19-29

1:19 While John was ministering (cf. John 1:7-8, 15), representatives of the religious establishment approached him to investigate his activities and claims. They regarded it as their responsibility as religious leaders to examine prophets to see if they were of God (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22). The priests were descendants of Aaron who had authority to minister at the altar in the Temple (Ex. 28:1). The Levites were descendants of Levi who had been appointed by God to assist the priests (Num. 8:19, 26). They came with the simple question, "Who are you?" (NASB). The officials in Jerusalem wanted to know more about him.

1:20 Although nothing had been said about John's being the Messiah, the first-century Roman rule of Palestine lent itself to considerable messianic expectancy. John wanted it to be emphatically clear that he laid no claim to the office of Messiah. John used the emphatic pronoun to strengthen his statement "I am not the Christ!"

1:21 The priests and Levites inquired further, "Are you Elijah?" Their question was based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:5, which predicted the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord. It was commonly believed among Jews of the first century that Elijah the Tishbite

would return in the flesh to restore Jewish families to purity in anticipation of Messiah's coming. The Septuagint's translation of Malachi 4:5 reads "Elijah the Tishbite," not simply Elijah, which would have encouraged this idea. John made it clear that he was definitely not Elijah the Tishbite.

John's response has raised questions about his fulfilling Malachi's predictions (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6). On the basis of John 1:21, some hold that Elijah must personally come again to fulfill these prophecies. Those who hold this viewpoint often identify one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-6 as Elijah. Others are more impressed by the rather clear indications in the synoptic gospels that John the Baptist fulfilled Malachi's prophecies (cf. Matt. 11:10-14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17, 76).

It seems that John denied being Elijah the Tishbite whom the Jews anticipated. But he fulfilled Malachi's prophecies—in an unexpected way. He came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). Malachi uses the name Elijah (Mal. 4:5) to refer to the prophetic office of Elijah. As restorer of God's people, John fulfilled this office and ministry (Matt. 3:4-6).

Still perplexed, the priests and Levites asked, "Are you the Prophet?" This question is based on God's promise in Deuteronomy 18:15, 17 to raise up for Israel a prophet like Moses. The Jews of the first century were expecting a great meditorial person in the tradition of Moses to appear on the scene before the coming of Messiah. John assured them that he was not this expected prophet.

1:22 Having exhausted their own list of possibilities and in need of an answer to give the religious authorities, John's interrogators asked him to explain himself. "What are you saying about yourself?"

1:23 John answered by quoting Isa. 40:3, which both identifies him and tells of his mission. John was the "voice" spoken of by Isaiah. Strangely, Isaiah predicted that the voice would be "calling in the desert." This is the first indication that things were not quite right in Jerusalem. The religious establishment of first-century Judaism was corrupt. The voice had abandoned Jerusalem and was calling out in the desert.

The message, "Make straight the way for the Lord," recalls the preparation made by subjects for a king's passage through their land. A few days before his travel, they would sweep the road, clear away debris, and fill the potholes in preparation for the king's use. In a similar way, John was preparing the nation for the coming of Messiah.

1:24 Whereas the priests and Levites led in the first phase of John's interrogation, the delegation of Pharisees took over in v. 24. The Pharisees were a leading sect within first-century Judaism. They are described by Josephus as having the reputation of "excelling the rest of their nation in the observances of religion, and as exact exponents of the laws" (*Jewish Wars* 1.110). The Pharisees had broken ranks with the Hasmoneans (descendants of the Maccabees) over their abandoning certain traditions and over the legitimacy of the Hasmonean priesthood. The Pharisees held that rabbinic tradition was as valid as the written law of Moses. They were generally middle class Jews who were quite rigorous in the exercise of their religion. The doctrines of the Pharisees were orthodox, although they were condemned by Jesus for not practicing what they preached (Matt. 23:3).

1:25 Matthew reports that John was baptizing in the Jordan River as people "confessed their sins" (Matt. 3:6). John's baptism was an immersion (from *baptizō*, "to dip, immerse, sink") that expressed the repentance of the one submitting to the ritual and his anticipation of forgiveness, which the coming Messiah would grant (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).

The Pharisees wanted John to explain his baptism. They were not unfamiliar with ritual immersion. Self-baptism was a common cleansing ritual among the Jews and was required of converts to Judaism. But the Pharisees wondered why John was baptizing, inasmuch as he made no claim to be the Messiah, or Elijah, or the expected Prophet.

1:26 John explained that his baptizing was preparatory for the Messiah's work. It gave people an opportunity to express their desire for cleansing and identify themselves with John, who would introduce Messiah to Israel. The words "among you stands one you do not know" indicate that the Messiah was present on the scene but had not yet been identified. His introduction to Israel was imminent.

1:27 Verse 27 reflects John's view of himself as a subordinate in relationship to the Messiah (cf. 1:15). The removal of a master's sandals was regarded as the duty of a slave. According to an early rabbinic saying, not even a disciple was permitted to perform this task. "Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal thong."¹⁵ John, a man of genuine humility (cf. John 3:27-30), saw himself as below the status of a slave—not even worthy to unlatch the Messiah's sandal.

15. Cited by Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 141.

1:28 The apostle reports that John's interaction with the religious leaders regarding his identity took place at "Bethany on the other side of the Jordan," where John was baptizing. The location of Bethany (cf. John 10:40-41) has been the subject of much debate. By the third century A.D. there was confusion regarding the identification of the site. On the basis of his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, Origen suggested that the proper reading was Bethabara ("house of preparation") and that the site was located west of the Jordan. But the reading "Bethany" is attested by overwhelming documentary evidence. And the phrase "beyond the Jordan" clearly distinguishes it from the Bethany near Jerusalem (Matt. 21:17; Mark 11:1), placing the site east, not west, of the Jordan.

The name Bethany is probably derived from *bet aniyyah*, meaning "house of the boat/ship." This would be an appropriate name for a ford community on the Jordan. Two such fords are represented on the Madaba mosaic map (c. A.D. 560). Although the remains of such ford communities would have long since washed away, there is a strong tradition from the earliest times that links Jesus' ministry with the Hajlah ford in the vicinity of the Wadi el-Kharrar, about seven miles southeast of Jericho.¹⁶ Bethany was a little village situated on the Jordan noted primarily as a ford and a place of refreshment for weary travelers.

THE LAMB OF GOD, 1:29-34

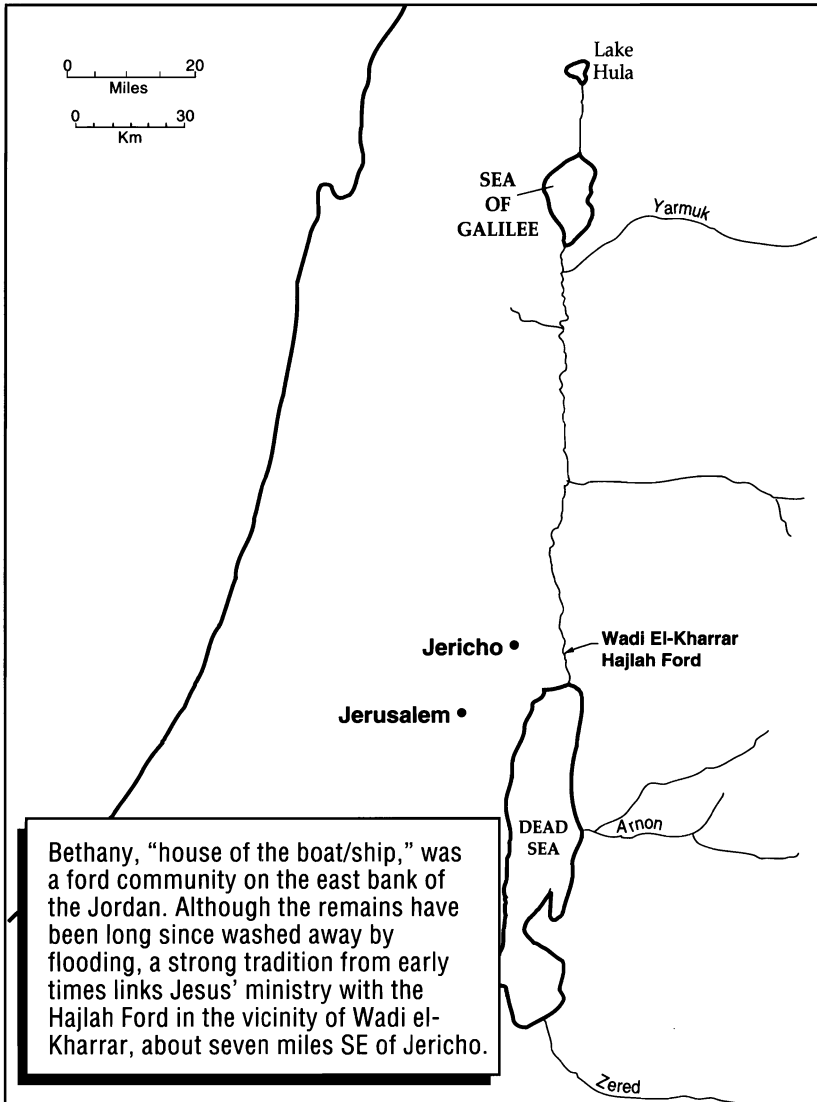
1:29 On the day following the investigation by the religious delegation, John identified Jesus as the Lamb of God. This testimony occurred after Jesus' baptism and temptation and should not be confused with it. (The baptism took place earlier, probably in the summer or autumn of A.D. 29.¹⁷) What John records here is the first public declaration by John the Baptist that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God.

There are two basic dimensions of Christ's messianic mission—redemptive and kingdom. He came to redeem and to reign. Here the emphasis is on the Messiah's work of redemption. By referring to Jesus as the "Lamb of God," John is drawing deeply upon the Old Covenant theology of sacrifice. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a lamb is

16. Clemens Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels*, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 113-29.

17. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 29-44.

THE LOCATION OF BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN
John 1:28



associated with many sacrificial offerings: Passover (Ex. 12:3-14), the daily Temple sacrifice (Ex. 29:38-41), the burnt offering (Lev. 1:10), the peace offering (Lev. 3:7), sin offering (Lev. 4:32), the purification of a leper (Lev. 14:13), the lamb sacrifices for the Feast of Trumpets, Tabernacles, and Day of Atonement (Num. 29:1-40). It is probable that the Lamb of God designation focuses not on one particular Old Testament metaphor but on God's sacrificial provision in a collective sense.¹⁸ Yet it is not without purpose that John develops much of his material around the Passover Feast.

The Passover taught that deliverance was effected through the shedding of blood—the death of the innocent in behalf of the guilty (Ex. 12:1-14). Jews hearing John speak would likely link his remark to the Passover lamb. John was saying, “Jesus is God’s sacrificial lamb.” He was the Lamb Abraham had said God would provide (Gen. 22:7-8). Paul would later write, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

The words “who takes away the sin of the world” are laden with theological significance. The verb “takes away” (*airō*) means “to lift up,” “to carry away,” “to remove.” As the scapegoat identified with sin and carried it with him from the camp of Israel, so Jesus was “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21) and carried it to the cross. The penalty He bore was sufficient to provide redemption for “the world”—lost humanity.

1:30 John clarifies in verse 30 that the “Lamb of God” was none other than the superior and pre-existent Messiah about whom he had testified (John 1:15).

1:31 The key to vv. 31-34 is the twice repeated phrase “I myself did not know him” (1:31, 33). Although the NIV varies the translation, the phrases are identical in the Greek. The words “I myself did not know him” should not be taken to imply that John the Baptist did not know Jesus at all. The infancy narrative in Luke 1:36-45 indicates that John and Jesus were related. What John was saying was that he did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah until He was divinely revealed. It was in connection with John’s ministry of baptizing that this took place. In fact, John’s ministry of baptism was inaugurated for the specific purpose (*bina*, “that,” “in order that”) of revealing the Messiah to Israel.

1:32 The apostle records the Baptist’s testimony, “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” This oc-

18. Charles, “John 1:19-34 and the ‘Witness’-Motif,” p. 78.

curred when Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. The apostle testifies to this event, as do the synoptics (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). Luke also referred to this when he wrote of how “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38).

The phrase “as a dove” describes the descent of the Spirit (literally, “coming down as a dove from heaven”). There is some debate as to whether the Spirit actually took the form of a dove in His manifestation. Luke’s use of the word “bodily” (Luke 3:22) provides rather convincing evidence that the Spirit took the visible, physical form of a dove. As to the symbolic significance of the dove, several Jewish writings use the dove as an image of the Spirit of God (Talmud *Hagigah* 15a, Targum to Canticles 2:12).

1:33 God had revealed to John the Baptist that the Messiah would be identified by a manifestation of the Spirit’s descending and remaining upon Jesus. The Lord also revealed to John that the Spirit-anointed Messiah would “baptize” others “with the Holy Spirit.” Jesus spoke of this ministry with His disciples just before His ascension: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5; cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33). John had identified people with his messianic movement through water baptism. Jesus would identify believers with Himself through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 14; 1 Cor. 12:13). Jesus’ possession of the Spirit (1:32) and baptizing of others with the Spirit signals the imminent commencement of the long-awaited messianic age (cf. Isa. 11:1-2; 42:1; 61:1-2; Ezek. 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32).¹⁹

1:34 Verse 34 brings the reader to the climax of John’s testimony. The gospel of John was written to bring people to the recognition that Jesus is the divine Messiah (John 20:31). John the Baptist concluded his initial public testimony concerning Jesus by aligning himself with that purpose. What John had seen and heard at the baptism of Jesus, including God’s announcement from heaven (cf. Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), serves as convincing evidence that Jesus was God’s divine Son (“the Son of God”). Several manuscripts read instead “the chosen one of God,” but the age and diversity of witnesses support the reading “Son of God,” a phrase more in harmony with the theological terminology of the gospel.²⁰

19. Walt Russell, “The Holy Spirit’s Ministry in the Fourth Gospel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (Fall 1987): 230.

20. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 200.

The phrase “son of God” (*huios theou*) appears eleven times in the gospel of John. The purpose statement (20:31) indicates the gospel was written that people might believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Believers may become “sons of God” (1:12; 11:52), but Jesus’ sonship stands apart from all others. As “son,” Jesus has a special relationship (5:20; 6:47) with the Father and a unique knowledge of the Father (10:15). The words of Jesus in 8:58; 10:30; and 14:6 indicate that the term “son of God” affirms His deity (cf. 5:18).

THE FIRST DISCIPLES OF JESUS, 1:35-51

It was at Bethany beyond the Jordan that Jesus made His first disciples. This took place as an outgrowth of John’s declaration that Jesus was the “Lamb of God” and “Son of God.” As a result of John’s testimony, some of his followers left him and began to follow Jesus.

ANDREW, JOHN, AND PETER, 1:35-42

It was John’s mission to point men to the Messiah (John 1:7). On the day following his identification of the “Lamb of God” (John 1:19), he had the opportunity to direct two of his disciples to Jesus.

1:35 The two disciples with John were Andrew (1:40) and probably the apostle John. John’s pattern in the fourth gospel is to refer to himself only indirectly (cf. 13:23). These two men had traveled from Galilee to the wilderness of Judea in response to John the Baptist’s ministry (cf. Matt. 3:5-6). They had listened to his preaching of repentance and had responded to his message.

1:36 John is seen here to be carrying out his work of witness (cf. 1:7). When he saw Jesus passing by, he once again declared, “Look, the Lamb of God.”

1:37 Two of John’s disciples who heard this witness were prepared to respond. Andrew and John acted on the Baptist’s testimony and “followed Jesus.” The aorist of *akoluthēō* is ingressive, focusing on the commencement of their action. The term is used elsewhere of committed discipleship (cf. Matt. 8:22; Luke 9:61). Yet it can also be used of those whose interest and commitment is only temporary. Many of Jesus’ followers withdrew upon hearing His difficult teachings (cf. 6:2, 66). It is uncertain as to the measure of commitment being manifested by Andrew and John at this time. The call to become fishers of men occurred later (cf. Matt. 4:18-22).

1:38 Realizing that He was being followed, Jesus turned and spoke to the two, “What do you want?” (literally, “What are you seeking?”). The two disciples of John responded to Jesus’ question with a question of their own, “Where are you staying?” The question implied that they wanted to go with Him and sit under His teaching. They were interested in becoming associated with Him in a teacher-disciple relationship. The term *rabbi* is a transliteration from the Hebrew term meaning “my master.” It was used by the Jews as a respectful designation for their religious teachers.

1:39 Jesus responded positively to their query inviting them to “come and see.” They followed Jesus to the place where He was staying and spent the rest of what must have been a very memorable day with Him.

John provides the reader with the first of several time notices in the gospel (John 4:6, 52; 19:14). It was the “tenth hour of the day” when Andrew and John joined Jesus. The Jews of the first century reckoned the days from sunset to sunset. From the Babylonians they learned to divide the daylight period into twelve hours beginning at 6:00 A.M. According to this system of reckoning, the “tenth hour” would be 4:00 P.M. For legal and contractual purposes, the Romans reckoned their days from midnight to midnight. Accordingly, the tenth hour would be 10:00 A.M. Yet Roman sundials, in popular use by the common people, designated noon as the sixth hour of the day.

By either Jewish reckoning or Roman sundials, the tenth hour would be 4:00 P.M. Yet John says that the disciples “spent that day with him.” How could this be true if there were only two hours left in the day? It was commonly understood in Jewish society that any part of the day would be regarded as the whole for purposes of reckoning time (Jerusalem Talmud, *Shabbath* 9.3). John is telling the reader that the disciples spent the rest of the day with Jesus and that the time spent was significant.

1:40 Although John does not mention himself, he identifies Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, as one of the two disciples who had followed Jesus. Andrew and Peter, natives of Galilee, were from the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44) but made their home in Capernaum (Mark 1:21). They were fishermen by trade and were in partnership in a fishing enterprise on the Sea of Galilee with James and John, sons of Zebedee (Matt. 4:18; Luke 5:10).

1:41 The afternoon interview with Jesus must have provided Andrew with sufficient evidence of His messianic Person because he im-

mediately sought out his brother, Peter, and reported, “We have found the Messiah.” He used the Jewish term for God’s anointed one. John the apostle translates the term into Greek (*Christos*, or “Christ”) for the benefit of non-Jewish readers.

1:42 Andrew is remembered because he was one of the first to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and because he had the heart of an evangelist. He did not just report his findings; he brought Peter to Jesus. Andrew wanted his brother to know the Lord. The greatest gift anyone can receive is the good news of the gospel. The greatest gift anyone can give is the same precious truth.

When Andrew’s brother came to Jesus he was given a new name. People were often named or renamed in the biblical period to acknowledge a character trait or significant event (cf. Num. 13:16). Peter’s Jewish name was Simon ben John (“Simon son of John”). But Jesus gave him the name “Cephas,” which in the Aramaic language means “stone.” Peter (*Petros*) is the Greek translation of the Aramaic name. The renaming of Simon foreshadowed the character and significance of his person as a disciple of Jesus (cf. Matt. 16:16-19)—he was to become Peter, “the rock,” steadfast and firm in faith.

PHILIP AND NATHANAEL, 1:43-51

1:43 On the day following his renaming of Peter, Jesus resolved to leave for Galilee. It was not yet time for his ministry to commence in Jerusalem. Galilee is the name applied to the northern district of Israel that was surrounded on three sides by foreign nations. The term literally means “circle” or “district,” the fuller expression of which is “district of the Gentiles” (Isa. 9:1). According to Josephus, Galilee was divided into upper and lower regions (*Jewish Wars* 3.35-40). Upper, or northern, Galilee does not enter much into biblical history. Lower Galilee served as the location for most of Christ’s ministry as recorded in the synoptic gospels. Galilee’s fertility was highly praised by Josephus, who states that no part of the land was left uncultivated.

Before departing for Galilee, Jesus found Philip and said, “Follow me.” The imperative is best translated “Keep on following me.” Jesus intended for Philip to become a disciple.

1:44 Like Andrew and Peter, Philip was from the Galilean town of Bethsaida. Many Bible atlases and maps have indicated that there were two Bethsaidas, one in Galilee and the other east of the Jordan in Gaulanitis. Josephus tells how Philip the Tetrarch advanced the village of Bethsaida, near the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee, to the

status of a “city” (*polis*) by strengthening its fortifications, increasing its population, and naming it Julias (after the emperor’s daughter). This site has been identified as et-Tell, situated about a mile and a half north of where the Jordan River empties into the Sea of Galilee. Early pilgrim tradition knows of only one Bethsaida-Julias, and no evidence for a western Bethsaida appears until the time of the Crusades, when sites were moved in wholesale fashion to suit the convenience of pilgrims.

Bethsaida-Julias was a double site with a fishing village suburb on the Galilean lakeshore (el-’Araj) within reasonable proximity of the fortified city of et-Tell. A Roman road and an aquaduct join the two sites.²¹

1:45 Verse 45 reflects the evangelistic principle of multiplication. As Andrew brought Peter, so Philip led Nathanael to the Messiah. He reported to Nathanael that he had found the prophesied Messiah, the one written of by Moses (cf. Gen. 3:15; 22:8; 28:12; 49:10; Num. 21:9; 24:17) and the prophets (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 52:13–53:12; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 9:9). Philip identified the Messiah in terms of His earthly relationships—Jesus, from the city of Nazareth and the adopted son of Joseph (cf. Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:34).

Nathanael seemed shocked at the mention of Nazareth. Nazareth was so insignificant and relatively unknown that it was not even mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. But Nathanael’s question, “Can any good come from there?” suggests that insignificance was not the only problem. There was something unclean about the place. This was due to its geographical proximity to Sepphoris, the Roman capital of Galilee. Sepphoris was located just four miles north of Nazareth. When the Roman rulers of this region needed workmen, they drew from the laborers of Nazareth. Some of the citizens of Nazareth exploited this opportunity for personal gain. And so the people of Nazareth were disdained by many Jews. It was an insignificant place with a questionable reputation.

There is a time to debate issues, and there is a time to let the issues speak for themselves. Philip recognized that it was a time for the latter. He simply responded, “Come and see.”

1:47 Seeing Nathanael approaching, Jesus made a statement that reflects supernatural insight into the character of the man. He de-

21. J. Carl Laney, “Geographical Aspects of the Gospel,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), pp. 81–82.

clared, "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." Nathanael was a man of integrity. The word "false" appears in extrabiblical text to refer to "bait" or a "snare." There was not a hidden hook or trap in Nathanael's character.

1:48 Surprised to hear these words spoken by a stranger, Nathanael inquired, "How do you know me?" He wondered, perhaps, if they had met before. Had their paths crossed at a festival or village market? Jesus demonstrates in His response that His knowledge of Nathanael's character was of supernatural origin. He had seen Nathanael while he was still sitting under the fig tree, before he had been called by Philip.

1:49 Nathanael was a man who did not need a lot of convincing. According to Trudinger, knowing the thoughts of men was one of the expected accomplishments of the ideal King (as in Wisdom 7:20).²² Faced with the Person and knowledge of Jesus he exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Nathanael was recognizing Jesus as the divine Messiah who had a right to the royal throne of David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16). The prophets had anticipated the coming of this messianic king and the establishment of His kingdom. Jacob announced that He would come through Judah (Gen. 49:10). Micah had predicted His birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah prophesied His virgin birth (Isa. 7:14) and His ministry in Galilee (Isa. 9:1-2). Nathanael realized that the promised ruler had come. He could be expected to assume His rightful, royal office.

1:50 Nathanael had taken the first step of faith. This was a faith that would be encouraged, undergirded, and enlarged through the three and one-half years of his association with Jesus. Knowing what was ahead, Jesus responded, "You will see greater things than that." Nathanael had not seen anything. The best was yet to come.

1:51 Jesus then made an exciting promise to Nathanael and the others. The word translated "you" (*humin*) is the plural form. The promise is set off by the words "I tell you the truth," literally, "Amen, amen" ("truly, truly," NASB). This phrase is used twenty-five times in John and appears nowhere else in the New Testament. It is used by the author to introduce a truth of special solemnity and importance.

What is the meaning of Jesus' promise that Nathanael and the others would see heaven open and "the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"? Jesus is undoubtedly drawing imagery

22. L. Paul Trudinger, "An Israelite in Whom There Is No Guile: An Interpretative Note on John 1:45-51," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (April-June 1982): 119.

from the vision Jacob had at Bethel (Gen. 28:12). As he slept, Jacob dreamed of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder that reached from earth to heaven. Jesus is saying that Jacob's dream has become a reality through His incarnation. The divine Messiah is the ladder, the bridge, the mediator between heaven and earth (1 Tim. 2:5). He is the one through whom man can have access to and fellowship with God.

The expression "Son of Man," appearing twelve times in John, is the favorite self-designation of Jesus. There is considerable debate among scholars as to whether Jesus drew upon Ezekiel's use of this term (Ezek. 2:1-3) to emphasize His humanity or upon Daniel's use of the term (Dan. 7:13) to emphasize His messiahship.

It seems that the issue of Jesus' humanity was never debated by those He ministered among in the first century. The crucial and debated issue was His messiahship. Yet the term *messiah* had such political connotations in the first century that it was difficult to use without arousing rebellion against Roman rule. The Jews were looking for a political messiah—one who would overthrow Rome and establish an independent Jewish state.

Most likely Jesus appropriated the term *Son of Man* from the glorious vision of Daniel 7:13. Those with genuine interest and biblical awareness would not be likely to miss the allusion to Jesus' messiahship. Yet those who were rejecting Him could have taken the term simply as a reference to His own humanity. Like the parables, the term *Son of Man* could be understood on a surface and superficial level as well as a deep and theological level.

HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS

The prologue of the gospel (1:1-18) provides an excellent opportunity for expounding the deity of Christ. He is the divine Logos who came to reveal God to mankind. The verses that follow present the messianic forerunner, John the Baptist (1:19-28), and then focus once again on Jesus.

John's great purpose in this first section of the gospel is to introduce the reader to the Person and manifold dimensions of the Messiah. There are eight different terms used for Christ in vv. 29-51. He is designated the "Lamb of God," "Son of God," "Rabbi," "Messiah," "Jesus of Nazareth," "son of Joseph," "King of Israel," and "Son of Man." These eight terms could be expounded in a single message or in a sermon series.