



## The Gospel of John - Chapter One

### Summary of Chapter One

This story is simply about God, the glory of his character, the nature of his life and his desire to share that life with his creatures. It is about God come amongst his people and the mixed response he received to his free and gracious offer of divine life.

The Gospel commences with one of the most remarkable pieces of biblical writing, acknowledging the pre-existence of Jesus, his role in the creation of all things and incarnation as the solution for reconciliation and salvation.

John the Baptist gives testimony to representatives of the Jewish leadership that he is not the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet who was to come, but the announced forerunner that would make the Messiah known to Israel.

John, speaking to two of his own disciples, then identifies Jesus as the one whom God had sent into the world as its Saviour, calling him the Lamb of God. John recognised him when the Spirit descended from heaven to stay on Jesus following his baptism in the River Jordan.

These two disciples, Andrew and John, then follow Jesus to find out more about him and subsequently become his disciples. Andrew then introduces his brother Simon to Jesus who immediately renames Simon to Cephas or Peter.

The chapter concludes with the account of Jesus calling two more of his inner core of disciples, Philip and Nathanael, and includes the dialogue that passes between them. Nathanael recognises Jesus as the Son of God.

### I. **John 1:1-18 - Prologue: The Word Became Flesh**

In the prologue John plunges straight into the heart of the revelation by giving an overview of the themes that will be worked out in narrative form in the story. The prologue helps readers to understand the significance of what takes place in the story and gives them clues as to what to watch for.

John presents Jesus as the eternal, pre-existent, now incarnate Word and as the one-of-a-kind Son of the Father who is himself God. God's revelation and

redemption in and through Jesus are shown to form the culmination of the history of salvation, which previously included God's giving of the law through Moses (v.17), his dwelling among his people in the tabernacle and the temple (v.14), and the sending of the forerunner, John the Baptist (vv.6-8 and v.15).

The prologue also introduces many of the major themes developed later in the Gospel, such as Jesus as the life (v.4), the light (vv.5-9), and the truth (v.14 and vv.16-17); believers as God's children (vv.12-13); and the world's rejection of Jesus (vv.10-11).

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

### John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word echoes the opening phrase of the OT: <<*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth*>> (Genesis 1:1). John will soon identify this Word as Jesus in v.14, but here he locates Jesus' existence in eternity past with God. Thus John starts the story before the beginning, outside of time and space and before anything existed that has been created.

The term the Word, Greek *Logos*, conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech and has a rich OT background. God's Word is effective: God speaks, and things come into being: <<*Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light*>> (Genesis 1:3), <<*By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth*>> (Psalm 33:6), <<*he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction*>> (Psalm 107:20), and: <<*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it*>> (Isaiah 55:10-11), and by speech he relates personally to his people, such as: <<*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'*>> (Genesis 15:1). John also shows how this concept of the Word is superior to a Greek philosophical concept of *logos* as an impersonal principle of Reason that gave order to the universe, Greek *kosmos*.

And the Word was with God indicates interpersonal relationship with God and distinct from him, but then and the Word was God affirms that this Word was also the same God who created the universe in the beginning. The word with, Greek *pros*, in a context like this is used to indicate personal relationship, not mere proximity. Here are the building blocks that go into the doctrine of the Trinity: the one true God consists of more than one person, they relate to each other, and they have always existed. These two truths seem impossible to reconcile logically, and yet both must be held with equal firmness. At this point John simply affirms this antinomy, but later he will reveal more of the relations of the Father and the Son, as well as of the Holy Spirit. John does not reflect philosophically on the Holy Trinity but bears witness to it as the eternal reality, leaving it to later teachers to try to expound its bright mystery. This relationship is the central revelation of this Gospel and the key to understanding all that Jesus says and does.

From the Patristic period (Arius, circa AD256-336) until the present day, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, some have claimed that the Word was God merely identifies Jesus as a god rather than identifying Jesus as God, because the Greek word for God, *Theos*, is not preceded by a definite article. However, in Greek grammar, Colwell's Rule indicates that the translation 'a god' is not required, for lack of an article does not necessarily indicate indefiniteness, i.e. 'a god', but rather specifies that a given term, God in this instance, is the predicate nominative of a definite subject the Word. This means that the context must determine the meaning of *Theos* here, and the context clearly indicates that this 'God' that John is talking about, i.e. the Word, is the one true God who created all things. Verses 6, 12, 13 and 18 are other examples of *Theos* without a definite article but clearly meaning 'God'.

<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.

### John 1:2

He is the Word that John will soon identify as Jesus and he was in the beginning with God means that he was in existence before the creation of all things, therefore was not created and has always existed.

<sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

### John 1:3-5

All things includes the whole universe, indicating that, except for God, everything that exists was created and that (except for God) nothing has existed eternally. God the Father is viewed throughout the Gospel as the ultimate source of all, including the Son and the Spirit. But life did not simply come through the Word but was in the Word. Only God is the source of life, and it is a mark of Jesus' distinctness and deity that the Father: <<*has granted the Son to have life in himself*>> (John 5:26b).

By stating both positively and negatively that the Word is the agent of all creation, John emphasises that there were no exceptions: the existence of absolutely all things came by this Word. Although with v.3 John moves from eternity to creation, he is still dealing with facts hard to comprehend. Until discoveries made in the 1920s, the Milky Way was thought to be the entire universe, but now it is realised that there are many billions of galaxies. Science is helping humankind spiritually, for it silences them before God in wonder and awe. But this verse also helps them put science in its proper place. The universe is incredibly wonderful, so how much more wonderful must be the one upon whose purpose and power it depends: <<*Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself*>> (Hebrews 3:3).

Came into being through him follows the consistent pattern of Scripture in saying that God the Father carried out his creative works through the activity of the Son: <<*yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for*

*whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist>>* (1 Corinthians 8:6), *<<for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him>>* (Colossians 1:16), and: *<<but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds>>* (Hebrews 1:2). This verse disproves any suggestion that the Word (v.1) or the Son (v.14) was created, for the Father would have had to do this by himself, and John says that nothing was created that way, for without him not one thing came into being.

The references to life, light, and darkness continue to draw on the Genesis motifs, as well as: *<<The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined>>* (Isaiah 9:2), *<<But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall>>* (Malachi 4:2), *<<By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace>>* (Luke 1:78-79), and many others. Life refers to the new life that creation has by being reconciled with God through Jesus. Against this background, Jesus as the light brings to this dark world true knowledge, moral purity and is the light that shows the very presence of God: *<<Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life’>>* (John 8:12), and: *<<This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all>>* (1 John 1:5).

The light of all people is an early reference to the fact that the life and salvation offered by God through Jesus was for both Jew and Gentile alike; there is no distinction in Christ: *<<There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>>* (Galatians 3:28), and: *<<In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!>>* (Colossians 3:11).

The light shines in the darkness. It is the nature of light to shine and to go on shining, penetrating the darkness and revealing what was previously hidden.

The darkness has not overcome it. The light of Christ cannot be thwarted by evil schemes, although people can choose to linger in the darkness: *<<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil>>* (John 3:19).

### Introduction to John 1:6-13

Using the image of light John now describes the incarnation in more detail, but he still does not refer to it explicitly. Nothing in this section, as in the last, need refer to a distinct person at all. Throughout there are analogies to what is said of Wisdom in the wisdom literature. Wisdom was God’s agent at creation, has come down to earth seeking those who will give heed, is rejected by some and is received by others whom she enables to receive life and favour from the Lord.

Thus, John is working with what would be familiar from Judaism to establish the context for appreciating the radically new thing that has occurred in Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

### John 1:6-9

John the Baptist was a man sent from God, which is a highly exalted title for it was also said of Jesus: <<*for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God*>> (John 16:27), and of the Holy Spirit: <<*When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf*>> (John 15:26).

He himself was not the light. The Baptist was not the Messiah as some were speculating. His purpose in life was as a witness to testify to the light, to the coming of the Messiah and of God's Kingdom: <<*But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'*>> (Luke 1:13-17). John uses many witnesses who attest to the lordship of Jesus. Refer to the comment made on 5:31-47.

So that all might believe through him shows that both the ministry of John the Baptist and that of Jesus were universal and not just restricted to the Jewish nation. However, the revelation of the Messiah and the proclamation of the Gospel would be given to the Jews first because of their unique calling by God: <<*There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality*>> (Romans 2:9-11).

The true light refers to the true knowledge and presence of God, as well as to moral purity, that is a feature of Jesus' teaching and person.

Which enlightens everyone. John again highlights the universality of Jesus' mission. The Gospel is not just for the Jews but for the whole of mankind.

The universal significance of the light for every individual is an important theme in this Gospel and a controversial one. The light of Jesus is as universal as the light of creation. He did not come merely to some Gnostic elite, nor did he come to a single nation or culture. This light is the Word that became flesh in a given time and place. At the heart of Christianity is the so-called scandal of particularity. People of all cultures and times are to receive the light that

shines in this 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jew, the one who has been given authority over all people: <<After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him'>> (John 17:1-2).

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

### John 1:10-11

Here, John moves from his own things, that is, creation, to his own people, the Jews. The Jewish rejection of the Messiah, despite convincing proofs of his messianic identity, especially the 'signs and wonders', is one of the major emphases of this Gospel: <<Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them'>> (John 12:37-40).

The world did not know him. God had made himself known to the Hebrew nation but not to the wider world, so the Gentiles would not initially be expected to recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah. Yet it was to the people of God, the Jewish nation, that Jesus was revealed, that is, what was his own, and his own people, and even they did not know or accept him for who he was.

<sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

### John 1:12-13

Received him implies not merely intellectual agreement with some facts about Jesus but also welcoming and submitting to him in a personal relationship. Believed in, Greek *pisteuō eis*, implies personal trust.

The question of why some believe and others do not is answered by another of John's antinomies. There is no doubt that God's gracious sovereign initiative comes first, for he is the source of all life and it is only by his grace that any life occurs and abides at all. The power to become children of God must be given by God. The images here rule out any role for human power or authority in the process of becoming a child of God. But unlike in natural birth the one being born of God does play a part; this life is not forced on the believer but must be received. Those who are receptive to the Son are offered the gift of becoming children of God themselves: <<But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ>> (Galatians 3:25-27).

His name refers to all that is true about him, and therefore the totality of his person. It is about accepting him according to the revelation of who he is by his name. On the human side everything depends on one's response to the light who has come. Receiving him is described as believing in his name, a very striking expression that occurs only in John 1:12, 2:23 and 3:18, and 1 John 3:23 and 5:13.

Born, not of blood, but of God makes clear that neither physical birth nor ethnic descent nor human effort can make people children of God, but only God's supernatural work. This extends the possibility of becoming God's children to Gentiles and not just Jews: <<***He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God***>> (John 11:51-52). Although this verse primarily refers to the Jewish Diaspora, it can also be taken to mean all people whom God has called to himself.

To all who believed he gave power or the right indicates that saving faith precedes becoming members of God's family through adoption as his children.

Become children of God means that believers begin to share his divine life, without ceasing to be creatures. Believing in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, enables them to <<***have life in his name***>> (John 20:31c). Given the significance of the name, it is clear that 'life in his name' is another way of referring to being a child of God because it means sharing in the divine life (6:40), and reflecting God's character. Thus the revelation of God in Jesus includes a revelation of the type of life believers are offered as members of his family.

### Introduction to John 1:14-18

Now comes to the climax of this prologue. There have been references to the incarnation in the previous verses, but they were expressed in a veiled way. In fact, everything up to this point could be interpreted in a way that would have been compatible, even attractive, to various ancient thinkers. But now comes the break with all non-Christian thought. This Word, the agent of creation, has become a creature. He who brought the universe into existence now is born within the universe as a human being. This thought is so familiar in Christianity that many are no longer staggered by it. They should be!

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

### John 1:14

The Word continues the opening words of the prologue in v.1. Became flesh does not mean the Word ceased being God; rather, the Word, who was God, also took on humanity: <<***who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross***>> (Philippians 2:6-8). This is the most amazing event in all of history: the eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy Son of God took on a human nature and lived among humanity as one who was both God and man at the same time, in one person.

Often in John the flesh is that which is natural, powerless and superficial. But now the flesh becomes the sphere of the supernatural, the all-powerful, the really real. Matter becomes spirit bearing, and the divine glory is revealed not through the flesh but precisely in the flesh.

Lived among us means more literally ‘pitched his tent’, Greek *skēnoō*, an allusion to God’s dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle: <<***And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it***>> (Exodus 25:8-9). In the past, God had manifested his presence to his people in the tabernacle and the temple. Now God takes up residence among his people in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (v.17). Thus, the coming of Christ fulfils the OT symbolism for God’s dwelling with man in the tabernacle and the temple. Later, through the Holy Spirit, Christ will make into a temple both the church: <<***Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?***>> (1 Corinthians 3:16), and a Christian’s body: <<***Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?***>> (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The references to God’s glory refer back to OT passages narrating the manifestation of the presence and glory of God in theophanies, i.e. appearances of God, the tabernacle, or the temple: <<***But the whole congregation threatened to stone them. Then the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites***>> (Numbers 14:10), and: <<***These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me***>> (Deuteronomy 5:22). The word glory means brightness or splendour. When it is used of a person, glory has to do with how a person appears to others, suggesting a character that is attractive and honourable. In Jewish thinking a son was to replicate the character of his father, thereby honouring the father and showing the son himself to be honourable.

A father’s only Son. Jesus is the ‘Son of God’, not in the sense of being created or born (v.3), but in the sense of being a Son who is exactly like his Father in all attributes, and in the sense of having a Father-Son relationship with God the Father. The Greek word underlying only, *monogenēs*, means ‘one of a kind or unique’, as in the case of Isaac, who is called Abraham’s ‘one-of-a-kind’ son in: <<***By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son***>> (Hebrews 11:17), which is in contrast to Ishmael. Thus only is a better translation than ‘only begotten’ that was made familiar through its use in the KJV.

*Monogenēs* can also be used where the child is literally the only one, as used in the LLX version of: <<***Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her***>> (Judges 11:34).

Full of grace and truth. To say the Son is full of truth is to claim he is the perfect revelation of the divine reality, and saying he is full of grace expresses the character of that reality, the truth about God.

<sup>15</sup> (John testified to him and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, “He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.”’)

### John 1:15

He was before me. John the Baptist is not speaking in human terms for he was Jesus’ elder cousin by about six months as described in Luke Chapters 1-2. John clearly had an understanding of the divinity and pre-existence of Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

### John 1:16-17

We have all received does not imply universalism, where all will eventually inherit eternal life but that God pours out his grace on all humanity, giving them the opportunity to be reconciled to him through his Son, irrespective of who they are or what they may have done. The bible makes it clear that it is only those who do accept Jesus who receive eternal salvation.

The Son is not simply full of grace; he has a fullness from which he shares with others. In part the image may be of an unending supply of grace similar to the water he will offer the Samaritan woman (4:14). But John has something more specific in mind for he says this grace upon grace is somehow explained by the relation Moses has to the law and that which Jesus Christ has to grace and truth, for grace upon grace indicates God’s unmerited favour that brings blessing and joy to all who believe in his name.

The NIV states: <<*Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given*>> (v.16). This is a reminder that God’s grace has always existed and was there throughout the OT era. There are many who believe that v.17 is an indication that grace only came with Jesus but the Lord has always been both gracious merciful in all the dealings with his creation.

Grace and truth most likely recalls the Hebrew behind the phrase <<*steadfast love and faithfulness*>> Hebrew *hesed* and ‘*emet*’ respectively in Exodus 34:6, 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-of-a-kind Son, Jesus Christ. The contrast is not that the law given through Moses was bad and Jesus is good. Rather, both the giving of the law and the coming of Jesus Christ mark decisive events in the history of salvation, the graciousness of God revealed in Scripture has now been perfectly manifested in Jesus. Through the giving of the law, God, through Moses, graciously revealed his character and righteous requirements to the nation of Israel, requiring their obedience for all generations to come: <<*When Moses had finished reciting all these words to all Israel, he said to them: ‘Take to heart all the words that I am giving in witness against you today; give them as a command to your children, so that they may diligently observe all the words of this law*>> (Deuteronomy 32:45-46). Jesus, however, marked the final, definitive revelation of

God's grace and truth. He was superior to Abraham (8:53), Jacob (4:12), and Moses (5:46-47 and 9:28).

The significant contrast in John is not of the law over against grace and truth, since it is the same graciousness of the same God that is revealed in both. Rather, it is the contrast between the verbs was given, Greek *edothē*, and came, Greek *egeneto*. The verb 'to give' itself speaks of the divine graciousness, because it obviously talks of God's gifts. Indeed, as already noted, grace and truth were manifest at the giving of the law. So these verbs are not contrasting a negative with a positive. Rather, the divine graciousness evident in the divine was given is tremendously intensified in the divine came. The same graciousness has now been manifested in an entirely new mode: the Word became, i.e. *egeneto*, flesh.

<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

### John 1:18

No one has ever seen God, that is, in a full and complete way (6:46), but some people did see partial revelations of God in the OT. To see God in Christ would be far better.

Some ancient manuscripts say God the only Son here, but the earliest manuscripts say the only God, using the same word for only as in v.14, meaning 'unique, one-of-a-kind'. John refers to two different persons here as God, as he did in v.1. John concludes the prologue by emphasising what he taught in v.1: Jesus as the Word is God, and he has revealed and explained God to humanity.

Who is close to the Father's heart is a reference to the close and perfect loving relationship that exists between God and Jesus.

Who has made him known. A key part of Jesus' ministry was to reveal God the Father in his fullness, **which he did through himself**: <<*Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?'>> (John 14:9).*

What John is saying here is not only in keeping with the OT but is its fulfilment. The revelation of God in Jesus is not contradictory to Judaism, but rather the very thing for which Judaism had been preparing. So when the Jewish opponents reject Jesus later in the story they do so despite their Judaism, not because of it.

This last section of the prologue speaks powerfully of the identity of Jesus and the character of God revealed in him. Understanding Jesus' deity is crucial to understanding all that he says and does in the story, especially that which is most cryptic. The connection between glory and grace is also extremely important, for John reveals that in this story believers will see the glory that is grace and truth. This is the only section where the word grace occurs in this Gospel, but the rest of the story presents this grace in narrative form, coming to a climax at the Cross.

## II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah

The first half of John's Gospel features Jesus' demonstration of his messianic identity by way of seven selected signs:

- The changing of water into wine (2:1-11).
- The healing of the official's son (4:46-54).
- The healing of the invalid (5:1-15).
- The feeding of the multitude (6:1-15).
- Walking on water (6:16-21).
- The healing of the man born blind (9:1-41).
- The raising of Lazarus (11:1-44).

In addition, there are many personal signs from Jesus during his visits to Jerusalem. This section ends with a reference to the Jewish nation's rejection of the Messiah (12:36b-37).

### II.a John 1:19-2:12 - John the Baptist's witness and the first week of Jesus' ministry

This introductory section of John's Gospel narrates the course of the first week of Jesus' ministry. He is hailed by John the Baptist as 'God's lamb' (v.29 and v.36), is followed by his first disciples (vv.37-51), and performs his first miraculous sign by turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana (2:1-11). Following the wedding they moved to Jesus' Galilæan base in Capernaum.

#### II.a.i John 1:19-28 - The Testimony of John the Baptist

John is quizzed by some officials sent by the religious leaders as to who he was and what was the purpose of his ministry. John simply states that his purpose is to herald in the one they have been waiting for - the Christ of God.

<sup>19</sup> This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'

#### John 1:19

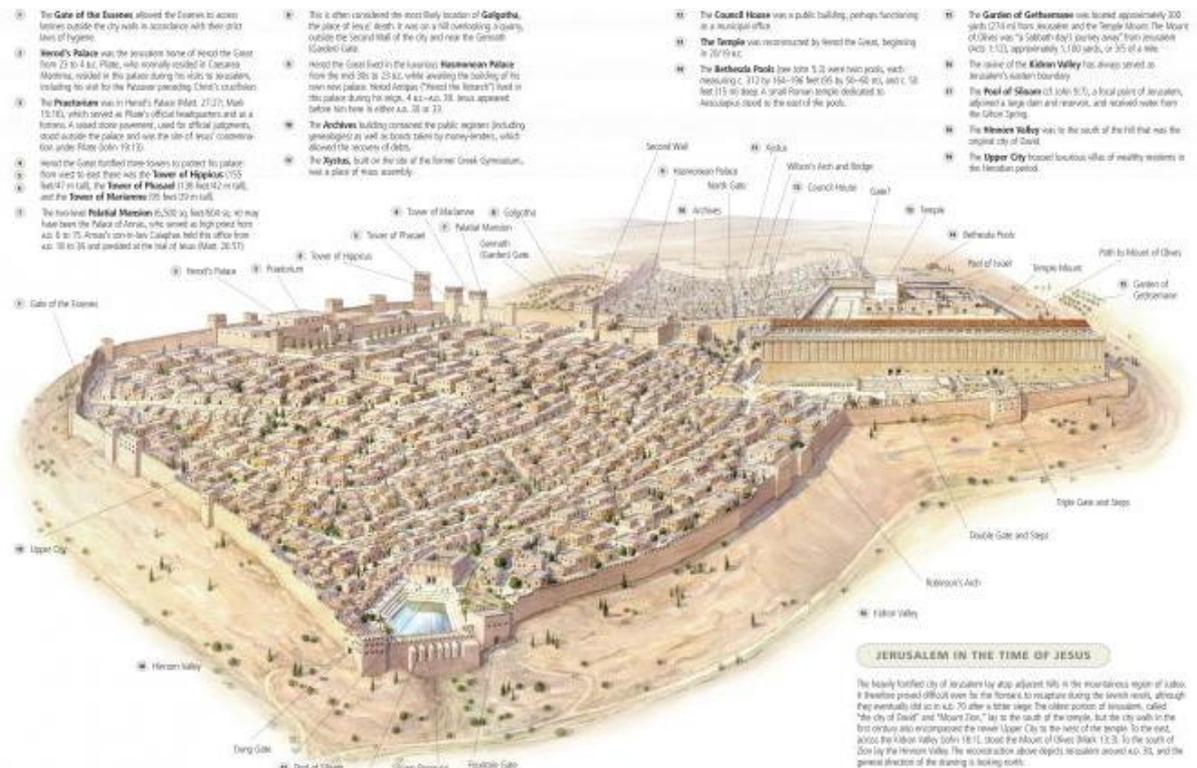
**Testimony.** John's purpose was to bear true witness to the coming to the people of God of the long awaited Messiah. The Baptist had an extensive ministry quite apart from his testimony to Jesus as confirmed by Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18:116-119), but in John all of this is eclipsed. For in John, the Baptist is a witness to Jesus and a model of true discipleship.

**The Jews** is an expression used 68 times in the Greek text of John, sometimes in a neutral or positive sense, but often to refer to hostile Jewish opponents of Jesus among both the Jewish leadership and the ordinary people who followed them. In this instance it refers to Pharisees (v.24). The phrase does not usually mean all the Jews, for Jesus and John the Baptist were also Jews, as was the author John and all the early disciples of Jesus. John wants Jewish readers in his own time to realise that opposition to Jesus by many Jewish leaders goes back to the very

beginning of Jesus' ministry, but that did not deter many other Jews from following him anyway. In many places in John, **the Jews** seems to be a shorthand expression for 'the Jews who opposed Jesus'.

**Priests and Levites.** All descendants of Levi were chosen by God to serve in various roles in the tabernacle, temple or in other religious duties. **Priests** were also **Levites** but were direct descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, whom God anointed as the first High Priest and whose descendants were authorised as **priests** to minister the appointed rites and duties: <<**Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests – Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar**>> (Exodus 28:1).

The heavily fortified city of **Jerusalem** lay atop adjacent hills in the mountainous region of Judæa. It therefore proved difficult even for the Romans to recapture during the Jewish revolt, although they eventually did so in AD70 after a bitter siege. The oldest portion of Jerusalem, called 'the city of David' and 'Mount Zion', lay to the south of the temple, but the city walls in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century also encompassed the newer Upper City to the west of the temple. To the east, across the Kidron Valley, stood the Mount of Olives; to the south of Zion lay the Hinnom Valley. The reconstruction depicts Jerusalem around AD30, and the general direction of the drawing is looking north.



<sup>20</sup> He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' <sup>21</sup> And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.'

## John 1:20-21

John confessed to not being the Messiah, the promised return of Elijah, or the Prophet.

The Messiah refers to the expected Saviour of the Jewish nation that God had promised through his prophets to send when the time was right.

Elijah, who never died: <<As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven>> (2 Kings 2:11), was expected to return in the end times: <<Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes>> (Malachi 4:5), which Jesus confirmed to his disciples: <<He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things'>> (Matthew 17:11), but John came as one like Elijah: <<With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord>> (Luke 1:17). Although John the Baptist resembled Elijah in his rugged lifestyle: <<They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.' He said, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite'>> (2 Kings 1:8), compared with: <<Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey>> (Mark 1:6), he denied that he himself was Elijah. However Jesus, understanding more about this than John, saw John as fulfilling the prophecy about Elijah: <<and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come>> (Matthew 11:14).

The coming of the Prophet was predicted by Moses: <<The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet>> (Deuteronomy 18:15), and: <<I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command>> (Deuteronomy 18:18), and was expected in Jesus' day: <<When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world'>> (John 6:14). John denied being this Prophet as well, although he was a prophet: <<He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true'>> (John 10:40-41).

<sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' <sup>23</sup> He said,

'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,  
"Make straight the way of the Lord"',  
as the prophet Isaiah said.

## John 1:22-23

Who are you? John had come as a religious teacher outside of the mainstream and was proclaiming an eschatological message. This was not unusual as there were many in that era claiming to have knowledge of God but John had to be checked

out as there were many taking notice of him: <<*John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judæan countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins*>> (Mark 1:4-5). Although John was not mainstream his message was and the authorities had to check it out. So having exhausted their list of possibilities they now give John the chance to explain himself.

Let us have an answer for those who sent us. These men had been sent by the rabbinic leaders in Jerusalem to determine who John was and whether his message was authentic.

John is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, in keeping with the prophet's words of Isaiah 40:3, that are recorded also in Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3 and Luke 3:4. By preaching a word of repentance and divine judgment, this messenger of God was to prepare the way for the Lord God of the OT, Yahweh himself, to come to his people through the wilderness.

This is a highly significant expression of who John is, what he is doing and why he is doing it. His identity is his task, and this task is directed entirely toward the Lord's coming and not his own. His reply does answer them and should have aroused their curiosity. Unfortunately, it went right over their heads; they did not even acknowledge it. It was outside of their expectations, and they did not have the inner spiritual openness to be able to hear it.

<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

#### John 1:24

The Pharisees were a relatively small but highly influential group of Jews who emphasised meticulous observance of God's law, as understood both from the OT laws and from their accumulated extra-biblical traditions, and as the means by which one attains righteousness before God and retains his favour. Many Pharisees opposed Jesus, for example Matthew 23:1-36 describes an account where Jesus condemns their hypocrisy. However, some followed him including Nicodemus in this Gospel and, of course, the apostle Paul. They were a laymen's fellowship, popular with the common people and connected to local synagogues, chiefly characterised by adherence to extensive extra-biblical traditions, which they rigorously obeyed as a means of applying the law to daily life. They wielded significant power and influence in the lives of ordinary Jews. Many were zealous and pious, but there were others that had a reputation of being self-seeking and domineering. The apostle Paul was a zealous Pharisee: <<*When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead'*>> (Acts 23:6).

<sup>25</sup> They asked him, 'Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' <sup>26</sup> John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, <sup>27</sup> the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.'

## John 1:25-27

Why then are you baptising. John does not respond to their question. He simply says that he is baptising and then goes on to identify himself solely in terms of the one who is coming after me.

I baptise with water. John's baptismal ministry was to bring people to repentance: <<*He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*>> (Luke 3:3).

Among you stands one whom you do not know. This one of whom they are ignorant is far greater than the Baptist himself. By such a response John the Baptist is true to his task, for he is testifying to the light (v.7). Even when he is asked to testify concerning himself he points to Jesus. Thus he is a model of humility, a key characteristic of discipleship in this Gospel. So the Baptist himself is a lamp (5:35), both shining on Christ and exposing the ignorance of the opponents. The Baptist is a powerful example of humility, single-mindedness and faithful witness.

Leather sandals with thongs or ties are pictured in ancient art representing Judæans from various eras. Some archæological examples of sandals are known from this period, e.g. from the Cave of Letters in the Judæan desert.

<sup>28</sup> This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

## John 1:28

The Bethany across the Jordan, also noted later: <<*He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising earlier, and he remained there*>> (John 10:40), is different from the village near Jerusalem where Lazarus was raised from death: <<*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha*>> (John 11:1); the Bethany here is designated as across, i.e. to the east of, the Jordan River.

John was baptising. John's baptism was an outward sign of cleansing reflecting inward repentance from sins. Christian baptisms have come to symbolise so much more than this: <<*Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'*>> (Acts 2:38), <<*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?*>> (Romans 6:3), <<*And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*>> (1 Peter 3:21).

### II.a.ii John 1:29-34 - The Lamb of God

The Baptist may be cagey about his own identity, but he is not so about Jesus' identity. His testimony here comes in two parts, the first identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God who comes after the Baptist (vv.29-31); the second identifying Jesus as the one upon whom the Spirit rests, the Son of God (vv.32-34). Taken together these verses read like a summary of his testimony, although there is no indication of where he gives it or of who hears it.

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’

### John 1:29

**The next day.** As noted in the section introduction, John is reviewing the first week of Jesus ministry and this is the second day.

**Jesus**, by his sacrifice, fulfils the symbolism of the Passover lamb and other OT sacrifices, refer to Leviticus 1:1-5:19, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 5:2 and Hebrews 10:1-14. Deliverance through the blood of a lamb prefigured the coming of Jesus as **the Lamb of God** to obtain final salvation for God’s people through his death, which in turn redeemed them from death, sin, and Satan, confirmed in Colossians 1:13-14 and Hebrews 2:14-15. Refer also to Isaiah 53:7 and other OT passages about sacrifices for sins, such as Genesis 22:8, Leviticus 14:25 and 16:15-22. This lamb imagery will later culminate in John’s vision of Jesus as the apocalyptic warrior Lamb who will bring judgment and universal victory, as described in Revelation 5:6-13, 7:17, 21:22-23 and 22:1-3.

**Takes away the sin of the world** refers to Jesus’ sacrificial, substitutionary death and his appeasement of the divine wrath by way of atonement for sin, i.e. his propitiation: *<<they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed>>* (Romans 3:24-25), *<<Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people>>* (Hebrews 2:17), *<<and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world>>* (1 John 2:2), and: *<<In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins>>* (1 John 4:10). Refer also to the comments made on 1 Peter 2:24 and 3:18.

<sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.”

### John 1:30

**He was before me.** As confirmation and for emphasis, John repeats Jesus’ eternal existence and pre-eminence over John based on who he is, the Lamb of God.

<sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.’

### John 1:31

**I myself did not know him.** John was Jesus’ cousin but had spent most of his life in the wilderness and had probably never met Jesus before this encounter. What he most likely means here is that he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until he saw the sign mentioned in vv.32-33.

He might be revealed to Israel. The Messiah must first be made known to the original people of God before they can reveal him to the wider world. When a Canaanite women asked Jesus for help: <<***He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'***>> (Matthew 15:24). Yet it had been long foretold of the Messiah: <<***And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'***>> (Isaiah 49:5-6). Jesus the man ministered and taught in just a small part of the world for just three years, but the effect of his ministry would be global and timeless.

<sup>32</sup> And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit." <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

#### John 1:32-34

The Spirit did not merely descend on Jesus, he remained on him (3:34), a sign of Jesus' divine anointing. This remaining, Greek *menon* in the present tense, implies that all of Jesus' ministry must be understood as accomplished in communion with the Spirit of God. Here in a nutshell there is the Johannine teaching about the Spirit as the one who comes from God and points to Jesus. In the OT, the Spirit came upon people to enable them to accomplish certain God-given tasks. But Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be full of the Spirit at all times: <<***The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord***>> (Isaiah 11:2), and: <<***The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners***>> (Isaiah 61:1), which Jesus acknowledged as referring to him in Luke 4:18.

Like a dove. This simile does not necessarily mean that the Spirit actually assumed the form of a dove but it does indicate a bodily form of something like a dove. It was probably ephemeral.

I myself did not know him. Jesus was John's younger cousin by six months but there is nothing to suggest they had ever met. However, in this context John is indicating that he had no idea that Jesus was the Messiah until the time of his baptism. This meeting between Jesus and John is recorded more fully in the Synoptic Gospels in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22, but John decided to focus of John's testimony of the occasion rather than its details.

The one who sent me refers to God the Father, who had sent the angel Gabriel to Zechariah to announce the birth of a son who would fulfil this ministry.

The one who baptises with the Holy Spirit. This was the unique role of Christ, and Jesus did impart the Spirit on his closest disciples shortly after his resurrection: <<*Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'* When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'>> (John 20:21-22). The full baptism of the Spirit did not actually occur until the Day of Pentecost: <<*While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'*>> (Acts 1:4-5).

I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God. The Baptist's testimony is a model of Christian witness to Jesus! He is also a model of Christian discipleship in his humility. Jesus is God himself, the second person of the Trinity, with an eternal relation of sonship to God the Father: <<*For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God*>> (John 5:18). Refer also to the comments made on John 5:31-47.

John's admission is startling since what he had just asserted concerning his examiners (v.26) he now confesses of himself. It is important to see that such ignorance of Jesus is not bad in itself for everyone begins ignorant of Jesus. Even the fact that the Baptist's cryptic saying went over their heads (vv.23-25) is not necessarily an indictment of them. But their ignorance and the Baptist's ignorance are two very different things. They thought they already knew all about the Messiah and other eschatological figures. The Baptist, however, knows his ignorance and is looking for the one to be revealed. In fact, it is for this very reason that he came baptising. So John's humility is revealed in his recognition of his ignorance and in his waiting and watching for God's promised Messiah, the world's true Saviour.

### II.a.iii John 1:35-51 - Jesus Calls His Disciples

John takes a different perspective to the Synoptic Gospels with regard to the calling of the first disciples. John and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus as the Messiah and they turned to follow him. The following day Andrew took Simon Peter to Jesus. These meetings probably preceded the account where Jesus called the men from the fishing boats to follow him, which occurred after Jesus had returned to Galilee (v.43). John then refers to the calling of Philip and Nathanael, which is not included in the other Gospel accounts.

#### II.a.iii.1 John 1:35-42 - The First Disciples of Jesus

John records how Andrew and John first meet Jesus to become his disciples, followed by the introduction of Simon Peter to Jesus by his brother Andrew.

<sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,  
<sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!'

## John 1:35-36

He watched Jesus walk by. It is unlikely this was a casual occurrence but it seems that Jesus made no attempt to communicate with either John or his disciples.

The Lamb of God. John the Baptist again identifies Jesus as the Christ to two of his disciples. Andrew is named (v.40), and it is generally accepted that the other is the author John Zebedee.

<sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' <sup>39</sup> He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

## John 1:37-39

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. There is no indication that the Baptist had made his proclamation for the benefit of the two disciples with him. He could have been talking to himself, even under his breath! The initiative to follow Jesus was solely theirs; they heard and they followed.

What are you looking for? Far from calling them to follow him, Jesus turns around and looks at them after they are already following him. He is going on ahead and they must catch up. The question could have even been posed in an off-putting tone or it may simply have been encouraging them to reflect on why they had left the Baptist to go after Jesus. It is a question that can reveal their hearts by indicating their attitude toward Jesus and their reason for following him. It also allows them to set the agenda. They could have asked him, for example, why the Baptist called him 'the Lamb of God'. Instead they accepted the role of receivers and expressed a desire to be with Jesus, i.e. where are you staying? Jesus' response is inviting: come and see.

'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher) is one of seven Hebrew/Aramaic terms translated by John for his readers. The two disciples recognised Jesus' authority and show him the level of respect that was due to him at this first meeting. This was a term that his disciples would continue to use for their master: <<*Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so'*>> (Matthew 26:25), <<*Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah'*>> (Mark 9:5), and: <<*Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something'*>> (John 4:31). It was a term of respect used by the Pharisee Nicodemus: <<*He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'*>> (John 3:2).

They remained with him that day. It remains unknown what they discussed but the two men were obviously enthralled by their time with the Lord.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. The significance of the time is unknown. Some believe the hour is mentioned to show that they stayed out the day with him because little of it remained. The original states the tenth hour and the Jews calculated time from 6 a.m. typically sunrise. This is generally accepted as John's intention rather than the Roman calculation from midnight.

<sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

#### John 1:40

One of the two was Andrew. The name of the other disciple is not stated. However, it has always been accepted that he was John the son of Zebedee.

<sup>41</sup> He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed).

#### John 1:41

It is not revealed how Jesus began teaching such open-hearted people. The implication is that something impressive occurred, for John records Andrew going to his brother Simon Peter and telling him, we have found the Messiah.

The terms Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean anointed, usually by God. In the NT and early Judaism, Messiah is a summary term that gathers up many strands of OT expectations about a coming 'anointed one' who would lead and teach and save God's people, especially the great King and Saviour in the line of David whom the OT promised, for example in 2 Samuel 7:5-16, Psalm 110:1-4, and Isaiah 9:6-7.

<sup>42</sup> He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

#### John 1:42

Cephas is an Aramaic word meaning rock: <<*Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'* And Jesus answered him, *'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it'*>> (Matthew 16:16-18). In Biblical times, God frequently changed people's names to indicate their special calling, as was the case with Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), and Jacob to Israel (Genesis 32:28).

Which is translated. In both v.41 and here John translates an Aramaic term for his non-Jewish readers.

### II.a.iii.2 John 1:43-51 - Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

John records the calling of two further Galilean disciples, explaining the remarkable circumstances of how he had foreknown one of them.

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'

#### John 1:43

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. Jesus had encountered John the Baptist on the eastern side of the River Jordan, and had subsequently met the first three disciples in that area. He then continued his journey to their home region.

Galilee is the region west of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee and north of Samaria. In the NT era Galilee was successively ruled by Herod the Great, his son Herod Antipas, and then by Herod Antipas' nephew Herod Agrippa I.

He found Philip. Andrew and John had followed Jesus on their own initiative, then Andrew went to find Peter. Here, the emphasis shifts to Jesus taking the active role in the calling, although it was Philip who later brought Nathanael to Jesus.

Follow me. There is no indication here of Jesus performing signs or providing any great wisdom as to why his disciples should follow him. The command is simple and the response decisive. It was the same with Matthew: <<*After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up, left everything, and followed him*>> (Luke 5:27-28).

<sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

#### John 1:44 Bethsaida.

Bethsaida was just northeast of where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north. Research since the 1980s has focused on et-Tell as the site for Bethsaida. This site does have residential remains from around NT times, including an apparent fisherman's house with ancient fishing equipment, atop an earlier Iron Age, i.e. OT-era settlement. Excavation geologists suggest that the Sea of Galilee originally extended closer to this site than it does today. Therefore, this fits with it being the birthplace of Andrew and Peter.

<sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.'

#### John 1:45

Nathanael is also mentioned in 21:2 and may be the personal name of Bartholomew or Bar-Tholomaios or 'son of Tholomaios', who is linked with Philip in all three Synoptic lists of apostles in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:14.

Jesus son of Joseph. Until it was realised that Jesus was God incarnate, it was accepted that Joseph was his father. He is mentioned only once more in John.

The law and the prophets commonly referred to the Jewish Scriptures, i.e. the OT, in their entirety and was used as such by Jesus, for example: <<*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil*>> (Matthew 5:17), and: <<*In everything do to others as you*

would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets>> (Matthew 7:12).

<sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ <sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, ‘Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!’

### John 1:46-47

Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit! Nathanael is a model disciple because he stands in striking contrast with the picture of the opponents that will emerge. He reacts to Jesus initially in exactly the same way they will later in the story. He says, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ That is, for Nathanael, Jesus’ origin raises doubts whether he could be the one: <<*about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote*>> (v.45), just as it will later for the Jewish opponents: <<*Others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ But some asked, ‘Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?’*>> (John 7:41-42).

The reason Nathanael has trouble with Jesus’ coming from Nazareth is probably because the Messiah was not expected to be associated with Nazareth. Nathanael’s question is usually understood as a negative one, although some of the church fathers took the tone as positive, that something good could come from Nazareth. It is probably neither entirely negative nor positive but simply a genuine question, expressing his doubts. He has reason to question whether Jesus is the one promised, but he is open to the possibility that Jesus is, as his subsequent action and confession show. Above all, he is the sort who seeks God before all else.

Come and see. Philip does not try to argue his case but simply believes that once Nathanael has met Jesus then he too will recognise him.

Not mentioned in the OT, Nazareth was a village of no more than 2,000 people in Jesus’ day and was the place where Jesus’ human family had settled.



The Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth

Excavations at Nazareth have located tombs, olive presses, wells, and vaulted cells for wine and oil storage, indicating that the village was a small agricultural settlement. However, Nazareth was located on a road leading from nearby Sepphoris into Samaria, therefore it was on a busy trade route. The current Church of the Annunciation lies atop previous early Byzantine church structures and caves from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century or possibly earlier; these commemorated the early life of Jesus and his family.

<sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, ‘Where did you come to know me?’ Jesus answered, ‘I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.’

#### John 1:48

I saw you. Jesus here displays supernatural knowledge, thus identifying himself as the Messiah.

The fig tree often serves as a metaphor for Israel and its standing before God: <<*When I wanted to gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them*>> (Jeremiah 8:13), <<*Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved*>> (Hosea 9:10), and: <<*It has laid waste my vines, and splintered my fig trees; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches have turned white*>> (Joel 1:7). Under the fig tree also serves as a metaphor for someone who is studying the Scriptures, indicating that is what Nathanael was doing before Philip called him.

<sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’

#### John 1:49

The Son of God designates Jesus as the Messiah predicted in the OT: <<*I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me*>> (2 Samuel 7:14a), and: <<*I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you*>> (Psalm 2:7).

The King of Israel likewise is an OT designation for the Messiah: <<*The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more*>> (Zephaniah 3:15). The two terms are also found side by side in comments made about Jesus when he was on the Cross: <<*He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, “I am God’s Son”*>> (Matthew 27:42-43).

This Gospel’s use of these titles right from the outset is different than the Synoptics’, where Peter does not confess Jesus as Messiah until halfway into the story, refer to Matthew 16:16, Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20. It is unlikely that the disciples would have taken long to begin wondering whether Jesus were

the Messiah, but John, agreeing with the Synoptic Gospels, allows that they had to grow in their understanding of who Jesus really is. Each of Jesus' titles affirmed in this chapter is true, so the disciples have glimpsed something of Jesus' identity. But much purging of error and further illumination will be necessary before they truly grasp what they are saying.

<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.'<sup>51</sup> And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

### John 1:50-51

You will see greater things than these. Jesus alludes to the many signs and wonders he will perform in their presence, and of his being served and ministered to by angelic beings, such as the time following his temptation: <<*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him*>> (Matthew 4:11), and in the Garden of Gethsemane: <<*Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength*>> (Luke 22:43).

Very truly, I tell you is a solemn affirmation stressing the authoritative nature and importance of Jesus' pronouncements. The expression is found 25 times in this Gospel. The references to you here are plural.

See heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending recalls the story of Jacob in Genesis Chapter 28, especially: <<*And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it*>> (Genesis 28:12). Jesus will be a greater way of access to God than the heavenly ladder on which angels travelled between God and Jacob: <<*Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)*>> (Hebrews 10:19-20), and wherever Jesus is, that place will become the 'New Bethel' where God is revealed.

Jesus is not merely 'a son of man', i.e. an ordinary male human being, but over 80 times in the Gospels he repeatedly calls himself the Son of Man, suggesting the greatest, most notable son of man of all time. The Son of Man is thus a messianic title that refers back to the mysterious, human-divine figure of 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7:13-14, one who would be given rule over all the nations of the earth forever: <<*Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven'*>> (Matthew 26:64). The Son of Man will be 'lifted up' by being crucified, as noted in comments on 3:14, will provide divine revelation (6:27), and will act with end-time authority (5:27 and 9:39).