

JOHN 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

UBS ⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Word Became Flesh	The Eternal Word	The Prologue	The Word of Life	Prologue
1:1-5	1:1-5	1:1-5	1:1-5	1:1-18
	John's Witness: the True Light			
1:6-13	1:6-13	1:6-9 1:10-13	1:6-9 1:10-13	
	The Word Became Flesh			
1:14-18	1:14-18	1:14-18	1:14 1:15 1:16-18	
The Testimony of John the Baptist	A Voice in the Wilderness	The Testimony of John	John the Baptist's Message	The Witness of John
1:19-28	1:19-28	1:19-23 1:24-28	1:19 1:20 1:21a 1:21b 1:21c 1:21d 1:22 1:23 1:24-25 1:26-27 1:28	1:19-28
The Lamb of God	The Lamb of God		The Lamb of God	
1:29-34	1:29-34	1:29-34	1:29-31 1:32-34	1:29-34
The First disciples	The First Disciples	The Testimony of Jesus' First Disciples	The First Disciples of Jesus	The First Disciples
1:35-42	1:35-42	1:35-42	1:35-36 1:37-38a 1:38b 1:39 1:40-42a 1:42b	1:35-39 1:40-42

The Calling of Phillip Nathanael	Phillip and Nathanael		Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael	
1:43-51	1:43-51	1:43-51	1:43-45	1:43-51
			1:46a	
			1:46b	
			1:47	
			1:48a	
			1:48b	
			1:49	
			1:50-51	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL INSIGHTS TO VERSES 1-18

- A. Theological outline of the poem/hymn/creed
 1. eternal, divine, creator, redeemer Christ, vv. 1-5 (Jesus as Word)
 2. prophetic witness to Christ, vv. 6-9, 15 (Jesus as Light)
 3. incarnate Christ reveals God, vv. 10-18 (Jesus as Son)
- B. Theological structure of vv. 1-18 and recurrent themes
 1. Jesus was pre-existent with God the Father (1a)
 2. Jesus was in intimate fellowship with God the Father (1b, 2, 18c)
 3. Jesus shares God the Father's very essence (1c, 18b)

* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions?

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two and Three.

4. God the Father's means of redemption and adoption (12-13)
 5. incarnation, deity becomes a man (9, 14)
 6. revelation, deity fully revealed and understood (18d)
- C. Hebrew and Greek background of *logos*
1. Hebrew background
 - a. the power of the spoken word (Isa. 55:11; Ps. 33:6; 107:20; 145:15), as in Creation (Gen. 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24, 26,29) and the Patriarchal blessing (Gen. 27:1ff; 49:1)
 - b. Proverbs 8:12-23 personifies "Wisdom" as God's first creation and agent of all creation (cf. Ps. 33:6 and the non-canonical *Wisdom of Solomon*, 9:9)
 - c. the Targums (Aramaic translations and commentaries) substitute the phrase "Word of God" for *logos* because of their discomfort with anthropomorphic terms
 2. Greek background
 - a. Heraclitus - the world was in flux; the impersonal divine and unchanging *logos* held it together and guided the changing process
 - b. Plato - the impersonal and unchanging *logos* kept the planets on course and determined the seasons
 - c. Stoics - the *logos* was the "world reason" or manager, but was semi-personal
 - d. Philo - he personified the concept of *logos* as "High Priest that set the soul of man before God," or "the bridge between man and God," or "the tiller by which the Pilot of the universe steers all things" (*kosmocrater*)
- D. Elements of the developed gnostic theological/philosophical systems of the second century A.D.
1. An ontological (eternal) antagonistic dualism between Spirit and matter
 2. Matter is evil and obstinate; Spirit is good
 3. The gnostic system posits a series of angelic levels (*aeons*) between a high, good god and a lesser god who was able to form matter. Some even asserted that this lesser god was YHWH of the OT (like Marcion)
 4. Salvation came by
 - a. secret knowledge or passwords which allowed a person to pass through these angelic levels on their way to union with God
 - b. a divine spark in all humans, which they are not aware of until they receive secret knowledge
 - c. a special personal agent of revelation that gives this secret knowledge to mankind (the Spirit of Christ)
 5. This system of thought asserted Jesus' deity, but denied His real and permanent incarnation and central redemptive place!
- E. The historical setting
1. Verses 1-18 are an attempt to relate to both Hebrew and Greek minds by use of the term *logos*.
 2. The heresy of gnosticism is the philosophical background to this highly structured introduction to the Gospel of John. I John may have been the cover letter to the Gospel. The theological system of thought called "gnosticism" is unknown in writing until the second century, but incipient gnostic themes are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Philo.
 3. The Synoptic Gospels (especially Mark) veil Jesus' deity (the Messianic secret) until after Calvary, but John, writing much later, develops the crucial themes of Jesus as fully God and fully man (Son of Man, cf. Ezek. 2:1 and Dan. 7:13) in chapter one.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-5

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

1:1 "In the beginning" This reflects Genesis 1:1 and I John 1:1. It is possible that I John was a cover letter to the Gospel. Verses 1-5 are an affirmation of Jesus Christ's divine pre-existence before creation (cf. 1:15; 8:56-59; 16:28; 17:5; II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-7; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; 10:5-8).

▣ **"was"** (thrice) This is an IMPERFECT TENSE (cf. 1,2,4,10) which focuses on continual existence in past time. This tense is used to show the Logos' pre-existence. It is contrasted with the AORIST TENSES of vv. 3, 6, and 14.

▣ **“the Word”** The Greek term *logos* referred to a message, not just a single word. In this context it is a title which the Greeks used to describe “world reason” and the Hebrews as analogous with “Wisdom.” John chose this term to assert that God’s Word is both a person and a message.

▣ **“with God”** This could be paraphrased “face to face.” It depicts intimate fellowship. It also points toward the concept of one divine essence and three personal eternal manifestations. The NT asserts the paradox that Jesus is separate from the Father, but also that He is one with the Father.

▣ **“the Word was God”** This verb is IMPERFECT TENSE as in v. 1a. There is no ARTICLE with *Theos*, but *Theos* is placed first in the Greek phrase for emphasis. This verse and v. 18 are strong statements of the full deity of the pre-existent Logos (cf. 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8; II Pet. 1:1). Jesus is fully divine as well as fully human. He is not the same as God the Father, but He is the very same divine essence as the Father.

The NT asserts that the full deity of Jesus of Nazareth, but protects the distinct personhood of the Father. The one divine essence is emphasized in Jn. 1:1; 5:18; 10:30,34-38; 14:9-10; and 20:28, while their distinctives are emphasized in Jn. 1:2,14,18; 5:19-23; 8:28; 10:25,29; 14:11,12,13,16.

1:2 This is parallel to v. 1 and emphasizes again the shocking truth in light of monotheism that Jesus, who was born around 6-5 B.C., has always been with the Father and, therefore, is deity.

1:3 “All things came into being through Him” The Logos was the Father’s agent of creation of both the visible and the invisible (cf. v. 10; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). This is similar to the role wisdom plays in Ps. 33:6 and Prov. 8:12-23 (which is FEMININE because wisdom is a FEMININE gender noun).

▣ **“apart from Him nothing came into being”** This is a refutation of the gnostic false teaching of angelic aeons between the high, good god and a lesser spiritual being that formed matter.

1:4 “in Him was life” This phrase is emphasizing that “life” itself comes from the Son, the Word. John uses the term, *zōē*, to refer to resurrection life, eternal life, God’s life (cf. 1:4; 3:15,36; 4:14,36; 5:24,26,29,39,40; 6:22,33,35,40,47,48,51,53,54,63,65, etc.). The other Greek term for “life,” *bios*, was used for earthly, biological life (cf. I Jn. 2:16).

▣ **“the life was the Light of men”** Light is a common metaphor John uses for the truth and knowledge of God (cf. Jn. 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Notice the life was for all humans! Light and darkness were also common themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls. John often expresses himself in dualistic (contrasting) terms and categories.

1:5 “the Light shines” This is PRESENT TENSE, which means continuous action. Jesus has always existed, but now He is clearly manifested to the world. In the OT the physical or human manifestation of God was often identified with the angel of the Lord (cf. Gen. 16:7-13; 22:11-15; 31:11,13; 48:15-16; Ex. 3:2,4; 13:21; 14:19; Judg. 2:1; 6:22-23; 13:3-22; Zech. 3:1-2). Some assert that this was the pre-incarnate Logos.

▣

NASB, NKJV	“the darkness did not comprehend it”
NRSV	“the darkness did not overcome it”
TEV	“the darkness has never put it out”
NJB	“and darkness could not overpower it”

The root meaning of this term is “to grasp.” Therefore, it can mean either (1) to grasp so as to overpower (cf. Matt. 16:18) or (2) to grasp so as to comprehend or understand. John may have used this ambiguity to suggest both. John’s Gospel is characterized by double entendres (ex. “born again or from above,” 3:3 and “wind-spirit,” 3:8).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:6-8

⁶There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light.

1:6-7 “There came a man, sent from God...He came as a witness,...to testify about the light...” John the Baptist was the last OT prophet (in the sense of his message and perspective). He was the forerunner predicted in Mal. 3:1 and 4:5 (cf. Jn. 1:20-25). John the Apostle may have inserted verses 6-8 because of the early misunderstandings which developed around John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 3:15; Acts 18:25; 19:3). John, writing later than the other Gospel writers, saw the development of this problem.

It is interesting to note that Christ is described in IMPERFECT TENSE (pre-existence) verbs, while John is described in AORIST (manifested in time) and PERFECT TENSE (a historical event with lasting results) verbs (cf. v. 6). Jesus has always existed.

1:6-8 These verses and v. 15 (a parenthetical flash back) record the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus. He was the last OT prophet. It is difficult to put these verses in poetic form. There is much debate among scholars as to whether the prologue is poetry or prose.

1:7 “that all might believe through Him” This is a purpose clause. John’s Gospel, like all the Gospels (a uniquely Christian genre), is an evangelistic tract. This is the wonderful offer of salvation to all who exercise faith in Christ, who is the light of the world (cf. v. 12; Jn. 20:31; I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9).

1:7,12 “believe” This verb is used 78 times in the Gospel of John, 24 times in John’s letters. It is interesting that John’s Gospel never uses the noun form, only the verb. Belief is not primarily an intellectual or emotional response, but basically a volitional response. This Greek term is translated by three English terms: believe, trust, and faith. It is parallel to “welcome Him” (cf. vs. 11), and “accept Him” (cf. v. 12). Salvation is free in the grace of God and the finished work of Christ, but it must be received. Salvation is a covenant relationship with privileges and responsibilities.

1:8 It is possible that John the Apostle, writing much later than the other Gospel writers, recognized the problem which developed among John the Baptist’s followers who had not heard or accepted Jesus (cf. Acts 18:25-19:7).

SPECIAL TOPIC: WITNESSES TO JESUS

The noun (*marturia*) and its verb (*martureō*) “witness” is a key term in John. There are many witnesses to Jesus:

1. John the Baptist (cf. Jn.1:7,8,15; 3:26,28; 5:33)
2. Jesus Himself (cf. Jn. 3:11; 5:31; 8:13-14)
3. the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn. 4:39)
4. God the Father (cf. Jn. 5:32,34,37; 8:18; I Jn. 5:9)
5. Scripture (cf. Jn. 5:39)
6. the crowd at Lazarus’ raising (cf. Jn. 12:17)
7. the Spirit (cf. Jn. 15:26-27; I Jn. 5:10,11)
8. the disciples (cf. Jn. 15:27; 19:35; I Jn. 1:2; 4:14)
9. the author himself (cf. Jn. 21:24)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:9-13

⁹There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

1:9 “the true light” This is “true” in the sense of genuine or real, not just the opposite of falsehood. This may relate to all the theological diversities of the first century. This is a common adjective in John’s writings (cf. 3:35; 4:23,37; 6:32; 7:28; 15:1; 17:3; 19:35 and I Jn. 2:8; 5:20 and ten times in the Revelation). See special topic at 6:55.

▣ **“coming into the world”** John often uses this phrase to refer to Jesus leaving heaven, the spiritual realm, and entering the physical realm of time and space (cf. 6:14; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28). In this verse it seems to refer to Jesus’ incarnation.



NASB	“enlightens every man”
NKJV	“gives light to every man”
NRSV	“enlightens everyone”
TEV	“shines on all people”
NJB	“that gives light to everyone”

This phrase can be understood in two ways. First, by supposing a Greek cultural setting, it refers to an inner light of revelation in every man, the divine spark. This is the way the Quakers interpret this verse. However, such a concept never appears in John. For John, “light” reveals mankind’s evil (cf. 3:19-21).

Second, it can refer not to natural revelation, [that is God known through nature (cf. Ps. 19:1-5; Rom. 1:19-20) or an inner moral sense (cf. Rom. 2:14-15)], but rather to God's offer of enlightenment and salvation through Jesus, the only true light.

1:10 “the world” John uses the term *kosmos* in three distinct ways: (1) the physical universe (1:10,11; 11:9; 16:21; 17:5,24; 21:25); (2) all mankind (1:10,29; 3:16,17; 4:42; 6:33; 12:19,42; 18:29); and (3) fallen human society organized and functioning apart from God (7:7; 15:18-19; I Jn. 2:15; 3:1,13). In this context #2 is applicable.

▣ **“the world did not know Him”** Neither the fallen Gentile nations nor the elect Jewish nation recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah. The term “know” reflects a Hebrew idiom of intimate relationship more than intellectual assent to facts (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5).

1:11 “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” “His own” is used twice in v. 11. The first grammatical form is NEUTER PLURAL and refers to (1) all creation or (2) geographically to Judea or Jerusalem. The second is MASCULINE PLURAL and refers to the Jewish people.

1:12 “but as many as received Him” This shows humanity's part in salvation (cf. v. 16). Humans must respond to God's offer of grace in Christ (cf. 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13; Eph. 2:8-9). God is certainly sovereign, yet in His sovereignty He has initiated a conditional covenant relationship with fallen humanity. Fallen mankind must repent, believe, obey, and persevere in faith.

▣ **“He gave the right”** This Greek term can mean (1) legal authority or (2) right or privilege (cf. 5:27; 17:2; 19:10,11). Through Jesus fallen mankind can now know God and acknowledge Him as God and Father.

▣ **“to become the children of God”** The NT writers constantly use familial metaphors to describe Christianity: (1) Father; (2) Son; (3) children; (4) born again; and (5) adoption. Christianity is analogous to a family, not a product (ticket to heaven, fire insurance policy).

It is also interesting that of the two Greek terms for children, one is always used of Jesus (*huios*) while the other (*teknon*, *tekna*) is used for believers. Christians are children of God, but they are not in the same category as the Son of God, Jesus. His relationship is unique, but analogous.

▣ **“those who believe”** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE meaning “those who continue to believe.” The etymological background of this term helps establish the contemporary meaning. In Hebrew it originally referred to a person in a stable stance. It came to be used metaphorically for someone who was dependable, loyal or trustworthy. The Greek equivalent is translated into English by the terms (faith), “believe,” and “trust.” Biblical faith or trust is not primarily something we do, but someone in whom we put our trust. It is God's trustworthiness, not ours, which is the focus. Fallen mankind trusts God's trustworthiness, faiths His faithfulness, believes in His Beloved. The focus is not on the abundance or intensity of human faith, but the object of that faith.

▣ **“in His name”** In the OT the name of a person was very important. It was a hopeful/potential prophecy about their character or a description of their character. To believe in the name is to believe and receive the person.

1:13

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV

“who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man”

TEV

“they did not become God's children by native means, that is, by being born and the children of a human father”

NJB

“who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man”

The term “blood” is PLURAL. This refers not to racial privilege nor to human sexual descent, but to God's electing and drawing of those who trust in His Son (cf. 6:44,65). Verses 12 and 13 exhibit the covenantal balance between God's sovereignty and the need for human response.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:14-18

¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” ¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

1:14 “the Word became flesh” John is attacking the false doctrine of the gnostics, who were attempting to merge Christianity with Greek pagan thought. Jesus was truly man and truly God (cf. I Jn. 4:1-3) in fulfillment of the promise of Immanuel (cf. Isa. 7:14). God took up residence as a man among fallen mankind (literally, “pitched His tent”). The term “flesh” in John never refers to the sin nature as in Paul’s writings.

▣ **“dwelt among us”** Literally, this is “took up residence.” It had a Jewish background from the wilderness wandering period and the Tabernacle (cf. Rev. 7:15; 21:3). The Jews later called this wilderness experience the “honeymoon period” between YHWH and Israel. God was never closer to Israel than during this period. The Jewish term for the special divine cloud that guided Israel during this period was “the *Shekinah*,” the Hebrew term “to dwell with.”

▣ **“we saw His glory”** This refers to (1) something in Jesus’ life such as the transfiguration or the ascension is or (2) the concept that the invisible YHWH is now visible and fully known. This is the same emphasis as I Jn. 1:1-4, which is also an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus in opposition to the false gnostic emphasis on the antagonistic relationship between spirit and matter.



NASB, NKJV	“glory as of the only begotten from the Father”
NRSV	“the glory as of a father’s only son”
TEV	“The glory which he received as the Father’s only Son”
JB	“the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father”

This term “only” (*monogenēs*) means “unique, one of a kind” (cf. 3:16). The Vulgate translated it “only begotten” and, unfortunately, the older English translations followed this (cf. Lk. 7:12; 8:42; 9:38; Heb. 11:17). The focus is on singularity and uniqueness, not sexuality.

▣ **“Father”** The OT introduces the intimate familial metaphor of God as Father: (1) the nation of Israel is often described as YHWH’s “son” (cf. Hos. 11:1; Mal. 3:17); (2) even earlier in Deuteronomy the analogy of God as father is used (1:31); (3) in Deut. 32 Israel is called “his children” and God called “your Father”; (4) this analogy is stated in Ps. 103:13 and developed in Ps. 68:5 (the father of orphans); and (5) it was common in the prophets (cf. Isa. 1:2; 63:8; Israel as son, God as Father, 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4,19; 31:9).

Jesus takes this analogy and deepens it into full family fellowship, especially in Jn. 1:14,18; 2:16; 3:35; 4:21,23; 5:17,18,19,20,21,22,23,26,36,37,43,45; 6:27,32,37,44,45,46,57; 8:16,19,27,28,38,42,49,54; 10:15,17,18,25,29,30,32,36,37,38; 11:41; 12:26,27,28,49,50; 13:1; 14:2,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,16,20,21,23,24,26,28,31; 15:1,8,9,10,15,16,23,24,26; 16:3,10,15,17,23,25,26,27,28,32; 17:1,5,11,21,24,25; 18:11; 20:17,21!

▣ **“full of grace and truth”** This coupling follows the OT terms *hesed* (covenant love and loyalty) and *emeth* (trustworthiness) which are used together in Prov. 16:6. This describes Jesus’ character (cf. v. 17) in OT covenantal terms. See Special Topic on Truth at 6:55 and 17:3.

1:15 “for He existed before me” This is John the Baptist’s strong affirmation of Jesus’ pre-existence (cf. 1:1; 8:56-59; 16:28; 17:5; I Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-7; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3-10:5-8). Pre-existence and predictive prophecy affirm that there is a God above and beyond history, yet who works within history. It is an integral part of a biblical world view.

1:16-18 One of the characteristics of John’s Gospel is how the author breaks into the historical event, dialogue, or teaching session with his own comments. Often it is impossible to differentiate between Jesus’, other persons’, and John’s words. Most scholars assert that vv. 16-19 are John the author’s comments (cf. 3:14-21).

1:16 “fullness” This is the Greek term *pleroma*. The gnostic false teachers used it to describe the angelic aeons between the high god and lesser spiritual beings. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9; Eph. 1:23; 4:13) and the angelic levels. Here again it seems John the Apostle is attacking an early gnostic view of reality.



NASB, NRSV	“and grace upon grace”
NKJV	“and grace for grace”
TEV	“giving us one blessing after another”
NJB	“one gift replacing another”

The interpretive question is how to understand “grace.” Is it (1) God’s mercy in Christ unto salvation; (2) God’s mercy for the Christian life; or (3) God’s mercy in the new covenant through Christ? The key thought is “grace”; God’s grace has been wondrously given in the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus is God’s “yes” to fallen mankind (cf. II Cor. 1:20).

1:17 “the Law” The Mosaic Law was not bad, but was preparatory and incomplete as far as providing a complete salvation (cf. Gal. 3:23-29; Rom. 4).

▣ **“grace”** This refers to God’s undeserved, unmerited love for fallen mankind (cf. Eph. 2:8) This term grace (*charis*) , so important in Paul’s writings, is only used in this paragraph in John’s Gospel (cf. 1:14,16,17). New Testament writers, under inspiration, were free to use their own vocabularies, analogies, and metaphors.

▣ **“truth”** This is used in the sense of (1) faithfulness or (2) truth vs. falsehood (cf. 1:14; 8:32; 14:6). Notice both grace and truth came through Jesus (cf. v. 14).

▣ **“Jesus”** This is the first use of the human name of Mary’s son in the Prologue.

1:18 “No one has seen God at any time” Some say that this contradicts Ex. 33:20-23. However, the Hebrew term in the Exodus passage refers to “afterglow,” not physical sight of God Himself. The thrust of this passage is that only Jesus fully reveals God (cf. 14:8ff).

This verse emphasizes the unique revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. He is the full and only divine self-disclosure. To know Jesus is to know God. Jesus is the Father’s ultimate revelation of Himself. There is no clear understanding of deity apart from Him (cf. Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:2-3).



NASB	“the only begotten God”
NKJV	“the only begotten Son”
NRSV	“It is God’s only Son”
TEV	“The only Son”
NJB	“It is the only Son”

There is a Greek manuscript variation here. *Theos*/God is in the early Greek manuscripts P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, B, and C while “Son” is substituted for “God” only in MSS A and C³. The term “Son” possibly comes from scribes remembering “only begotten Son” in Jn. 3:16,18 and in I Jn. 4:9 (cf. Bruce M. Metzger’s *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* p. 198). This is a strong affirmation of the full and complete deity of Jesus! It is possible that this verse has three titles for Jesus: (1) only begotten, (2) God, and (3) who is in the bosom of the Father.

▣ **“who is in the bosom of the Father”** This is very similar in meaning to the phrase “with God” in vv. 1 and 2. It speaks of intimate fellowship.



NASB	“He has explained <i>Him</i> ”
NKJV	“He has declared <i>Him</i> ”
NRSV, NJB	“who has made him known”
TEV	“he has made him known”

We get the English term “exegesis” from this Greek word used in 1:18, which implies a full and complete revelation. One of Jesus’ main tasks was to reveal the Father (cf. Jn. 14:7-10; Heb. 1:2-3). To see and know Jesus is to see and know the Father (loving sinners, helping the weak, accepting the outcast, receiving children and women)!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Define *logos* and its ancient religious, secular, and biblical usages.
2. Why is the doctrine of the pre-existence of Jesus so important?
3. What is mankind’s part in salvation? How does one receive Jesus?
4. Why was it necessary for the Word to become flesh?

5. Why is it so difficult to outline this passage?
6. List the different theological truths used to describe Jesus (at least 8).
7. Why is verse 18 such an important verse?

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO VERSES 19-51

- A. This passage concerning John the Baptist deals with two early church misunderstandings:
 1. that which developed around the person of John the Baptist and is disputed in vv. 6-9, 20,21,25; and 3:22-36;
 2. that which involved the person of Christ and is dealt with in vv. 32-34. This same heresy of gnosticism is similarly attacked in I Jn. 1. I John may have been the cover letter to the Gospel of John.
- B. The Gospel of John is silent about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. The ordinances of the church, baptism and the Eucharist, are noticeably absent in John's account of the life Christ. There are at least two possible reasons for this omission:
 1. the rise of sacramentalism in the early church caused John to de-emphasize this aspect of Christianity. His Gospel focuses on relationship, not ritual. He does not discuss or record the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper at all. The absence of something so expected would draw attention to it.
 2. John, writing later than the other Gospel writers, used his account of the life of Christ to supplement the others. Since all of the Synoptics cover these ordinances, John only supplied additional information about the surrounding events. An example would be the dialog and events which occurred in the upper room (chapters 13-17) but not the actual supper itself.
- C. The emphasis of this account is on John the Baptist's testimony concerning the person of Jesus. John makes the following Christological statement:
 1. Jesus is the Lamb of God, (v. 29) a title for Jesus used only here and in Revelation
 2. Jesus is pre-existent (v. 30)
 3. Jesus is the Son of God (v. 34)
 4. Jesus is the receiver and giver of the Holy Spirit.
- D. The truths about the person and work of Jesus are developed by the personal testimony of
 1. John the Baptist
 2. Andrew and Simon
 3. Philip and Nathanael

This becomes a common literary technique throughout the Gospel. It contains twenty-seven of these dialogues or testimonies about Jesus or with Jesus.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:19-23

¹⁹This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'Make STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

1:19 "the Jews" In John this refers to (1) the people of Judea who were hostile to Jesus or (2) the religious leaders only. Some scholars have asserted that a Jew would not refer to other Jews in this way. However, Jewish opposition to Christianity intensified after the Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90.

▣ **"priests and Levites"** Apparently John the Baptist was also of priestly descent (cf. Lk. 1:5ff). This is the only occurrence of the term "Levites" in the Gospel of John. They possibly were the Temple police. This was an official group of "fact finders" sent from the religious authorities in Jerusalem (cf. v. 24). The priests and Levites were usually Sadducees while the scribes were Pharisees (cf. v. 24). Both of these groups were involved in questioning John the Baptist. The political and religious antagonists joined forces to oppose Jesus and His followers.

▣ **“Who are you?”** This same question is asked of Jesus in 8:25. John and Jesus taught and acted in ways which made the official leaders uncomfortable, because they recognized in both men certain OT eschatological themes and terms. This question, then, relates to the Jewish expectation of end-time, New Age personages.

1:20 “And he confessed, and did not deny, but confessed” This statement is a strong, threefold denial that he was the expected, promised Messiah (Christ).

▣ **“the Christ”** “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *“māšīah,”* which meant “an anointed one.” In the OT the concept of anointing was a way of emphasizing God’s special calling and equipping for a specific task. Kings, priests, and prophets were anointed. It came to be identified with that special One who was to implement the new age of righteousness. Many thought John the Baptist was this promised Messiah (cf. Lk. 3:15) because he was the first inspired spokesman for YHWH since the OT writers some four hundred years earlier.

1:21 “What then? Are you Elijah?” Because Elijah did not die but rather was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven (cf. II Kgs. 2:1), he was expected to come before the Messiah (cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5). John the Baptist looked and acted much like Elijah (cf. Zech. 13:4).

▣ **“I am not”** John the Baptist did not see himself in the eschatological role of Elijah, but Jesus did see him functioning as a fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:12).

▣ **“Are you the Prophet?”** Moses predicted that one like himself (whom he called “The Prophet”) would come after him (cf. Deut. 18:15, 18; Acts 3:22). There are two distinct ways this term was used in the NT: (1) as an eschatological figure distinct from the Messiah (cf. 7:40-41) or (2) as a figure identified with the Messiah (cf. Acts 3:22).

1:23 “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness” This is a quote from the Septuagint translation of Isa. 40:3 with an allusion to the parallel in Mal. 3:1.

▣ **“MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD”** This is a quote from (Isa. 40:3) the literary unit of Isaiah (chapters 40-54) in which the Servant Songs occur (cf. 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). They initially referred to Israel, but in 52:13-53:12, the phrase has been individualized. The concept of straightening the road was used for preparation of a royal visit.

This whole paragraph may have served John the Apostle’s theological purpose of depreciating John the Baptist because of the development of several heretical groups in the first century that took John the Baptist as their spiritual leader.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:24-28

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but among you stands One whom you do not know.* ²⁷*It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.*" ²⁸These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

1:24 “they had been sent from the Pharisees” This text is ambiguous. It can mean (1) the Pharisees sent John’s questioners (cf. v. 19); or (2) the questioners were Pharisees, which is unusual in light of the fact that most priests were Sadducees (cf. v. 9).

SPECIAL TOPIC: PHARISEES

- I. The term had one of the following possible origins
 - A. “To be separate.” This group developed during the Maccabean struggle with the Selucids (one of Alexander the Great’s generals whose family ruled Syria, Babylon, and Palestine) over the Hellenization of Palestine. This is the most widely accepted view.
 - B. “To divide.” This is another meaning of the same Hebrew root. Some say it meant an interpreter.
 - C. “Persian.” This seems to have been taken from an Aramaic root. Some of the doctrines of the Pharisees have much in common with Persian Zoroastrian religion.
- II. They developed during the Maccabean Period from the “Hasidim” (pious men). Several different groups like the Essenes came out of the anti-Hellenistic reaction to the Selucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). The Pharisees are first mentioned in Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* 8:5:1-3. Their major doctrines:
 - A. Belief in a coming Messiah, which was influenced by intertestamental apocalyptic literature like I Enoch.

- B. God's activity in daily life. This was directly opposite from the Sadducees (a priestly aristocracy). Much of Pharisaic doctrine is a theological counterpoint to the Sadducees' doctrines.
 - C. An after-life similar to earthly life which involved rewards and punishments. This may have come from Dan. 12:2.
 - D. Authority of the OT and the Oral Traditions (Talmud). They were conscious of being obedient to the OT commands of God as they were interpreted and applied by rabbinical scholars. The rabbinical interpretation was based on a dialogue between rabbis of two differing philosophies, one conservative (Shammai) and one liberal (Hillel). These oral discussions over the meaning of Scripture were finally written down in two forms: the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud. They believed that Moses had received oral instructions on Mt. Sinai, which explains the written OT. The historical beginning of these discussions being written down was Ezra and the men of the "Great Synagogue."
 - E. Highly developed Angelology. This follows the intertestamental literature and Zoroastrianism.
- III. Pharisees were a very sincere and dedicated sect of first century Judaism. Most of the scribes were Pharisees. Paul (Saul) was a member of this group as was Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Their desire to serve God through obedience to the Mosaic laws caused them to become (1) judgmental, (2) exclusivistic, (3) self-righteous, and (4) trusting in human performance for right standing before God. Jesus' harshest words were directed to these pious, self-righteous religionists.

1:25 "Why then are you baptizing?" Proselyte baptism was normative in ancient Judaism for those Gentiles wishing to become converts, but it was highly unusual for Jews themselves to be baptized (the sectarian Jews of Qumran practiced self-baptisms). This text may involve Messianic implications from Isa. 52:15; Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1.

▣ **"if"** This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes.

▣ **"not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"** It is interesting in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls that these three personages represented the Essene view that there would be three different Messianic figures. It is also interesting that some early church leaders believed that Elijah would come physically before the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Chrysostom, Jerome, Gregory, and Augustine).

1:26 "I baptize in water" The preposition "in" can also mean "with." Whichever option is chosen must match the parallel of v. 33 concerning "the Spirit."

1:27 "the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie" This refers to the slave's task of undoing his master's sandals as he entered his home (considered the lowliest, most menial task a slave could perform). Rabbinical Judaism asserted that the rabbi's disciple should be willing to do everything that a slave was willing to do except untie his rabbi's shoes. There is also the unstated implication of removing the shoes and taking them to a designated place of storage. This was a metaphor of extreme humility.

1:28 "Bethany" The King James Version has the name "Bethabara." This was due to the KJV's translators' reliance on Origen's misunderstanding (and allegorization of the place name) of the location of the city. The correct reading is Bethany (Bodmen Papyrus)—not the one southeast of Jerusalem, but the town across from Jericho, across the Jordan River (eastern side).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:29-34

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
³⁰"This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'
³¹"I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." ³²John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³"I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴"I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

1:29 "Behold, the Lamb of God" The feast of Passover was not far away (cf. 2:13). Therefore, this probably refers to the Passover lamb symbolizing deliverance (i.e. salvation) from Egypt (cf. Ex. 12). However, there have been other interpretations: (1) it may refer to the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53:7; (2) it may refer to the animal which was caught in the thicket in Gen. 22:8; or (3) it may refer to the daily offering in the Temple called "the continual" (cf. Ex. 29:38-46). Whatever the exact association, it was for a sacrificial purpose that the lamb was sent.

This powerful metaphor for Jesus' sacrificial death is never used by Paul and only rarely by John (cf. 1:29,36). The Greek term for a "small lamb" is used by John in 21:15 and twenty eight times in Revelation.

There is one further possibility for John the Baptist's imagery: intertestamental apocalyptic literature where the "lamb" is a victorious warrior. The sacrificial aspect is still present, but the lamb as judge is pre-eminent (cf. Rev. 5:5-6,12-13).

▣ **"who takes away the sin of the world!"** The phrase "takes away" meant to "take up and bear away." This is very similar to the concept of "the scapegoat" in Lev. 16. The very fact that the world's sin is mentioned alludes to the universal nature of the lamb's task. Notice that sin is SINGULAR, not PLURAL. Jesus has dealt with the world's "sin" problem.

1:30 "for He existed before me" This is a repeat of v. 15 for emphasis. This is another emphasis on the pre-existence and deity of the Messiah (cf. Jn. 1:1, 15; 8:58; 16:28; 17:5,24; II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-7; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).

1:31 "so that He might be manifested to Israel" This is a common Johannine phrase (cf. 2:11;3:21; 7:4;9:3; 17:6; 21:14), but it is rare in the Synoptic Gospels, only appearing in Mk. 4:22. It is a play on the Hebraic term "to know," which speaks of personal fellowship with someone more than facts about someone. The purpose of John's baptism was twofold: (1) to prepare the people; and (2) to reveal the Messiah.

1:32-33 This is a three fold emphasis of the fact that John saw the Spirit coming and remaining on Jesus.

1:32 "the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven" This was Isaiah's (chapters 40-66) way to recognize the Messiah (cf. Isa. 42:1; 59:21; 61:1). This does not mean to imply that Jesus did not have the Spirit before this time. It was a symbol of God's special choice and equipping. It was not primarily for Jesus, but for John the Baptist!

The Jews had a world-view of two ages, the current evil age and an age of righteousness to come. The new age was called the age of the Spirit. This vision would have said to John the Baptist (1) this one is the Messiah and (2) the new age has dawned.

▣ **"dove"** This was used (1) as a rabbinical symbol for Israel; (2) as an allusion to the Spirit as a female bird "brooding" in Gen. 1:2; or (3) as a metaphor of the manner in which the Spirit descended (the Spirit is not a bird).

1:33 "I did not recognize Him" This implies that John the Baptist did not know Jesus as the Messiah, not that he did not know Him at all. As relatives, surely they had met at family or religious gatherings over the years.

▣ **"He who sent me to baptize in water said to me"** God spoke to John as He did to other OT prophets. John was to recognize the Messiah by these specific acts which would occur at His baptism.

John's baptism suggested a religious authority. The official delegation from Jerusalem (cf. vv. 19-28) wanted to know the source of this authority. John the Baptist attributes that authority to Jesus. Jesus' Spirit baptism is superior to John's water baptism. Jesus' own baptism in water will become a sign of the baptism of the Spirit, the incorporation into the new age!

▣ **"this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit"** From I Cor. 12:13 it seems that this concept relates to the initial inclusion of a person into the family of God. The Spirit convicts of sin, woos to Christ, baptizes into Christ and forms Christ in the new believer (cf. Jn. 16:8-13).

1:34 "I myself have seen, and have testified" These are both PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE which implies past action brought to completion and then continuing. This is very similar to I Jn. 1:14.

▣ **"that this is the Son of God"** This same title is used by Nathanael in Jn. 1:49. It is also used by Satan in Matt. 4:3. There is an interesting Greek manuscript variant found in MSS P⁵ and N^{*} which has "the Chosen One of God" instead of "the Son of God." The phrase "Son of God" is common in John. But, if one follows the rational tenets of textual criticism, then the most awkward and unusual wording is probably original then there is at least a possibility of the alternate translation even though the manuscript witness is limited. Gordon Fee discusses this textual variant in his article "The Textual Criticism of the New Testament" pp. 419-433 in the introductory volume to *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

"In John 1:34, did John the Baptist say, 'This is the Son of God' (KJV, RSV) or 'This is God's Chosen One' (NEB, JB)? The MS evidence is divided, even among the early text-types. 'Son' is found in the key Alexandrian witnesses (P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, B, C, L cop^{bo}) as well as in several OL (aur, c, flg) and the later Syriac witnesses, while 'chosen One' is supported by the Alexandrian P⁵, N, cop^{sa} as well as the OL MSS a,b,e,ff², and the Old Syriac.

"The question must finally be decided on internal grounds. As to transcriptional probability, one thing is clear: the variant is intentional, not accidental (cf. Bart D. Ehrman's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 69-70). But did a second century scribe alter the text to support a kind of adoptionist Christology, or did an orthodox scribe sense the possibility that the designation 'Chosen One' might be used to support adoptionism, and so alter it for orthodox reasons?

In terms of probabilities, the latter seems far more likely, especially since ‘the Son’ is not changed elsewhere in the Gospel to fit adoptionist views.

“But the final decision must involve exegesis. Since what John the Baptist said was almost certainly intended to be messianic and not a statement of Christian theology, the question is whether it reflects the messianism of such a passage as Psalm 2:7 or that of Isaiah 42:1. In light of the suffering, or paschal, lamb motif of John 1:29, it is surely arguable that ‘Chosen One’ fits the context of the Gospel” (pp. 431-432).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:35-42

³⁵Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

1:35 “two of his disciples” Mark 1:16-20 seems to be a different account of the calling of these two disciples. It is uncertain how much previous contact occurred between Jesus and His Galilean disciples. There were specific stages of discipline involved in the process of becoming a full-time follower of a rabbi in Jesus’ day. These procedures are spelled out in the rabbinical sources but are not exactly followed in the Gospel accounts. The two disciples mentioned are Andrew (cf. v. 40), and John (who never refers to himself by name in the Gospel).

The term disciple can mean (1) learner and/or (2) follower. This was an early name for believers in Jesus Christ as the promised Jewish Messiah. It is important to note that the NT calls for disciples, not mere decisions (cf. Matt. 13). Christianity is an initial decision (repentance and faith) followed by an on going decision of obedience and perseverance. Christianity is not a fire insurance policy or a ticket to heaven, but a daily servant/friend relationship with Jesus.

1:37 “The two disciples heard him speak” John the Baptist pointed beyond himself to Jesus (cf. 3:30).

1:38 “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher)” This was a common title in first century Judaism to identify those who could expound the implications and applications of the Mosaic Law and the Oral Tradition (Talmud). It is literally “my master.” It is used by John the Apostle as equivalent to “teacher” (cf. 11:8,28; 13:13-14; 20:10). The fact that John explains his terms (cf. vv. 38,41,42) shows he was writing to Gentiles.

▣ **“where are You staying?”** This seems to follow the traditional procedures of the establishing of the unique bond between teacher and student. Their question implies that these two men wanted to spend more time with Jesus than just being able to ask a few questions on the road (cf. v. 39).

1:39 “it was about the tenth hour” It is uncertain whether John is using Roman time, beginning at (1) 12:00 a.m. or (2) day break, or Jewish time, beginning at 6:00 p.m. (twilight). When one compares Jn. 19:14 with Mk. 15:25 it seems to imply Roman time. However, when one looks at Jn. 11:9 it seems to imply Jewish time. John possibly used both. Here it seems to be Roman time, #2, or about 4:00 p.m.

1:41

NASB “He found first his own brother”

NKJV, NRSV “He first found his own brother”

TEV “At once he found”

NJB “the first thing Andrew did”

There is a manuscript variant that affects the translations. The options are: (1) the first thing Andrew did; (2) the first person he found; or (3) Andrew was the first to go and tell.

▣ **“the Messiah (which translated means Christ)”** See note at 1:20.

1:42 “Jesus looked at him” This term refers to an “intensive look.”

▣ **“Simon the son of John”** There is some confusion in the NT concerning the name of Peter’s father. In Matt. 16:17 Peter is called “son of Jonah” (*Iōnas*) but here he is called “son of John” (*Iōannēs*). The name John is found in MSS P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵, **ℵ** and

L. MS B has the same name but with only one “n” (*Iōanēs*). The name Jonah occurs in MSS A, B³, K and most other later Greek manuscripts. There seems to be no clear answer to this question. Variant spellings are common with transliterated names from an Aramaic original.

▣ **“you shall be called Cephas’(which is translated Peter)”** The term Cephas is an Aramaic term for rock (*kepa*), which comes into Greek as *kephas*. The name would remind one of stability, strength, and durability.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:43-51

⁴³The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." ⁵⁰Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

1:43 “The next day” John includes chronological phrases throughout the Gospel (cf. 1:29,35,43; 2:1; etc).

▣ **“He purposed to go into”** John records an early period of Jesus’ ministry in Judea which is not recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. John’s Gospel focuses on Jesus’ ministry in Judea and particularly Jerusalem.

▣ **“follow Me”** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. This was a rabbinical call to be a permanent disciple. The Jews had set guidelines which defined this relationship.

1:44 “Now Philip was from Bethsaida” The name of this city means “house of fishing.” This was also the home of Andrew and Peter.

1:45 “Nathanael” This is a Hebrew name which means “God has given.” He is not referred to by this name in the Synoptic Gospels. It is assumed by modern scholars that he is the one called “Bartholomew,” but this remains only a supposition.

▣ **“the Law and *also* the Prophets”** This refers to two of the three sections of the Hebrew canon: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (which was finally settled at Jamnia in A.D. 90). It was a way of referring to the entire Old Testament.

▣ **“Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”** This must be understood in light of Jewish usage. Jesus then lived in Nazareth and the father of the home was named Joseph. This does not deny Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2), nor His virgin birth (cf. Isa. 7:14).

1:46 “Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’” Obviously Philip and Nathanael knew the OT quite well, for they knew that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2), not Nazareth in Galilee of the Gentiles, (maybe they had not considered Isa. 9:1-7).

1:47

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV “in whom there is no deceit”

TEV “there is nothing false in him”

NJB “in whom there is no deception”

This means a straightforward man with no hidden motives (cf. Ps. 32:2), a true representation of the chosen people, Israel.

1:48 “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you’” Obviously Jesus used His supernatural knowledge to give a sign to Nathanael that He was the Messiah.

It is difficult to understand how Jesus’ deity and humanity functioned. In some texts it is uncertain whether Jesus was using “supernatural” powers or human abilities. Here the inference is “supernatural” ability.

1:49 “Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God...King of Israel’” Notice the two titles! Both have nationalistic Messianic implications. These early disciples understood Jesus in first century Jewish categories. They did not fully understand His person and work as the Suffering Servant (cf. Isa. 53) until after the resurrection.

1:51

NASB	“Truly, truly, I say to you,”
NKJV	“Most assuredly, I say to you,”
NRSV	“Very truly, I tell you,”
TEV	“I am telling you the truth”
NJB	“In all truth”

Literally this is “Amen! Amen!” Jesus’ doubling of this term is only found in John’s Gospel where it appears twenty-five times. “Amen” is a form of the Hebrew word for faith (*emeth*) which meant “to be firm.” It was used in the OT as a metaphor for stability and trustworthiness. It came to be translated “faith” or “faithfulness.” However, in time it came to be used of an affirmation. In this initial position in a sentence, it was a unique way of drawing attention to Jesus’ significant, trustworthy statements (cf. 1:51; 2:3,5,11; 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).

Notice the change to the PLURAL (pronoun and verb). This must have been addressed to all those standing there.

▣ **“the heavens opened”** This is PERFECT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE which implies they remained opened. The term “heavens” is PLURAL because in Hebrew it is PLURAL. This can refer to (1) the atmosphere above the earth as in Gen. 1 or (1) the very presence of God.

▣ **“the angels of God ascending and descending”** This is an allusion to Jacob’s experience at Bethel (cf. Gen. 28:10ff). Jesus is asserting that as God promised to provide all of Jacob’s needs, God was providing all of His needs!

▣ **“Son of man”** This is Jesus’ self-chosen designation. It was an Hebraic phrase referring to a human being (cf. Ps. 8:4; Ezek. 2:1). But because of its use in Dan. 7:13, it took on divine qualities. This term had no nationalistic or militaristic overtones because it was not used by the rabbis. Jesus chose it because it combined the two aspects of His nature (cf. I Jn. 4:1-6).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why does the committee from Jerusalem ask John the Baptist if he is one of the three Old Testament personages?
2. Identify the Christological statement which John the Baptist makes about Jesus in verses 19-30.
3. Why do the Synoptics and John vary so much on the call of the disciples?
4. What did these men understand about Jesus? Notice the titles by which they call Him (verse 39).
5. What did Jesus call Himself? Why?