

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (PART I)

Study 1

IN THE BEGINNING

Read John 1: 1-18

In studying John's Gospel we soon become aware of a marked difference from the other three Gospels - called the Synoptics. Some people have asked, 'Why a fourth gospel?' Surely the others gave a clear enough picture of the history of Jesus without the need of a fourth. The very fact that John is known as the 'fourth gospel' seems to set it apart from the others. Yet our New Testament would be the poorer without it. Written by the Apostle John in quite simple style, it contains some of the most deep and wonderful ideas in the whole of the Bible.

WHY did John write his account of the Lord Jesus Christ? It is strange, but we have to get almost to the end of the gospel before we find the reason. Look at **20: 30-31**. He makes it very clear to his readers that many of the acts of the Lord Jesus were never recorded. In **21: 25** he says that if they had been written down the whole world could not contain the books needed. **"But these are written"**, says John, **"that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."** Keep this great fact in mind as you work at the gospel. It is very important. The aim of John was to present in his writings, such a picture of the Lord Jesus that it would be clear to everyone that He is the Son of God. It is imperative that everyone should believe this in order to find LIFE - ETERNAL LIFE.

WHERE does John begin his story? Here we find the greatest contrast between the fourth gospel and the others. Matthew, Mark and Luke all begin with the human circumstances of the life and work of Jesus. They introduce us to Christ on an earthly level straight away, but not John. Look carefully at **1: 1**. **"IN THE BEGINNING was the WORD and the Word was WITH GOD and the WORD WAS GOD."** Where have you read the words **"In the beginning"** before? Surely **Genesis 1: 1**. Then does John begin his account of the life of the Lord Jesus at this point? He does. He calls the Lord Jesus **"the WORD"** because all that God thinks, and plans and speaks is found in Him. He was WITH GOD and IS GOD. If we miss this vital point the rest of the gospel will not make sense. The EXISTENCE of which John speaks in relation to the Lord Jesus takes us back to the very beginning. So truly is Jesus God Incarnate that in **verse 3** we read that the creation of which **Genesis 1: 1** speaks was the work of the Lord Jesus. HE IS GOD in every sense of the word. Master in your thinking as you study this valuable New Testament book, why John wrote it and where his life of Jesus began.

The first 18 verses of John's Gospel are spoken of as the PROLOGUE to the book. The 'seedplot' of the gospel is found in these verses. Remember that whatever he says about Jesus in the higher realm of His existence, he says he is still going to give us a picture of a man. The fact that He was **"in the beginning"** does not alter this truth at all.

The prologue prepares the way for an understanding of the life of **"THE WORD"** in **"THE WORLD"**. Notice how John introduces us to the idea of LIGHT. This is one of his great words around which he builds his teaching. Two other words that go along with it are LIFE and LOVE. Work your way through the gospel with these in mind. You will be surprised how much they support the structure of all he teaches. So the light shines as Jesus comes into the world. **Verse 5** tells us that the darkness could not extinguish or overcome this TRUE LIGHT.

We have a **WITNESS** to the light which shone as Jesus came. **"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John"**. (**verses 6-9**) The business of John the Baptist was to witness to the Lord Jesus. His ministry and testimony prepared the way for the greater ministry of Jesus. Notice how in **verse 15** he gives his witness to the eternal character of Christ. Says John Baptist **"He who comes after me" (verse 15)** - in point of time the birth of Jesus followed John's. Yet **"He is preferred before me, for He was before me"** - so John sums up the existence of Christ before time began. This is very important to grasp if the true nature of the Lord Jesus as God and man is to be understood.

John tells **WHAT** it means for Jesus to become a man. Look at **verse 14**, **"The WORD BECAME FLESH and dwelt among us."** The question is bound to come into your mind 'How can we find God and man in the same person?' **1 Timothy 3: 16** calls it the **"mystery of godliness"**. We shall never fully understand it. We can say, as we study **verse 14** and **verse 18**, one or two definite things.

1. Jesus was completely MAN - apart from sin (**see Hebrews 4: 15b**) He did not merely become LIKE a man. He WAS a man - **"the WORD became FLESH, and dwelt among us."**
2. So it was REAL MANHOOD. John's picture of Jesus is as real as the other three gospels present. He could be weary. (**John 4: 6**) He could weep. (**John 11: 35**) He really died. (**John 19: 30**) Think about these things.
3. Therefore we must believe that the Lord Jesus was as much God as man, although He became man. This is where difficulties come in. He was not a ghost, or phantom as some suggest. He did not become man at one point and God at another in His earthly life. He was both together, ALL THE TIME, and John says that **'we beheld His Glory** - as of God's only Son'. (**verse 14**)

Do you realise how wonderful this is? Man had never seen God at any time. (**verse 18**) Now in Jesus, God was revealed and made known. Whatever we need to know about God we can learn in the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall realise this as we study the gospel together. Make sure as you finish this lesson that you know the meaning of **verse 12**. To receive the Lord Jesus, even though the world did not know Him (**verses 10-11**) means to have the right to be called the children of God. This great honour and relationship comes to those **"who believe in His Name"**.

Study 2

IN THE WORLD

Read

John 1: 19-51

We have noticed that John, the writer of the fourth gospel, goes back to the beginning of creation - even before this - in his presentation of the Lord Jesus to us. **"In the beginning WAS THE WORD". (verse 1)** Now notice **verse 10. "He was IN THE WORLD and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."** John is going to unfold to us all what it means for us to be confronted by the WORD IN THE WORLD. It is obvious that in the WORD and the Lord Jesus we have the same Person. Some deny this and even in John's day there were errors abroad which denied that Jesus was the Son of God - God Himself. John's gospel and letters are a tower of strength to any who have to meet errors relating to the Person of Christ.

The AIM of John in presenting this portrait of the Lord Jesus was that people in his day and ours should BELIEVE in Him. It would be a good exercise if you took a concordance and followed the idea of **"believing"** right the way through the gospel. The FIRST mention of it is in **1: 12**. Although **verse 11** says that **"He came to His own and His own did not receive Him"**. **Verse 12** makes it clear that the special privilege of those who believe in His Name is the right to become God's children. Entry into God's family comes by believing in the Lord Jesus. The LAST mention of believing is in **20: 31**. John here sums up the reason for his writing and again makes it clear that LIFE comes through believing in His Name. Let us get this fact clear in our study of John's Gospel. You will find many facts outlined - ideas that are wonderful. But here is the AIM of the writer - that all may BELIEVE that Jesus is God's Son.

Two main facts come from the study of the passage for this lesson:

1. The WITNESS of John the Baptist to CHRIST, **verses 19 - 37**.
2. The WITNESS of the first DISCIPLES to CHRIST, **verses 38 - 51**.

1. The WITNESS of JOHN THE BAPTIST.

We can do no better in this study than just notice HOW the Lord Jesus is described. The Jews sent to John with the question **"Who are you?" (verse 19)** They were intrigued by the revolutionary ministry of this strange man. Notice the clear way in which the question is answered. Not Christ, or Elijah, or the great expected prophet. John knows where he stands in relation to the Lord Jesus. He is just a VOICE, preparing the way for The Messiah to come. John felt and expressed his sense of unworthiness in the face of the greatness of Christ. It is at this point that John points to Jesus as he sees Him on the next day. **"Behold! The LAMB of GOD who takes away the sin of the world". (verse 29)** You will find seven descriptions of Jesus in this chapter. The WORD is the first - this is the second. The WORD in the WORLD becomes the LAMB OF GOD to bear away its sin. Always in the Bible, the LAMB is the symbol of sacrifice. If you go back through the Old Testament you can confirm this. **Genesis 22: 8; Exodus 12: 3-7; Isaiah 53 : 6-7** are three outstanding examples of this fact. John looked at Jesus and said in effect 'Here is the Lamb for sacrifice - a sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world'.

Think carefully about this.

John also describes Jesus as the **SON OF GOD**. You will notice that the baptism and temptations of the Lord Jesus recorded in the Synoptics are not included by John in his

record. Yet **verses 32 - 34** describe the descending of the Spirit upon the Lord at His baptism. This was the sign to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Son of God. He saw it and bare record for us. So John the Apostle is able to begin his gospel with the twofold witness of John the Baptist to Christ. He is the Lamb of God - He is the Son of God. SACRIFICE and SONSHIP - these two great truths are involved in the picture we have of the WORD in the WORLD.

2. The WITNESS of the first DISCIPLES, **verses 35-51**.

When John gave his witness to Jesus as the Lamb of God he lost two disciples. **(verses 35-37)** They left John and followed Jesus. John did not complain. His business was accomplished and he retires into the background. There is much we can learn from these verses. Notice that Jesus invites the disciples to see where He stays and they stay with Him. **(verse 39)** Also, it is interesting to notice how the disciples introduced each other to the Lord Jesus. This makes a study in itself. But there are four other descriptions of Christ in this section which make up the witness of these men to Christ as they began to follow Him.

(i) **The MESSIAH, verse 41.** Andrew was glad to find his own brother Peter and this is how he described Him. The idea of the Messiah is the SENT ONE, the One who was promised - the Anointed of God. The conflict which we shall notice between Jesus and the Jews arose because they would not recognise His claims as the Messiah. Good for Andrew that he recognised the Lord Jesus in this way!

(ii) **JESUS OF NAZARETH, verse 45.** Philip goes after Nathanael and this is how he introduces the Lord Jesus, the Son of Joseph - Jesus the man. Here we have the name that means SAVIOUR and we shall notice in the gospel of John how the idea of Salvation is worked out. The presence of the Lord Jesus in the world meant Salvation for men.

(iii) **KING OF ISRAEL, verse 49.** Nathanael or Bartholomew of the other gospels (**Luke 6: 14**) was amazed that the Lord Jesus knew so much about him. He confesses Him as the Son of God, just as John had in **verse 34**. Then he gives to Jesus the title of King of Israel. There is no doubt of the fact that one day this will be true of Christ as He reigns in the world as King.

(iv) **SON OF MAN, verse 51.** Here is a title that is used only by the Lord Jesus of Himself. We can say more about it later, but the importance of it lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus used it to describe Himself in His mission as MAN in the World.

We have covered a lot of ground in this lesson. But it all centres around the Lord Jesus - in the World. Try to master the meaning of it.

Study 3

THE MIRACLES 1

Read

John 2: 1-11; 4: 46-54; 5: 1-9

There are fewer miracles recorded in John's Gospel than in the other three. When we look for the reason for this, there is a fairly straightforward answer. The writer of the Fourth Gospel chose his miracles as SIGNS to illustrate different features of the power of the Lord Jesus. Remember that when John wrote he was writing for Christians. Also it was the last of the gospels to be written. Therefore, he probably had a number of years to reflect on the MEANING of the events which he

described. Thus he weaves together all that he records to give the portrait of Jesus he wants us to have. He also had in mind those who were denying some of the truth that centred around the Person and work of Christ. There were heresies - wrong and false teachings - abroad. This is why the facts that are emphasised in this gospel are so important for us to grasp. We have to face today many errors in teaching about the Lord Jesus.

There are seven SIGNS that John gives to us in his record. We are going to look at three of them in this lesson.

1. Turning Water into Wine. **2: 1-11**
2. Healing the Nobleman's Son. **4: 46-54**
3. Healing the Impotent Man at the Pool. **5: 1-9**

Read the narrative carefully and also read the context - the verses which come before and after the miracles. Try to ask yourself in each case WHY He did these things.

1. TURNING WATER INTO WINE. (2: 1-11)

The wedding at Cana of Galilee was the occasion for the first of the miracles that Jesus performed and only John records it. We notice that it was an occasion of JOY. Yet it was a joy that was in danger of being marred because the resources of merriment had run out. **"NO WINE"**. (verse 3) We can imagine that it was a very urgent appeal that Mary, His mother, brought to Jesus. Whatever you do, don't overlook the words with which Jesus answered His mother, **"My hour has not yet come"**. (verse 4) They are important and I suggest that you look through the gospel with **"the hour"** in mind. For the Lord Jesus, everything in life was marked out clearly and this hour of which He spoke was the hour of His death at Calvary. Then, for a while He would give Himself up to men's power. But not now, and this is why He spoke as He did to Mary.

The MIRACLE came when the water was turned into wine. Out of the ORDINARY the Lord Jesus brought the EXTRAORDINARY to satisfy these people and bring them joy. There are perhaps other things we could say about this miracle. We must not overlook the command of Mary to the servants, **"Whatever He says to you, do it"**. (verse 5) This is a piece of necessary advice for all of us. But looking at the miracle in the context of the message of John, we see something of the character of the LIFE the Lord Jesus gives. In **John 10: 10** He calls it life more abundant. Earthly sources of joy and gladness will always be exhausted just when needed most. But the Lord Jesus can take the ordinary things of our lives and change them into that which satisfies and does not fail. Thus the Lord Jesus in this first miracle **"manifested His glory"**. (verse 11) His disciples believed on Him. Remember John's emphasis on believing?

2. HEALING the NOBLEMAN'S SON. (4: 46-54)

This second miracle at Cana is also only recorded by John. Compare it with the story of the Roman Centurion's servant who was healed, **Matthew 8: 5 - 10**. You will easily notice the differences. Here again the emphasis is on believing. The man said, **"Come down"** - he could only see healing if the Lord Jesus came to his house. Notice the challenge of **verse 48**. It looks as if Jesus was probing into the mind of the man to bring out what he really believed. But in this SIGN, the Lord goes beyond this nobleman's faith. He heals his son without going with him. It was healing from a distance and it was done in spite of the limitations of the man's faith. The power of the Lord Jesus is displayed and the household believes. This miracle is a rebuke to a faith that is limited. We can be encouraged to commit all into the hands of the Lord Jesus. He works in His own way.

3. THE IMPOTENT MAN AT THE POOL. (5: 1-9)

This, the third SIGN, is again only found recorded in John's Gospel. It presents to us two features of helplessness. Here was a man who could not help himself. But also, he could not find anyone else to help him. **"Sir, I have no man"**, was a terrible admission of loneliness. The miracle came when he took up his bed and walked. (verse 9) Notice that it happened immediately upon the command of the Lord Jesus. It also took place on the Sabbath. (verse 9) It was here at this point in the narrative of the gospel, that John records the beginning of the bitter strife between Jesus and the Jews. (verse 16) We shall look at this in more detail later. For the man at the pool it was a tremendous blessing - the beginning of a new life. Notice **verse 14** especially. It is obvious from this verse that sin had something to do with the condition of the man. **"Sin no more", said Jesus, "lest a worse thing come upon you"**. (verse 14) Here was a call to a new life spiritually as well as physically. We can learn the lesson that SIN makes us HELPLESS to walk in God's ways. The Lord Jesus alone can give us the power to RISE UP and WALK. Let us make sure that we are walking in right ways - the ways that please HIM.

Study 4

THE MIRACLES 2



John 6: 1-21; 9: 1-12; 11: 1-44

We now study four more SIGNS performed by the Lord Jesus. They are as follows:

1. Feeding the Multitude. **6: 1-14**
2. Walking on the Sea. **6: 15-21**
3. Healing the Man born Blind. **9: 1-12**
4. Raising Lazarus from the Dead. **11: 1-44**

You will notice that woven into these actions we have some of the 'WORD SIGNS' of the Lord Jesus - the series of **"I AM"** sayings. We shall study these later, but it would be a good idea to note them as you work through the gospel. There are seven of them.

Now let us look at these miracles.

(i) FEEDING THE MULTITUDE. (6: 1-14)

Each of the gospels record this miracle. It is a good exercise to look at them and see where they agree and where they differ. Notice WHEN this happened - the Passover, the feast of the Jews was approaching, **verse 4**. It has been said that John built his gospel around three occurrences of this feast. Remember that John the Baptist described Jesus as the Lamb of God. At the centre of the Passover feast was a LAMB. **See Exodus 12**. There is an interesting connection and it seems that John had this in mind as he wrote his gospel.

We must especially notice that this SIGN leads into the teaching of the Lord about Himself as the Bread of Life. He took the bread and shared it, through His disciples, with the multitude. The miracle shows us the Lord Jesus as the great SATISFIER of men's hunger. The beauty of the story lies in the words **"There is a lad here"**, **verse 9**. This is one of the simple touches of the gospel. It is good to notice that although John presents us with such an exalted picture of Jesus, he is able to relate that the lunch of a boy provided a feast for a multitude. So, little is much if it is placed in the hands of the Saviour. This is true of your life and mine too. He can use us to bring help to people who need the Lord. One point in this story tells us that the Lord Jesus was

more than man. **Verse 6** says about Jesus, **“He Himself knew what He would do.”** Here is another study for you to do. Look through John and make a note of what he says about the knowledge of Jesus.

(ii) WALKING ON THE SEA. (6: 15-21)

The Lord Jesus escaped the multitude when He knew they wanted to make Him king. He knew their motive for doing this. They were merely interested in material things - the food He could supply them with. Here again the fact that the Lord Jesus is God is brought out. (**verse 15**) He perceived that they would make Him king. As someone has said, they wanted Messiah *‘on the cheap’*. His spiritual plans were of far greater importance, and they rejected these.

While Jesus was alone on the mountain, the disciples in the boat struggled with the waves and the winds. In the dark, a storm on the sea took a lot of handling, even for experienced fishermen as these were. Fear struck them as they saw Jesus walking towards them on the water. He proves that He is master of the waves. Notice that in this SIGN, as soon as they receive Him into the boat, they *‘arrived’* at their destination. John makes this point very well. We can learn that the presence of the Lord Jesus banishes fear. And when we take Him into our lives we are sure to arrive safely - life is secure.

(iii) HEALING THE MAN BORN BLIND. (9: 1-12)

It is interesting in studying this miracle to remember that the power of the Lord Jesus to heal physical blindness, challenged the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. **Chapter 9** is a very full chapter and much of it you must study for yourself. It is very evident that matters in relation to the reaction of the Pharisees to Christ had reached a critical point. They would even cast a man, who had been healed by Jesus, out of the Synagogue because he gave his testimony. For the man it was wonderful to have such a testimony to give. It meant new life for him, **“A man called Jesus ... anointed my eyes . . . I went and washed and I received sight”**. (**verse 11**) It came from the reality of experience. (**verse 25**) The climax of the SIGN comes as the man believed and worshipped the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. (**verses 35-38**) He was given more than natural sight. This takes us back to **1: 18** - the Lord Jesus came to reveal God to men. Only the Divine Son could do this.

(iv) THE RAISING OF LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD. (11: 1-44)

In this miracle or SIGN, only recorded by John, we come to the last in the public ministry of the Lord. It brings a climax of TRIUMPH in the works of the Saviour. We see demonstrated His power as the Son of God. Notice John’s aim again in recording this is consistent with the purpose of his gospel. **Verse 4** says that its intention was that the **“Son of God may be glorified”**. **Verse 45** in stating the outcome of the miracle, clearly indicates that many believed. Link these two ideas again with **20: 30-31**. Here we can see the challenge of SIN and DEATH to the power of the Lord Jesus. Notice His LOVE for the FAMILY. (**verse 5**) In His delay in going to the home there was no unkindness - He was working to a DESIGN, as He always did. Both Martha and Mary pour out their sorrow when they meet Him. Yet He was in CONTROL and proves Himself to be the CONQUEROR of Death, **verses 43- 45**.

Make sure in your studies of these seven SIGNS which prove the power of the Lord Jesus, that you study them in the context of the gospel. We shall consider his SAYINGS in the next two lessons.

Questions

Study 1 - In the Beginning

1. What is the link between **John 1: 1** and **Genesis 1: 1**?
2. What was the distinct purpose of John in writing the fourth Gospel?
3. In what way does the beginning of John’s Gospel differ from that of the other three?
4. a) What are the three great words around which John builds his Gospel?
b) What did John the Baptist do for **“the Light”** as a man sent from God?
5. What have you learned about the manhood of the Lord Jesus from this lesson?

Study 2 - In the World

1. John wrote to correct an error, which we still have in the world today. What was this error?
2. Where do we find the first mention of **“Believing”** in the Gospel and what is the result of this?
3. Say in your own words what **“the LAMB of GOD”** means when we apply it to the Lord Jesus.
4. What SIGN did John the Baptist see which convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God?
5. Take two of the titles which the first disciples gave to Jesus and explain what each meant.

Study 3 - The Miracles 1

1. For what purpose did John record these miracles of Jesus in his gospel?
2. What did Jesus mean when He spoke of **“His hour”**?
3. What great lesson do we learn from the miracle of turning water into wine? What was the result of it?
4. In what way did the Lord Jesus go beyond the faith of the Nobleman in healing his son?
5. What does the miracle of the impotent man teach us about the effect of sin, and the power of the Lord Jesus IN OUR LIVES?

Study 4 - The Miracles 2

1. What have you learned about John and the **“Passover”** from this lesson?
2. Following the ‘feeding’ SIGN, to what did the Lord Jesus liken Himself?
3. What happened as soon as the disciples received the Lord Jesus into the boat?
4. In what way was the miracle of giving the blind man sight, a challenge to the Pharisees in their attitude to Jesus?
5. Give a sentence, twice repeated in **Chapter 11**, which shows that neither Martha nor Mary understood the mind of the Lord Jesus, in allowing this apparent tragedy. What does that teach us?