



Intro to John: The Word Made Flesh (John 1)

Notes: Week One

John 1 (HCSB)

Prologue

1 In the beginning was the Word,^[a]
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
2 He was with God in the beginning.
3 All things were created through Him,
and apart from Him not one thing was created
that has been created.
4 Life was in Him,^[b]
and that life was the light of men.
5 That light shines in the darkness,
yet the darkness did not overcome^[c] it.
6 There was a man named John
who was sent from God.
7 He came as a witness
to testify about the light,
so that all might believe through him.^[d]
8 He was not the light,
but he came to testify about the light.
9 The true light, who gives light to everyone,
was coming into the world.^[e]
10 He was in the world,
and the world was created through Him,
yet the world did not recognize Him.
11 He came to His own,^[f]
and His own people^[g] did not receive Him.
12 But to all who did receive Him,
He gave them the right to be^[h] children of God,
to those who believe in His name,
13 who were born,

not of blood,^[i]
or of the will of the flesh,
or of the will of man,^[j]
but of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh^[k]
and took up residence^[l] among us.
We observed His glory,
the glory as the One and Only Son^[m] from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

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

¹⁶ Indeed, we have all received grace after grace
from His fullness,

¹⁷ for the law was given through Moses,
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God.^[n]
The One and Only Son^[o]—
the One who is at the Father’s side^[p]—
He has revealed Him.

John the Baptist’s Testimony

¹⁹ This is John’s testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him,
“Who are you?”

²⁰ He did not refuse to answer, but he declared: “I am not the Messiah.”

²¹ “What then?” they asked him. “Are you Elijah?”

“I am not,” he said.

“Are you the Prophet?”^[q]

“No,” he answered.

²² “Who are you, then?” they asked. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us.

What can you tell us about yourself?”

²³ He said, “I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

Make straight the way of the Lord^[r]—just as Isaiah the prophet said.”

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”

²⁶ “I baptize with^[s] water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know Him. ²⁷ He is the One coming after me,^[t] whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.”

²⁸ All this happened in Bethany^[u] across the Jordan,^[v] where John was baptizing.

The Lamb of God

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the One I told you about: ‘After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’ ³¹ I didn’t know Him, but I came baptizing with^[w] water so He might be revealed to Israel.”

³² And John testified, “I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. ³³ I didn’t know Him, but He^[x] who sent me to baptize with^[y] water told me, ‘The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with^[z] the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!”^[aa]

³⁵ Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!”

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, “What are you looking for?”

They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are You staying?”

³⁹ “Come and you’ll see,” He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.^[ab]

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!”^[ac] (which means “Anointed One”), ⁴² and he brought Simon to Jesus.

When Jesus saw him, He said, “You are Simon, son of John.^[ad] You will be called Cephas” (which means “Rock”).

Philip and Nathanael

⁴³ The next day He^[ae] decided to leave for Galilee. Jesus found Philip and told him, “Follow Me!”

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael^[af] and told him, “We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!”

⁴⁶ “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him.

“Come and see,” Philip answered.

⁴⁷ Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, “Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him.”

⁴⁸ “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” Jesus answered.

⁴⁹ “Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰ Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe only because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You^[ag] will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹ Then He said, “I assure you: You^[ah] will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

John 1

1:1-18 John's prologue presents Jesus as the eternal, preexistent Word-become-flesh ([vv. 1,14](#)) and as the one-of-a-kind Son of the Father who is Himself God ([vv. 1,18](#)). Jesus culminated God's plan of salvation. Previous to Jesus this plan included God giving the law through Moses ([v. 17](#)), His dwelling among His people in the tabernacle ([v. 14](#)), and the sending of John the Baptist ([vv. 6-8,15](#)). The prologue introduces several themes that are emphasized later in the Gospel, including Jesus as life, light, and truth, believers as God's children, and the world's rejection of Jesus.

1:1 **In the beginning was the Word** echoes [Gen 1:1](#), "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." John located Jesus' existence in eternity past with God. "The Word" (Gk *logos*) conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech ([Ps 19:1-4](#)). God's Word is effective. He speaks, and things come into being ([Gen 1:3,9](#); [Isa 55:11-12](#)).

1:4-5 The references to **life... light**, and **darkness** continue to draw on Genesis themes (cp. [Gen 1:3-5,14-18,20-31](#); [2:7](#); [3:20](#)). Light symbolism is also found in later OT messianic passages ([Isa 9:2](#); [42:6-7](#); [49:6](#); [60:1-5](#); [Mal 4:2](#); cp. [Lk 1:78-79](#)).

1:7-8 On John as a witness to Jesus, see note at [5:31-47](#).

1:11 **His own people did not receive Him** refers to the Jewish people, the recipients of God's covenants, the law, and promises of a Messiah ([Rm 9:4](#)). Messiah's rejection by the Jews despite convincing proofs of His messiahship (esp. the "signs") is a major subject in the first half of John's Gospel (cp. [12:37](#)).

1:12-13 Reference to **children of God** builds on the OT characterization of Israel as God's children ([Dt 14:1](#); cp. [Ex 4:22](#)). **Born, not of blood... but of God** makes clear that true children of God come into being through faith in Messiah, not physical birth or ethnic descent ([8:41-47](#); cp. [3:16](#)). This opens the way for Gentiles to become God's children ([11:51-52](#); cp. [10:16](#)).

1:14 **The Word** continues the theme of [1:1](#). **Became flesh** does not mean the Word stopped being God; rather, the Word was made flesh. **Took up residence among us** literally means "pitched His tent" (Gk *skenoo*), an allusion to God's dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle ([Ex 25:8-9](#); [33:7](#)). In the past God demonstrated His presence to His people in the tabernacle and the temple. Now God has taken up residence among His people in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ ([Jn 1:17](#)). The references to God's **glory** hark back to OT passages that describe the manifestation of God's presence and glory in theophanies (appearances of God), the tabernacle, or the temple ([Ex 33:22](#); [Num 14:10](#); [Dt 5:22](#)). The Greek word *monogenes* underlying **One and Only Son from the Father** means "only child" ([Jdg 11:34](#); [Jer 6:26](#); [Am 8:10](#); [Zech 12:10](#)). "Only" may mean "one of a kind," as in the case of Isaac, who is called Abraham's "one of a kind" son in [Gen 22:2,12,16](#) (in contrast to Ishmael; cp. [Heb 11:17](#)). In the OT, the Son of David and Israel are called God's "firstborn" son (see [Ps 89:27](#)). The reference to God's "giving" of His "One and Only Son" in [Jn 3:16,18](#) may allude to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac ([Gen 22](#)).

¹ Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 1".

1:14 Full of grace and truth recalls "lovingkindness (Hb *hesed*) and truth (Hb *emet*)" in [Ex 34:6](#) (cp. [Ex 33:18-19](#)), where the expression refers to God's covenant faithfulness to His people Israel. According to John, God's covenant faithfulness found ultimate expression in His sending of His **One and Only Son**, Jesus (see textual note at [1:14](#)).

Incarnation and Christology

Stephen J. Wellum

The word "incarnation" derives from a Latin word developed from *in + caro* [flesh], which literally means "in the flesh." In Christian theology the term refers to the supernatural act of God, effected by the Holy Spirit, whereby the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Triune Godhead, took into union with Himself a complete human nature apart from sin. As a result of that action, the Son of God became the God-man forever, the Word made flesh ([Jn 1:1,14](#); [Rm 1:3-4](#); [8:3](#); [Gal 4:4](#); [Php 2:6-11](#); [1Tim 3:16](#); [Heb 2:5-18](#); [1Jn 4:2](#)).

The means whereby the incarnation came about is the virgin conception, commonly known as the virgin birth—the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary—so that what was conceived was fully God and fully man in one person forever ([Mt 1:18-25](#); [Lk 1:26-38](#)). He did this in order to become the Redeemer of the church, our Prophet, Priest, and King, and thus to save His people from their sins ([Mt 1:21](#)). By becoming one with us, the Lord of Glory not only shares our sorrows and burdens, He is also able to secure our redemption by bearing our sin on the cross as our substitute and being raised for our justification (see [Rm 4:25](#); [Heb 2:17-18](#); [4:14-16](#); [1Pe 3:18](#)).

The Humanity and Deity of Jesus in Scripture

Biblical evidence for the full deity and humanity of Christ is abundant. In regard to His humanity, Jesus is presented as a Jewish man who was born, underwent the normal process of growth and development ([Lk 2:52](#)), experienced a full range of human experiences (e.g. [Mt 8:10,24](#); [9:36](#); [Lk 22:44](#); [Jn 19:28](#)), including growth in knowledge ([Mk 13:32](#)), and the experience of death ([Jn 19:30](#)). Apart from His sinlessness, which Scripture unequivocally affirms ([Jn 8:46](#); [2Co 5:21](#); [Heb 4:15](#); [1Pe 1:19](#)), He is one with us in every way.

Scripture also affirms that the *man* Christ Jesus is also the eternal Son of God and thus God equal with the Father and Spirit. From the opening pages of the NT, Jesus is identified as the LORD: the One who establishes the divine rule and inaugurates the new covenant era in fulfillment of OT expectation—something only God can do (e.g. [Isa 9:6-7](#); [11:1-10](#); [Jer 31:31-34](#); [Ezek 34](#)). That is why Jesus' miracles are not merely human acts empowered by the Spirit of God; rather they are demonstrations of His own divine authority over nature (e.g. [Mt 8:23-27](#); [14:22-23](#)), Satan and his hosts ([Mt 12:27-28](#)), and all things ([Eph 1:9-10,19-23](#)). Because He is God the Son, Jesus has the authority to forgive sin ([Mk 2:3-12](#)), call Himself the fulfillment of Scripture ([Mt 5:17-19](#); [11:13](#)), view His relationship with the Father as one of equality and reciprocity ([Mt 11:25-27](#); [Jn 5:16-30](#); [10:14-30](#)), and do the very works of God in creation, providence, and redemption ([Jn 1:1-18](#); [Php 2:6-11](#); [Col 1:15-20](#); [Heb 1:1-3](#)).

Theological Expression of Jesus' Natures

Later church reflection, especially at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), affirmed that we cannot do justice to Scripture without confessing that Jesus of Nazareth was fully God and fully man. God the Son, who gave personal identity to the human nature He had assumed and did so without putting aside or compromising His divine nature, must be confessed as one person who now exists in two natures. Additionally, Chalcedon affirmed that we must not think that the incarnation involved a change in the properties of each nature so that some kind of blending resulted which was neither divine nor human, as the Eutychians wrongly affirmed. Rather, we must affirm that the properties of each nature (human and divine) were preserved so that Jesus is all that God is in all of His perfections and all that we humans are except in terms of sin.

This affirmation entails at least two important points. First, *the man* Jesus from the moment of conception was personal by virtue of the union of the human nature in the person of the divine Son. At no point were there two persons or two centers of self-consciousness, as the Nestorians wrongly affirmed. That is why in our Lord Jesus Christ we come face-to-face with God. We meet Him, not subsumed under human flesh, not merely associated with it, but in undiminished moral splendor. The deity and humanity coincide, not because the human has grown into the divine, but because the divine Son has taken to Himself a human nature for our salvation. He is the divine Son who subsists in two natures, who has lived His life for us as our representative head, died our death as our substitute, and been raised for our eternal salvation. This is why the Lord Jesus is utterly unique and without parallel and thus the only Lord and Savior. Second, since in the incarnation the eternal Son took to Himself a human nature, He can now live a fully human life. Yet He was not totally confined to that human nature as if for a period of time the divine nature was divested of its attributes or function. That is why Scripture affirms that even as the incarnate One, the divine Son continued to uphold and sustain the universe ([Col 1:15-17](#); [Heb 1:1-3](#)) even while He lived out His life on earth as a man dependent upon the Father and empowered by the Spirit ([Jn 5:19-27](#); [Ac 10:38](#)).

Our affirmation of the biblical Jesus is beyond our full comprehension, but it is only in such a Jesus that we have One who can meet our every need. Apart from Him as God the Son incarnate, we do not have a Redeemer who can stand on our behalf as a man, let alone satisfy God's own righteous demand upon us due to our sin. After all, it is only God who can save us. By becoming one with us, our Lord not only becomes our sympathetic Savior, He also accomplishes a work that saves us fully, completely, and finally.

1:15 John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus ([Lk 1:24,26](#)), and he started his ministry earlier than Jesus ([Lk 3:1-20](#)). Usually, priority in time (such as being the firstborn) implied preeminence, but Jesus' preexistence overrode John's temporal precedence.

1:17 The contrast between the **law** and **grace and truth** is not that the law was bad and Jesus was good; rather, both the giving of the law and the coming of Jesus Christ mark stages in God's reaching out to humanity. Jesus, however, marks the final, definitive revelation of God's grace and truth. He is superior to Abraham ([8:53](#)), Jacob ([4:12](#)), and Moses ([5:46-47](#); cp. [9:28](#)).

1:18 The HCSB translation reads **Son** rather than "only God," which appears in many translations. Based on manuscript evidence, the *Theos* reading was judged to be an early transcriptional error in the Alexandrian manuscript tradition; hence the HCSB excludes it.

1:19-2:11 This introductory unit presents the first week of Jesus' ministry: Day 1, John's witness about Jesus ([1:19-28](#)); Day 2, John's encounter with Jesus ([1:29-34](#)); Day 3, John's referral of two of his disciples to Jesus ([1:35-39](#)); Day 4, Andrew's introduction of his brother Peter to Jesus ([1:40-42](#)); Day 5, the recruitment of Philip and Nathanael ([1:43-51](#)); and Day 7, the wedding at Cana ([2:1-11](#)). During this early stage Jesus was hailed by John the Baptist as the "Lamb of God" ([1:29,36](#)), gathered His first disciples, and performed His first "sign"—turning water into wine ([2:11](#)).

1:19-21 John denied being the Christ (cp. [vv. 8,15](#); [3:28](#)), **Elijah**, or **the Prophet**. "The Messiah" refers to the coming greater Son of David, predicted in the OT ([2Sam 7:11-16](#); [Hos 3:5](#)). Elijah, who never died ([2Ki 2:11](#)), was expected to return in the end time ([Mal 4:5](#)) to "restore everything" ([Mt 17:11](#); cp. [Lk 1:17](#)). John the Baptist resembled Elijah in his rugged lifestyle ([Mt 3:4](#); cp. [2Ki 1:8](#)) but denied being Elijah. Moses predicted the coming of "the Prophet" in [Dt 18:15,18](#) (cp. [Ac 3:22](#); [7:37](#)), who was expected in Jesus' time ([Jn 6:14](#); [7:40](#)); John denied being this Prophet as well (though he was a prophet; see [10:40-41](#); [Mt 11:11-14](#)).

1:23 John was a voice... crying out in the wilderness: **Make straight the way of the Lord** in keeping with Isaiah's words ([Isa 40:3](#); cp. [Mt 3:3](#); [Mk 1:3](#); [Lk 3:4](#)). This messenger of God was to prepare the way for Yahweh's coming by preaching repentance and divine judgment. Isaiah's vision in [Isa 40-55](#) drew heavily on exodus typology and envisioned a new exodus of God's people in which God's glory would be revealed and His people delivered. This would be accomplished by the coming of the Servant of the Lord (see esp. [Isa 52:13-53:12](#)).

1:28 **John was baptizing** at the Jordan River. [Luke 3:1](#) places this event in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), or A.D. 29. John would have been about 33 years old. The **Bethany across the Jordan** (cp. [10:40](#)) was probably not the village near Jerusalem where Lazarus was raised (cp. [11:1,18](#)) but the region of Batanea in the northeast (called Bashan in the OT).

1:29 **On the next day**, see note at [2:1-2](#). John the Baptist's references to Jesus as **the Lamb of God** may echo the lamb led to the slaughter mentioned in [Isa 53:7](#). John may also have proclaimed Jesus as the apocalyptic warrior lamb who would bring judgment ([Rev 5:6,12](#); [7:17](#); cp. [Mt 3:7-12](#); [Lk 3:7-17](#)). **Takes away the sin of the world** refers to Jesus' sacrificial, substitutionary death, which appeased God's wrath against sin and sinners ([1Jn 2:2](#); [4:10](#)).

1:31 **By I didn't know Him** John probably meant that he did not know Jesus was the Messiah until he saw the sign from God mentioned in [verses 32-33](#).

1:32-34 The **Spirit** did not just descend on Jesus, He **rested** on Him (cp. [3:34](#))—a sign of Jesus' divine anointing. In the OT, the Spirit came upon people to enable them to accomplish specific tasks. Isaiah predicted that Messiah would be full of the Spirit at all times ([Isa 11:2](#); [61:1](#); cp. [Lk 4:18](#); see note at [5:31-47](#)).

1:35 In [1:35-4:42](#) John narrated events that fell between Jesus' baptism and the start of His Galilean ministry. On **the next day**, see note at [2:1-2](#).

1:38 **Rabbi (which means Teacher)** is one of six instances where John translated an Aramaic term for his readers. The others are "Messiah" (Christ, [v. 41](#); [4:25](#)); "Cephas" (Peter, [1:42](#)); "Siloam" (Sent, [9:7](#)); "Thomas" (Didymus, "Twin"; [11:16](#); [20:24](#); [21:2](#)); and "Place of the Skull" (Golgotha, [19:17](#)).

1:40 **Andrew was one of the two**; the other disciple is not named. He was probably John, the son of Zebedee.

1:41 On **Messiah... Anointed One**, see note at [verse 38](#).

1:42 **Cephas** is an Aramaic word meaning "rock" (cp. [Mt 16:16-18](#); see note at [Jn 1:38](#)). In OT times, God frequently changed people's names to indicate their special calling.

1:43 On **the next day**, see note at [2:1-2](#). Jesus' calling of His disciples (**follow Me**) differed from customary practice. Usually it was a disciple who took the initiative to follow a rabbi ([15:16](#)).

1:44 Most likely, **Andrew** and **Peter** grew up in **Bethsaida** and later moved to Capernaum ([Mk 1:29](#); cp. [Mk 1:21](#)), located only a few miles west. Similarly, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth ([Jn 1:45](#)), and later moved to Capernaum ([Mt 4:13](#)).

1:45 **Nathanael** is also mentioned in [21:2](#). Nathanael may be the personal name of Bartholomew (Bartholomaios = son of Tholomaios), who is linked with Philip in all three Synoptic lists ([Mt 10:3](#); [Mk 3:18](#); [Lk 6:14](#)). Philip's reference to **the One Moses wrote about in the Law** may allude to predictions of a coming prophet in [Dt 18:15,18](#) (see note at [Jn 1:19-21](#)). The expression "the Law and the Prophets" commonly referred to the OT in its entirety ([Mt 5:17](#); [7:12](#)).

1:46 **Nathanael**, who hailed from the small village of Cana in Galilee ([21:2](#); cp. [2:1-11](#)), used something of a double standard when he displayed prejudice toward insignificant **Nazareth**. Nazareth was a small town of no more than 2,000 people.

1:48 Jesus displayed supernatural knowledge (**I saw you**), identifying Himself as Messiah.

1:49 **Son of God** and **King of Israel** are both messianic titles. "Son of God" identifies Jesus as the prophesied Messiah ([2Sam 7:14](#); [Ps 2:7](#)); "King of Israel" likewise is a common OT designation for Messiah ([Zeph 3:15](#)). The two terms also appear in [Mt 27:42](#); [Mk 15:32](#).

1:51 **I assure you** translates Hebrew *amen, amen*, a solemn affirmation emphasizing the authoritative nature of Jesus' pronouncement. The phrase appears 25 times in John's Gospel. **Heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending** recalls the story of Jacob in [Gen 28:12-15](#). The greatness of the Son of Man will far surpass the vision of Jacob the patriarch ([Jn 4:5-6,11-12](#)). Jesus is the "new Bethel" where God is revealed, and the "new Israel." The expression **Son of Man** harks back to the mysterious figure of "One like a son of man" in [Dan 7:13-14](#). The Son of Man would be "lifted up" by crucifixion (see note at [Jn 3:14](#)), provide divine revelation ([6:27,53](#)), and act with end-time authority ([5:27](#); [9:39](#)).

The Apologetics Study Bible²

John 1

1:1 There is no definite article ("the") in the Greek before "God," so the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation reads, "The Word was a god." But sentences of this form in Greek (two nouns joined by a form of the verb "to be") normally placed the article only before the subject of the sentence, regardless of word order. So the traditional translation, "The Word was God," is to be preferred.

Twisted Scripture: John 1:1-2, 14

These verses refute Unitarian and cultic efforts to strip Jesus of His deity. They also hint at a Trinity. As the Word, Jesus "was God" ([v. 1](#)) and was "with God" ([v. 2](#)), indicating that the eternal Godhead consists of more than one person. The Word was incarnated as a human and dwelt among us ([v. 14](#)).

1:4, 7, 9 Each of these three verses could suggest that all people will be saved. But [verses 5, 10, and 11](#) all make it clear that not everyone accepted Jesus. So John must have meant that salvation was available through Jesus for all people, not that salvation automatically is applied to all people.

1:11 "He came to His own" probably referred first of all to the Jews. But if the Jews rejected the one claiming to be their Messiah, why should anyone else believe in Him? We must remember that throughout the OT period the majority of the Jewish people, more often than not, rebelled against God. But there was always a righteous remnant, as there was in the days of Jesus and the apostles. The number of people who believe something is not always related to the truth of what is believed.

1:14 Ancient Gnostics and modern "New Agers" have often challenged the idea of God taking on human flesh, since "flesh" is seen as inherently corrupt. But [Gn 1](#) stresses that God created the world and everything in it to be completely good. Only later did sin corrupt everything. Jesus, however, was God's "new creation" and free from sin. God Himself became incarnate in order to redeem sinful humanity.

1:17 This verse could suggest a complete dichotomy between OT and NT times, but in the context of [verse 16](#) it must refer to a relative contrast. A literal translation from the Greek of [verse 16](#) says (NT) grace "instead of" (OT) grace. Grace appears throughout the OT. God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt was an act of grace. Comparatively, however, the NT focuses on grace even more because it describes the completed plan of salvation in Christ.

1:18 If no one has ever seen God the Father, how could the Lord appear to OT saints, wrestle with Jacob, show His back to Moses, etc.? Because "God is spirit" ([4:24](#)) and because a spirit "does not have flesh and bones" ([Lk 24:39](#)), God is not inherently embodied. But He appeared to people temporarily in bodily form in OT times as a precursor to His full incarnation in Jesus.

² Ted Cabal, ed., *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1569-1573.

Article: Aren't the Gospels the Product of Greek Thinking?

by Ronald H. Nash

For more than a century, liberal critics of the Christian faith have been claiming that early Christianity was heavily influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, pagan mystery religions, or other movements in the world at that time. A series of scholarly books and articles had refuted most of these claims by the 1940s. But new generations of liberal scholars have revived many of these older discredited positions.

The favorite target among the four Gospels has been the Gospel of John. [John 1:1-18](#) was supposedly influenced by a Jewish philosopher named Philo who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. Rudolf Bultmann made a career of claiming that parts of John's Gospel were influenced by Gnosticism and/or various mystery religions. Such influences allegedly extended to the Apostle Paul as well.

All Christians should ask the following questions of all claims about any alleged dependence of early Christianity upon pagan sources:

1. What is the evidence for such claims?
2. What are the dates for the evidence? An embarrassingly high percentage of the alleged evidence turns out to be dated long after the writing of the NT.
3. Are the alleged parallels really similar, or are the likenesses a result of exaggeration, oversimplification, inattention to detail, or the use of Christian language in the description?
4. Is the alleged parallel between the NT and a supposed pagan source the sort of thing that could have arisen independently in several different movements?
5. Is the claim of influence or dependence consistent with the historical information we have about the first-century church?

[1:21](#) How could John deny that he was Elijah, when Jesus called him precisely that in [Mt 11:14](#)? Presumably he was denying that he was the literal Elijah returned from heaven that some Jews looked for. [Luke 1:17](#) harmonizes the two texts: John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah."

[1:28](#) The only Bethany we know of was close to Jerusalem, not "across" the Jordan River (to the east). This doesn't mean that John made a mistake, but it highlights our incomplete understanding of the archaeological history of the region. For example, there is a place called Batanea farther to the north, and east of Galilee, which may have been the place John called Bethany.

[1:31](#) How could John have not previously known Jesus, since they were relatives and each had had a special birth (see [Lk 1-2](#))? John must have meant that after years had gone by and Jesus had done nothing extraordinary as a youth, he was not at all sure what the various prophecies about Jesus meant, until God further revealed things to him at Jesus' baptism.

[1:36](#), [41](#), [45](#), [49](#) In a short span of time Jesus was called the "Lamb of God," "Messiah," the "One Moses wrote about," the "Son of God," and the "King of Israel." How could Jesus' first followers know so much about Him so quickly, especially when the other Gospels do not include such understanding until much later in His ministry? Actually, all these titles carried with them the common Jewish expectation of a kingly, militaristic deliverer who would overthrow Rome. A full understanding of who Jesus was came slowly.

[1:42](#) Doesn't this verse contradict [Mt 16:18](#), in which Jesus much later called Simon "the Rock" (Kepha [Cephas] in Aramaic and Petros [Peter] in Greek)? No, because in this verse Jesus used the future tense "will be called" and in the event at Caesarea Philippi He simply said, "You are..."

[1:45](#) Jesus' being called "son of Joseph" does not contradict the traditions of a virginal conception. Joseph would have legally adopted Jesus and become His stepfather. Nathanael is probably the same person as Bartholomew ([Mk 3:18](#)).

[1:46](#) It is sometimes claimed that we have no evidence of Nazareth existing as a town in Jesus' day. Yet artifacts show evidence of a settlement even before Roman times, as well as during the early Roman period, while a first-century inscription contains the name of Nazareth in Hebrew. But Nazareth was a small, out-of-the-way place that no one later wanting to honor Jesus would likely have made up. It is mentioned because that is where He really lived.

[1:51](#) John's language sounds confused. We might expect angels coming and going from heaven to "descend and ascend," not the reverse. But John was alluding to [Gn 28:12](#), in which Jacob dreamed about a stairway on which angels were "going up and down." Heaven will again open at Christ's resurrection and at His return; angels will accompany Him to heaven and one day usher Him back to earth.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

John 1

[1:1](#) What Jesus taught and what he did are tied inseparably to who he is. John shows Jesus as fully human and fully God. Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life. This is the truth about Jesus, and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to him. That is why John wrote this Gospel—to build faith and confidence in Jesus Christ so that we may believe that he truly was and is the Son of God ([20:30, 31](#)).

[1:1](#) John wrote to believers everywhere, both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John writes with credibility and the details of an eyewitness. His book is not a biography (like the book of Luke); it is a thematic presentation of Jesus' life. Many in John's original audience had a Greek background. Greek culture encouraged worship of many mythological gods, whose supernatural characteristics were as important to Greeks as genealogies were to Jews. John shows that Jesus is not only different from but superior to these gods of mythology.

[1:1ff](#) What does John mean by "the Word"? *The Word* was a term used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in many different ways. In Hebrew Scripture, *the Word* was an agent of creation ([Psalm 33:6](#)), the source of God's message to his people through the prophets ([Hosea 4:1](#)), and God's law, his standard of holiness ([Psalm 119:11](#)). In Greek philosophy, *the Word* was the principle of reason that governed the world, or the thought still in the mind, while in Hebrew thought, *the Word* was another expression for God. John's description shows clearly that he is speaking of Jesus (see especially [1:14](#))—a human being he knew and loved, but at the same time the Creator of the universe, the ultimate

³, *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1748-1752.

revelation of God, the living picture of God's holiness, the one who "holds all creation together" ([Colossians 1:17](#)). To Jewish readers, to say this man Jesus "was God" was blasphemous. To Greek readers, "the Word became human" ([1:14](#)) was unthinkable. To John, this new understanding of the Word was the Good News of Jesus Christ.

[1:3](#) When God created, he made something from nothing. Because we are created beings, we have no basis for pride. Remember that you exist only because God made you, and you have special gifts only because God gave them to you. With God you are something valuable and unique; apart from God you are nothing, and if you try to live without him, you will be abandoning the purpose for which you were made.

[1:3-5](#) Do you ever feel that your life is too complex for God to understand? Remember, God created the entire universe, and nothing is too difficult for him. God created you; he is alive today, and his love is bigger than any problem you may face.

[1:4, 5](#) "The darkness can never extinguish it" means the darkness of evil never has and never will overcome God's light. Jesus Christ is the Creator of life, and his life brings light to humankind. In his light, we see ourselves as we really are (sinners in need of a Savior). When we follow Jesus, the true Light, we can avoid walking blindly and falling into sin. He lights the path ahead of us so we can see how to live. He removes the darkness of sin from our lives. In what ways have you allowed the light of Christ to shine into your life? Let Christ guide your life, and you'll never need to stumble in darkness.

[1:6-8](#) For more information on John the Baptist, see his Profile on page 1749.

[1:8](#) We, like John the Baptist, are not the source of God's light; we merely reflect that light. Jesus Christ is the true Light; he helps us see our way to God and shows us how to walk along that way. But Christ has chosen to reflect his light through his followers to an unbelieving world, perhaps because unbelievers are not able to bear the full blazing glory of his light firsthand. The word *witness* indicates our role as reflectors of Christ's light. We are never to present ourselves as the light to others, but are always to point them to Christ, the Light.

[1:10, 11](#) Although Christ created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him ([1:10](#)). Even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him ([1:11](#)), although the entire Old Testament pointed to his coming.

[1:12, 13](#) All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family ([1:13](#)). Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family ([1:12](#)). Have you asked Christ to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in Christ.

There's no getting around it—John the Baptist was unique. He wore odd clothes and ate strange food and preached an unusual message to the Judeans who went out to the wastelands to see him.

But John did not aim at uniqueness for its own sake. Instead, he aimed at obedience. He knew he had a specific role to play in the world—announcing the coming of the Savior—and he put all his energies into this task. Luke tells us that John was in the wilderness when God's word of direction came to him. John was ready and waiting. The angel who had announced John's birth to Zechariah had made it clear that this child was to be a Nazirite—one set apart for God's service. John remained faithful to that calling.

This wild-looking man had no power or position in the Jewish political system, but he spoke with almost irresistible authority. People were moved by his words because he spoke the truth, challenging them to turn from their sins and baptizing them as a symbol of their repentance. They responded by the hundreds. But even as people crowded to him, he pointed beyond himself, never forgetting that his main role was to announce the coming of the Savior.

The words of truth that moved many to repentance goaded others to resistance and resentment. John even challenged Herod to admit his sin. Herodias, the woman Herod had married illegally, decided to get rid of this wilderness preacher. Although she was able to have him killed, she was not able to stop his message. The one John had announced was already on the move. John had accomplished his mission.

God has given each of us a purpose for living, and we can trust him to guide us. John did not have the complete Bible as we know it today, but he focused his life on the truth he knew from the available Old Testament Scriptures. Likewise, we can discover in God's Word the truths he wants us to know. And as these truths work in us, others will be drawn to him. God can use you in a way he can use no one else. Let him know your willingness to follow him today.

Strengths and accomplishments

- The God-appointed messenger to announce the arrival of Jesus
- A preacher whose theme was repentance
- A fearless confronter
- Known for his remarkable lifestyle
- Uncompromising

Lessons from his life

- God does not guarantee an easy or safe life to those who serve him
- Doing what God desires is the greatest possible life investment
- Standing for the truth is more important than life itself

Vital statistics

- Where: Judea
- Occupation: Prophet
- Relatives: Father: Zechariah. Mother: Elizabeth. Distant relative: Jesus.
- Contemporaries: Herod, Herodias

Key verse

"I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!" ([Matthew 11:11](#)).

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"I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!" ([Matthew 11:11](#)).

John's story is told in all four Gospels. His coming was predicted in [Isaiah 40:3](#) and [Malachi 4:5](#); and he is mentioned in [Acts 1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24,25; 18:25; 19:3, 4](#).

1:14 "The Word became human." By doing so, Christ became (1) *the perfect teacher*— in Jesus' life we see how God thinks and therefore how we should think ([Philippians 2:5-11](#)); (2) *the perfect example*—as a model of what we are to become, he shows us how to live and gives us the power to live that way ([1 Peter 2:21](#)); (3) *the perfect sacrifice*— Jesus came as a sacrifice for all sins, and his death satisfied God's requirements for the removal of sin ([Colossians 1:15-23](#)).

1:14 "The Father's one and only Son" means Jesus is God's only and unique Son. The emphasis is on *unique*. Jesus is one of a kind and enjoys a relationship with God. He is unlike all believers, who are called "children of God."

1:14 When Jesus was conceived, God became a man. He was not part man and part God; he was completely human and completely divine ([Colossians 2:9](#)). Before Christ came, people could know God partially. After Christ came, people could know God fully because he became visible and tangible in Christ. Christ is the perfect expression of God in human form. The two most common errors people make about Jesus are to minimize his humanity or to minimize his divinity. Jesus is both God and man.

1:17 Law and grace (the combination of God's "unfailing love and faithfulness") are both aspects of God's nature that he uses in dealing with us. Moses emphasized God's law and justice, while Jesus Christ came to highlight God's mercy, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Moses could only be the giver of the law, while Christ came to fulfill the law ([Matthew 5:17](#)). The nature and will of God were revealed in the law; now the nature and will of God are revealed in Jesus Christ. Rather than coming through cold stone tablets, God's revelation now comes through a person's life. As we get to know Christ better, our understanding of God will increase.

1:18 God communicated through various people in the Old Testament, usually prophets who were told to give specific messages. But no one ever saw God. Jesus is both God and the Father's unique Son. In Christ, God revealed his nature and essence in a way that could be seen and touched. In Christ, God became a man who lived on earth.

1:19 The priests and Temple assistants (also called Levites) were respected religious leaders in Jerusalem. Priests served in the Temple, and Temple assistants helped them. The Pharisees ([1:24](#)) were a group that both John the Baptist and Jesus often denounced. Many of them outwardly obeyed God's laws to look pious, while inwardly their hearts were filled with pride and greed. The Pharisees believed that their own oral traditions were just as important as God's inspired Word. For more information on the Pharisees, see the charts in [Matthew 3, p. 1541](#) and [Mark 2, p. 1617](#).

These leaders came to see John the Baptist for several reasons: (1) Their duty as guardians of the faith included investigating any new teaching or movement ([Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22](#)). (2) They wanted to find out if John had the credentials of a prophet. (3) John had quite a following, and it was growing. They were probably jealous and wanted to see why this man was so popular.

1:21-23 In the religious leaders' minds, there were four options regarding John the Baptist's identity: He was (1) the Prophet foretold by Moses ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#)), (2) Elijah ([Malachi 4:5](#)), (3) the Messiah, or (4) a false prophet. John denied being the first three personages. Instead, he called himself, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, "The voice of someone shouting, 'Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD!'" ([Isaiah 40:3](#)). The leaders kept pressing John to say who he was because people were expecting the Messiah to come ([Luke 3:15](#)). But John emphasized only *why* he had come—to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Pharisees missed the point. They wanted to know who John was, but John wanted to prepare them to recognize who Jesus was.

1:25, 26 John was baptizing Jews. The Essenes (a strict, monastic sect of Judaism) practiced baptism for purification, but normally only non-Jews (Gentiles) were baptized when they converted to Judaism. When the Pharisees questioned John's authority to baptize, they were asking who gave John the right to treat God's chosen people like Gentiles. John said, "I baptize with water"—he was merely helping the people perform a symbolic act of repentance. But soon one would come who would truly *forgive* sins, something only the Son of God—the Messiah—could do.

1:27 John the Baptist said he was not even worthy to be Christ's slave. But according to [Luke 7:28](#), Jesus said that John was the greatest of all prophets. If such a great person felt inadequate even to be Christ's slave, how much more should we lay aside our pride to serve Christ! When we truly understand who Christ is, our pride and self-importance melt away.

1:29 Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people ([Exodus 29:38-42](#)). [Isaiah 53:7](#) prophesied that the Messiah, God's servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given—and God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. The sins of the world were removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice. This is the way our sins are forgiven ([1 Corinthians 5:7](#)). The "sin of the world" means everyone's sin, the sin of each individual. Jesus paid the price of *your* sin by his death. You can receive forgiveness by confessing your sin to him and asking for his forgiveness.

1:30 Although John the Baptist was a well-known preacher who attracted large crowds, he was content for Jesus to take the higher place. This is true humility, the basis for greatness in preaching, teaching, or any other work we do for Christ. When you are content to do what God wants you to do and let Jesus Christ be honored for it, God will do great things through you.

1:31-34 At Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist had declared Jesus to be the Messiah. At that time God had given John a sign to show him that Jesus truly had been sent from God ([1:33](#)). John and Jesus were related (see [Luke 1:36](#)), so John probably knew who he was. But it wasn't until Jesus' baptism that John understood that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus' baptism is described in [Matthew 3:13-17](#); [Mark 1:9-11](#); and [Luke 3:21, 22](#).

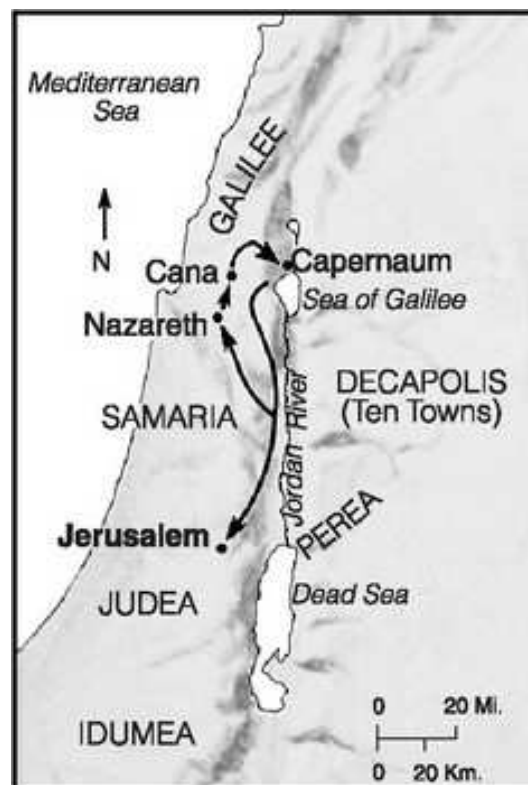
1:33 John the Baptist's baptism with water was preparatory, because it was for repentance and symbolized the washing away of sins. Jesus, by contrast, would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He would send the Holy Spirit upon all believers, empowering them to live and to teach the message of salvation. This outpouring of the Spirit came after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven (see [20:22](#); [Acts 2](#)).

1:34 John the Baptist's job was to point people to Jesus, their long-awaited Messiah. Today people are looking for someone to give them security in an insecure world. Our job is to point them to Christ and to show that he is the one whom they seek.

1:35ff These new disciples used several names for Jesus: Lamb of God ([1:36](#)), Rabbi ([1:38](#)), Messiah ([1:41](#)), Son of God ([1:49](#)), and King of Israel ([1:49](#)). As they got to know Jesus, their appreciation for him grew. The more time we spend getting to know Christ, the more we will understand and appreciate who he is. We may be drawn to him for his teaching, but we will come to know him as the Son of God. Although these disciples made this verbal shift in a few days, they would not fully understand Jesus until three years later ([Acts 2](#)). What they so easily professed had to be worked out in experience. We may find that words of faith come easily, but deep appreciation for Christ comes with living by faith.

1:37 One of the two disciples was Andrew ([1:40](#)). The other was probably John, the writer of this book. Why did these disciples leave John the Baptist? Because that's what John wanted them to do—he was pointing the way to Jesus, the one John had prepared them to follow. These were Jesus' first disciples, along with Simon Peter ([1:42](#)) and Nathanael ([1:45](#)).

1:38 When the two disciples began to follow Jesus, he asked them, "What do you want?" Following Christ is not enough; we must follow him for the right reasons. To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us—to align with us to support and advance our cause, not his. We must examine our motives for following him. Are we seeking his glory or ours?



Jesus' First Travels

After his baptism by John in the Jordan River and the temptation by Satan in the wilderness (see the map in [Mark 1, p. 1613](#)), Jesus returned to Galilee. He visited Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum, and then returned to Jerusalem for the Passover.

1:40-42 Andrew accepted John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus and immediately went to tell his brother, Simon, about him. There was no question in Andrew's mind that Jesus was the Messiah. Not only did he tell his brother, but he was also eager to introduce others to Jesus (see [6:8, 9](#); [12:22](#)). How many people in your life have heard you talk about your relationship with Jesus?

1:42 Jesus saw not only who Simon was, but who he would become. That is why he gave him a new name—*Cephas* in Aramaic, *Peter* in Greek (the name means "a rock"). Peter is not presented as rock-solid throughout the Gospels, but he became a solid rock in the days of the early church, as we learn in the book of Acts. By giving Simon a new name, Jesus introduced a change in character. For more on Simon Peter, see his Profile in [Matthew 27, p. 1603](#).

1:46 Nazareth was despised by the Jews because a Roman army garrison was located there. Some have speculated that an aloof attitude or a poor reputation in morals and religion on the part of the people of Nazareth led to Nathanael's harsh comment. Nathanael's hometown was Cana, about four miles from Nazareth.

1:46 When Nathanael heard that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he was surprised. Philip responded, "Come and see for yourself." Fortunately for Nathanael, he went to meet Jesus and became a disciple. If he had stuck to his prejudice without investigating further, he would have missed the Messiah! Don't let people's stereotypes about Christ cause them to miss his power and love. Invite them to come and see who Jesus really is.

1:47-49 Jesus knew about Nathanael before the two ever met. Jesus also knows what we are really like. An honest person will feel comfortable with the thought that Jesus knows him or her through and through. A dishonest person will feel uncomfortable. You can't pretend to be something you're not. God knows the real you and wants *you* to follow him.

1:51 This is a reference to Jacob's dream recorded in [Genesis 28:12](#). As the unique God-man, Jesus would be the ladder between heaven and earth. Jesus is not saying that this would be a physical experience (that they would see the ladder with their eyes) like the Transfiguration, but that they would have spiritual insight into Jesus' true nature and purpose for coming.