

LESSON 2

*January 3-9

Jesus Is *the Best*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1-18.*

Memory Text: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

Key Thought: At the beginning of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word who was God from eternity yet who became flesh. Thus, He alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. John 1:1-18 functions as a prologue to the story of Jesus in the Gospel. It tells an amazing story. The King of the universe, the eternal Creator, became a human being. The One who walked this earth, who became sweaty, tired, and hungry, was intimate with God before the world began, because He Himself was one with God. Although He became part of the human race and was subject to human limitations, He was the One who created the human race and the world in which it lived. The Creator came to serve the creation, even to the point of death. The prologue to John, therefore, interprets everything that happens in the Gospel in the light of the larger perspective of eternity.

The Creator Himself came down and walked among us, spoke our language, and showed us in human terms what God is like. Through the Fourth Gospel, we escape from a narrow world of limited perception into the vast universe of ultimate reality, a view that revelation alone can offer.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*

SUNDAY *January 4*

The Word as Eternal God *(John 1:1, 2).*

The prologue to the Gospel of John *(John 1:1-18)* is beautifully structured in the style of Hebrew poetry, which often uses parallel words and ideas. The simple, yet majestic, grandeur of the language is a fitting complement to the awesome magnificence of the ideas expressed in this section of the Gospel.

How far back in time does “the Word” go? *John 1:1.* What does the phrase “in the beginning” refer to? Why would John want to link these two concepts? *(See also John 1:3.)*

The concept of “the Word” would have been readily recognizable to the ancient Greeks, whether or not they ever had heard of Jesus. For centuries the Greeks had conceived that a divine figure they called “the Word” (*logos* in Greek) was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Source of reason and intelligence, and the Mediator between the great God and the creation. In applying the term *Logos* to Jesus, John was appealing to the Greeks in terms they could understand.

What kind of relationship did the Word have with the Father? *John 1:1, 2, 18.*

Is the Word fully God or in some sort of subordinate position? *John 1:1.*

The first words of the Gospel combine “in the beginning” (*from the Creation story of Gen. 1:1*) with a verb that expresses continuous existence in past time. At the very beginning, at the point when Creation began, the Word was already in continuous existence. He is, therefore, eternal.

But the eternity of the Word is not based on some kind of pre-creation origin in the Father; Jesus was not created by the Father. Instead, from eternity, Jesus, the Word, was distinct from the Father (called “God” in John 1:1 but “Father” in verse 18) but in no sense inferior. “What God was, the Word was” is the brilliantly accurate translation of The New English Bible. The intimate relationship between the Word and the Father was an intimacy of equals. We are not dealing with “Gods” here; there is full unity in the Godhead at the same time that there is intimate relationship among the personalities of the Godhead. (See quotations in Friday’s section.)

MONDAY January 5

Creator and Sustainer (*John 1:3-5*).

How does John make it clear that the preexistent Word was not a created being? *John 1:3*.

This text is so devastatingly clear that one denomination was forced to change the wording of their own Bible translation (adding the word *other*—“all other things were made by him”) in order to maintain their beliefs. The clear intention of this text as it reads is to assert that everyone and everything in all creation was made by “the Word.” He is the Source of everything created. If “not a single thing” was made apart from His action, then He is not the result of an act of creation. As John 1:1 points out, before any creation took place, the Word was already in continuous existence.

This teaching may seem academic or irrelevant, but it is extremely important to Christian faith. It establishes the incredible value that God placed on us at the Cross. The Person who died there was not just another part of God’s creation, such as the sun, the moon, or angels; if He were, the sacrifice would not have the same kind of value it does with Jesus as Creator.

This, then, is no minor sacrifice. At the Cross our value is established in infinite terms: The infinite Son of God died in order to save us; that’s how important we are in the sight of God. This fact is the truest and most stable basis for self-worth.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Colossians 1:16, 17. In what ways do they say the same thing as what John says regarding the role of Christ as our Creator?

“ ‘His name shall be called Immanuel . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

Meditate on what the full deity of Christ means for us, that God Himself died for our sins. Why does that give us so much hope, as compared to a view of the universe in which there is no God or caring Creator?

TUESDAY *January 6*

Rejection and Reception (*John 1:4-13*).

What other function does the Word perform? *John 1:4, 5.*

In the original Creation, the Word was the Author of physical light. He is the One who uses light (the rays of the sun) as part of the process of plant production that sustains physical life on this earth. But the author of our Gospel has more than physical light and life in mind here. He's talking about light in the spiritual sense, as well.

Read John 1:10. Summarize, in your own words, the gist of what that text means.

Without the Word, there would be no rain, no sunshine, no air, no life. The amazing reality is, however, that when the Creator and Sustainer of the universe appeared on earth, He was unknown and unrecognized as such. Even His "very own" rejected the One who gave them life. In light of these verses, the actions of so many people toward Jesus in the Gospel of John, including His disciples (*John 12:16, 14:6-9*), are foolish and tragic.

Yet, the message of this prologue is not all dark.

On what basis is it possible to become children of God? John 1:12, 13? How much human effort is involved?

In the original language of John 1:12, it is the one who "received" (a point in past time) Him and who "believes" (continuous action) in His name who gains the right to become a child of God. This language points to two aspects of becoming right with God. There is the initial point of reception, and there is the ongoing relationship of believing. There is no "once saved always saved" here. Being a child of God has a beginning, but it is also a process that continues as long as a Christian lives.

This "new birth," however, is not achieved by human effort; it is as much a miracle as the original act of creation. And just as the original act of creation must be sustained by the continual miracle of the Word's watchcare (*vss. 4, 5*), so the relationship of the child of God with Jesus involves ongoing belief resulting in an ongoing miracle of spiritual life (*vss. 12, 13*).

In verse 12, John says that those who receive Him become sons of God. Why do some receive Him and some do not? What role does free choice have in the answer? What role does free choice have in the continuation of our spiritual life, as well?

The Humanity of Jesus *(John 1:1, 2, 14).*

Compare John 1:1, 2 with what is said in verse 14. While verses 1-5 focus on the divine preexistence of the Word, verse 14 turns to His nature and status as One who walked on earth as a part of human history. These texts express an incredible paradox. A man of a particular ethnic background, living at a particular time in history, subject to human frailty, turns out to be the divine Word, who created the entire universe.

Eternal <i>(John 1:1)</i>	Earthly <i>(John 1:14)</i>
<p>“was”</p> <p>“was God”</p> <p>“with God”</p>	<p>“among us”</p> <p>“became”</p> <p>“became flesh”</p>

The language here is simple yet profound. In John 1:1 the Word “was.” The Greek tense implies continuous past existence. He always “was.” But verse 14 tells us that at a point in time the Word “became” flesh. The word translated “became” in verse 14 is the same as the one translated “made” in verse 3. When the Word became flesh, it was an act of creation, something added to His ongoing, eternal nature. Though He “was” God, He also “became” flesh. In the process, the Word went from being “with God” to being “with us.” The entire Gospel of John becomes an expression of Jesus’ humanity while He was here on earth. One struggles here to express truth that is simply stated in John 1 yet is so profound that “the whole world would not have room for the books” that could be written about it *(John 21:25, NIV)*. In simple language John has articulated the full range of both the Word’s divine and human natures. He is the God-man. He is from heaven yet of earth. He always was, yet He also became. He was eternal, yet He also has a created existence.

Because He is fully God, Jesus could reveal what God is like in the highest sense. Because He became fully human, that revelation is accessible to us at a level we can grasp and follow. “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” *(John 14:9, NIV)*. In the Gospel of John, this difficult but glorious truth is revealed in the prologue but also brought home to our hearts by the Spirit *(John 16:13-15)*.

If possible, obtain some facts on the size of the visible universe. After reading those figures, dwell on the texts and the study for today. How does this help you begin to understand the incredible love that God has for us?

THURSDAY January 8

The Greatest Revelation *(John 1:14-18)*

What did the Word do in order that His glory might be seen on earth? *John 1:14*.

The phrase “made his dwelling” translates from the Greek word for “pitch one’s tent” to mean a reminder of the tabernacle in the wilderness (*Exod. 25:8, 9*). The glory of Jesus that the disciples saw recalls the glory of God’s presence in that tabernacle (*Exod. 40:34, 35*). Things become even more interesting when we discover that in Hebrew the word “to dwell” (*shachan*) and the word for God’s glory in the sanctuary (*shechinah*) come from the same root.

The Old Testament sanctuary was a marvelous source of grace and blessing and continues to instruct us today. But when the Word became flesh, the Old Testament sanctuary was eclipsed by an even greater Source of grace and blessing (*John 1:16*). Jesus is a better revelation of God than even the sanctuary, because in Jesus, God dwelt directly in human flesh, and “we” could behold what was before hidden behind curtains.

What did John the Baptist have to say about the Word? *John 1:15*. **What was he referring to when he said that Jesus came “before” him when, in fact, he had been born before Jesus?** *See Luke 1*.

In Jesus’ day the two greatest human figures were John the Baptist and Moses. John was revered by many as a contemporary prophet, Moses as the great deliverer of Israel and giver of the Law.

But the prologue makes clear that Jesus is no ordinary human being. He is greater than the greatest men known to the people of the time. He was the best, because He was God made flesh. In His person it became possible for human beings to know what God was like. He came to reveal a world far beyond the ability of our senses to know and comprehend.

Moses was a man given an incredible revelation of God (*Exod. 33:19-23*), and yet, even he was allowed to see God only briefly and from the back. In contrast, the Word came to earth as One who had been in continual residence “at the Father’s side”—the Greek implies continual close communion with God.

Think of the infinite humiliation the incarnation of Christ required. How does that rebuke, in the most powerful way, human pride and arrogance? In light of the truth about Christ and the Incarnation, why are these such horrendous sins?

FRIDAY January 9

Further Study: “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

“The only way in which the fallen race could be restored was through the gift of His Son, equal with Himself, possessing the attributes of God. Though so highly exalted, Christ consented to assume human nature, that He might work in behalf of man and reconcile to God His disloyal subject.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, November 8, 1892.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why did John begin his Gospel with thoughts about Creation, and even before Creation, when all the other Gospels begin with either the birth of Jesus or His adult ministry? What theological point was he making?
- 2 As we saw this week, John uses sanctuary imagery in referring to Christ (*John 1:14*). And though the earthly-sanctuary service was ended after Christ’s death, what role did the sanctuary have that is so important in helping us understand just what Christ did for us when He was in the flesh and also what He is doing for us now as our High Priest?
- 3 How would you answer someone who rejects the Deity or pre-existence of Christ on scientific or logical grounds?

Summary: John 1:1-18 tells us that the King of the universe, the eternal Creator, chose to become a human being. In simple yet profound terms, John expresses the full contrast between the divine and human natures of Jesus. No being in the universe is more divine than Jesus, nor is any more human. In His person He combines everything we need to become children of God. The rest of the Gospel will unpack how this can take place in our lives today.

The Difference Jesus Makes

by J. H. ZACHARY

Yohana was a farmer living in Rwanda. In the forest near his home live the Twa people, pygmies, who are descendants of the original inhabitants of Rwanda. Today their numbers have dwindled to just a few thousand. These people do not farm, but move from place to place searching for food. When there is not enough food, they steal from the farmers. They earn a small wage making pottery for neighboring tribes.

Yohana learned that there were no Christians among the Twa in his area. He had a burden to reach them for Christ. For days he prayed for these neighbors who live hidden in the dense forests.

One day Yohana met a Twa man. Yohana invited him to church, but the man told him, "I cannot come to church because I do not have clothing." Yohana and another elder gave the man a shirt and trousers, and two weeks later the man appeared in church. The Holy Spirit touched his heart, and he responded to the call to accept Jesus as his personal Savior.

Yohana and a friend visited the new believer in his jungle home. "Why have you come here?" the surprised villagers asked.

Yohana replied, "We have learned that Jesus is coming soon to give people a new life in a wonderful place in the sky. We want you to come with us." The loving friendship of Yohana and his friend touched their hearts. As a result of the testimony of the converted tribesman, 14 Twa visited Yohana's church the next Sabbath.

The Holy Spirit spoke to these searchers, and they began studying the Bible with the Adventist men. As they studied God's eternal truths, they accepted Christ's invitation to "follow Me."

The government moved the Twa to a new location. Yohana helped them find Adventist believers in their new area, and he continues to visit them regularly. He is looking forward to their baptism.

The rest of the Twa are seeing the difference that Christ makes in the lives of the 15 Twa believers. They are changing the way they live. They no longer steal from the farmers; friendships are replacing former hostility. The power of the gospel is changing the entire community. Even Yohana's fellow villagers are amazed at how dramatically this group of Twa has changed.

Seeing how God has changed him and those for whom he has labored, Yohana became a literature evangelist, so he can sell gospel literature and seek for more souls to lead to Christ.

J. H. ZACHARY is coordinator of international evangelism for *The Quiet Hour*.