

John 1b John Introduces the Word

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Overview

Following Mlakuzhyil (pp. 91, 149), the introduction to the gospel consists of three sections, each corresponding to a distinct clause in 20:30,31, in chiasmic order.

30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:	2:1-11, Initial Sign in Cana of Galilee
31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;	1:19-51, John's testimony to Jesus as the Christ
and that believing ye might have life through his name.	1:1-18, the spiritual birth of those who believe on his name (1:12 at center of chiasm)

This section grows out of the prolog.

- It amplifies the testimony of John (1:6-8, 15).
- It gives us the first examples of those who “received him” and “believe on his name” (1:12).
- Its geographical references remind us that those who receive him are not to be found in “his own [home]”. The first of these sections (1:1-18) is non-narrative and has no location, but the second and third are given clear locations. Both of these are outside Jerusalem and even outside Judaea, emphasizing that in this cycle the Lord is not among “his own.”
 - 1:19-51 takes place “beyond Jordan” (28), at the unspecified lodging place of Jesus (39), and in Galilee (43).
 - 2:1-11 occurs in “Cana of Galilee.”

The section is punctuated chronologically, by reference to successive days (1:29, 35, 43; 2:1), a scheme that carries us over to ch. 2. Note that it also yields a total of seven days, reinforcing John's imitation of Genesis, begun with 1:1 (“in the beginning”).

The section begins with three denials by John as to who he is. He is not

- The Christ
- Elijah (Greek “Elias”)
- “that prophet,” predicted by Moses in Deut 18:18.

It then continues to show that Jesus is the rightful owner of two of those titles; the third title is his according to 2:1-11, which is thus even more tightly bound to the two preceding sections. In addition, this section ascribes him the titles “lamb of God,” “Son of God” (crucial in 20:31), and “King of Israel.”

19-28, John and the Inquisitors

The prolog drew a sharp contrast between those who receive the Lord Jesus and those who do not. John begins his narrative with an encounter between the first person who received him (John the Baptist) and the prototypical group that did not (“priests and Levites from Jerusalem,” “Pharisees”).

The rejectors ask him three questions.

19, “Who Art Thou?” (Negative Answer)

John’s initial answer implies an unspoken assumption on the part of the Pharisees. There were many in that day who arose as charismatic leaders and some element of Messianic claim (Acts 5:36, 37), and it would be the responsibility of the temple priesthood to investigate these claims. (Notice “sent” in vv. 19, 22, 24.)

Application: Note that the strongest opposition to Christ and his messenger comes from within the “organized church,” those who have something to lose by change in the spiritual order. Organized religion and civil government conspired to execute Christ, and they have regularly been the adversaries of his people (Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*). We must be constantly aware that one may have the form of godliness while denying its power (2 Tim 3:5).

The three titles that John denies are all associated with the messianic promise.

- “Christ” (20) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah,” which means “anointed one.” (“Christ” comes from the same root as “christen.”) Three offices in ancient Israel were marked by anointing: the prophet (Elisha in 1 Kings 19:16), the priest (Exod 30:23-30; Psa 133:2), and the king (1 Sam 15:1). The Messiah would hold all of these offices.
- “Elias” (21) is the Greek version of “Elijah,” mentioned in Mal 4:5, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”
- “That prophet” is a reference to Deut 18:18, the prophet like unto Moses, whom Moses told the nation to expect.

22, “Who Art Thou?” (Positive Answer)

John answers them in the language of Isa 40:3, the great song of comfort to Israel after the judgment of the Babylonian captivity announced in 38:6-7. He is preparing the people for the advent of Jehovah. (We must remember that “Lord” in Isa 40:3 is YHWH, the ineffable name of God. John’s testimony in 1:15 already shows his appreciation of the deity of Christ, and this is implicit in his use of Isa 40:3.)

25, “Why baptizest thou?”

Their question has three possible senses:

1. Why do **you** baptize? This is the question that the Pharisees have in mind, and that the Baptist answers here.
2. Why do you **baptize**? (as opposed to some other ritual?) This question is not in focus; the Evangelist assumes that his readers understand the significance of baptism. But we may need some help with it.

3. **Why** do you baptize? This is a more neutral question, and John responds to it in v.31.

In response to the third question, we must understand that Jewish baptism was (and is) part of the process of converting to Judaism, a rite of purification by which Gentiles washed away their pollution to become Jews. John does not need to spell this out, because he assumes the Synoptics, which had already made the point that John's baptism involved repentance (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).

In applying it to Jews, John is asserting the moral failings of the chosen people. In the minds of the Pharisees, the self-righteous legalizers, such a challenge might be brought by a promised eschatological figure, but not by an unknown wilderness preacher. Thus they challenge his authority to do such a thing, just as they will later challenge the authority of the Lord himself (2:18; cf. Matt 21:23). "Why do **you**, a hermit without ecclesiastical credentials or even a supposition of Messianic authority, baptize?"

John's answer is twofold.

1. He contrasts himself with them: "I [emphatic] baptize with water, ... you know not." He has already claimed to act as the forerunner of the Messiah, whom they cannot even recognize. He as one who recognizes the Messiah surely does not need to answer for his actions to them, who do not.
2. Yet he does not glory over them, but proclaims his own unworthiness. "It's not just that I condemn you all of sin. I myself am unworthy." He emphasizes the contrast in two ways.
 - a. First, he utters the statement that was quoted of him in 1:15 (and that he will repeat in 1:30)).
 - b. Second, he declares himself unworthy to loose Messiah's shoe. The comment about the shoe-latchet is particularly revealing. In Rabbinic teaching, a disciple could be required to perform a wide range of tasks in service of his teacher, but the teacher could not require him to do anything that required him to touch another's feet. That was the task of a slave. John does not merely characterize himself as a disciple of the Messiah. He declares that he is unworthy even to be his slave.

Application: John's humble testimony is an example for us. We do not need to be perfect in order to encourage others spiritually. We can be candid and vulnerable about our own lowly position, because our witness is not to glorify ourselves, but to exalt Christ. (How remarkable that by the end of this gospel, our Lord himself will wash his disciples' feet, in order to give them an example for how they should conduct themselves.)

In the following four episodes, Jesus is introduced under a variety of titles, including the three that John has rejected.

29-34, John and Jesus

John told the delegation from Jerusalem that the Messiah "standeth ... among you," but did not introduce them to the Lord. Perhaps the Lord was not present, for on the next two days, when Jesus was present in the crowd, John did call peoples' attention to him with public announcements. This section depicts one such public announcement. It has two parts:

1. 29-30 record what John said on this occasion when Jesus appeared in the crowd.

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2. 31-34 are John's recollection of how he came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, at the time some period before when he baptized Jesus.

Each of these sections introduces a new title for the Messiah, one that the Jewish leaders did not use.

There is chiasmic structure within the paragraph, with the turning point marked by the narrative comment at 32, "John bare record." See the handout. This structure helps us understand better the two titles that John introduces.

Titles of Christ	29a Lamb of God	34 Son of God
Functions	29b carry the sin of the world	33 baptize with the HS
"I knew him not"	30-31, Jesus' relation to John (priority; role of the baptizer)	32-33a, Jesus' relation to the Spirit

29-30, John introduces Jesus as the Divine Lamb of God

Behold the Lamb of God.—This is the pattern of John's public testimony, repeated again in v.36. Note both his *action* and his *content*.

His *action* is the exhortation, "Behold." This word calls people's attention to something they might not otherwise have noticed. "Look! Don't miss this!" It is the essence of witness, sharing with others what we have noticed ourselves.

His *content* focuses on Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, familiar to every Jew from the Passover sacrifices, as well as many other temple sacrifices. He may have had Isa 53:7,10 in mind, which predicts that the Messiah would be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," in order to "make his soul an offering for sin." This is the essential element of the gospel: not Jesus as creator (leading to arguments about evolution), nor Jesus as returning Lord (leading to speculations about eschatology), nor Jesus as moral teacher (leading to discussions of morality), but first of all Jesus as the sacrifice who can take away sin.

This is not a title that the Jewish rulers considered using for the Messiah, in spite of clear indications such as Isa 53. In their self-righteousness, they would not acknowledge the inadequacy of their own sacrifices, and the need for God to reach down and save them.

Why does he call him "the Lamb of God"? Was not every sacrificial lamb God's, since it was presented to God? The reference here must be to Gen 22:8, where Isaac asks about the lamb for the sacrifice on Moriah, and Abraham replies, "God will provide for himself a lamb for the burnt sacrifice." The lamb must meet his standards, and must come from him. The Lord Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise, and is in a special sense "God's lamb."

He was before me.—Surprisingly, John immediately connects our Lord's role as the sacrifice with his preexistence as the divine Word of God. How are these related?

The answer is found in the verb translated in v.29, "taketh away." *airw*, which occurs over 390x in the Greek Bible (LXX and NT). This verb overwhelmingly translates the Hebrew verb *ns* "to lift up," which is often applied to sin or guilt in the OT. The usage of this expression is intriguing. It is applied to four different kinds of individuals.

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1. The sinner “bears his iniquity,” Lev 5:1. He carries the guilt resulting from his sin, as a heavy burden, and one that overwhelms him, Gen 4:13.
2. The sacrifice (notably, the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement) “bears their iniquity” away into the wilderness, Lev 16:22. Central to the OT concept of sacrifice is the notion that the sacrifice takes the place of the sinner. So it is natural to understand the sacrificial animal as taking this burden of guilt from the sinner. It is in this sense that Jesus as the lamb of God “takes away” or “carries” the sin of the world.
3. The priest “bears the iniquity of the holy things,” Exod 28:38. Compare Lev 10:17; Num 18:1; Ezek 4:4-6. Some of these verses might be understood to warn that they will be liable for any misconduct in the sanctuary (Exod, Num, compare Exod 28:43), but the references in Lev and Ez cannot be understood in this way. These references rather insist that the priestly function involves in some way carrying the burden of sin for the sinner! How can this be? The answer is found in the fourth usage.
4. Surprisingly, and many times, God is said to “bear the iniquity” of his people! Exod 34:7 is the first of these: “bearing iniquity and transgression and sin.” We are not immediately aware of this idiom because our version regularly translates the verb “forgive” rather than “bear,” but the expression in Hebrew is exactly the same as that which is applied to the sinner.

The intuition lying behind the fourth usage, in which God bears sin, is that he as the lawgiver must exact punishment for sin. If he chooses not to do so, he must assume the responsibility for the moral imbalance that results. The only way he can forgive sin against his laws is by taking the guilt on himself! This logic explains:

- why the Hebrew expression that means “to forgive sin” is the same as that for “bearing sin”;
- why the priest, as God’s representative, is said to “bear the sin” of the people in the process of mediating for them;
- why John, in introducing Jesus as the ultimate sin-bearer, insists on his deity as the pre-existent one. Ultimately, the only sacrifice that can effectively bear our sin is one that is divine.

In the light of John’s collocation of “lamb of God” and “he was before me,” it is tempting to understand “lamb of God” as an appositional genitive, “the lamb who is God,” or attributive, “the divine lamb.” This would be true, but linguistically unprecedented: where else is “of God” used appositionally or attributively? Perhaps in “Spirit of God” or “angel of God,” but the Bible’s strong opposition to idolatry makes it unlikely that “of God” could be used attributively or appositionally with the name of a creature.

The sin of the world.—Recall our discussion in the prolog of the meaning of “world” in John. It is a term of quality, not quantity. It describes rather than counts. His point is not that Christ has borne everyone’s penalty—otherwise everyone would be saved. It is that he has carried the guilt justly attributed to the rebellious world system that has set itself against God.

31-34, John bears record to Jesus as the Son of God

31 is a link. It comes before the narrative comment “And John bare record,” but its purpose is plainly to introduce and explain that record.

In these verses, John reveals how he came to recognize the Messiah, and in the process answers the third version of the Pharisees’ question, “**Why** do you baptize?” Answer: because this is how God told me that I would recognize the Messiah. “Go baptize, and when the person you baptize is marked out by the Spirit, proclaim him as the Messiah.”

God could have designated the Messiah in other ways. The Jews were expecting some majestic entry along the lines of Rev 19. This approach emphasizes his place as a member of the nation Israel. He is marked out from the many who came to be baptized, emphasizing how completely the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us.

I knew him not.—This denial (in both 31 and 33) seems at first glance to contradict Matt 3:14,15, which suggests that John recognized Jesus as the Messiah before his baptism and the descent of the Spirit.

There are several approaches to resolving this tension. All depend on distinguishing different nuances in what it meant for John to “know” Jesus.

1. Can anything be made of the particular verb oida (rather than ginwskw used here? Probably not.

- *Trench does not treat the word*
- *Burton (on Gal 4:8,9) distinguishes ginwskw as inchoative, “learn, come to know” vs. oida as state. John 8:55; Matt 24:43 and //’s; Heb 8:11; Mark 4:13; John 13:7 fit this.*
- *Cremer 229-230 claims that ginwskw implies “an active relation l... a self-reference of the knower to the object of his knowledge,” while oida simply asserts that “the object has come within the sphere of perception.” But Seesemann in TDNT V 116 denies any clear difference other than the inchoative sense of ginwskw, as Burton.*
- *Abbott-Smith distinguishes ginwskw as experiential vs. oida as reflective knowledge (compare the use of ginwskw but not oida for sexual knowledge), but that would be counter to what is going on here, and Burton’s discussion suggests that some people take just the opposite approach.*

*2. One might distinguish the **character** in which John came to know Jesus at the baptism. Looking back on the accumulated NT revelation, it is easy for us to bundle together all of the characteristics of the Messiah: his role as Davidic king bearing the title “Son of God” (2 Sam 7), his eternal deity, his role as sacrificial lamb, the one who would send the spirit to his disciples after his resurrection and ascension. But to faithful Jews before his advent, things may not have been so neat; there was, for example, a distinction between the Messiah as the son of David (regal) and as the son of Joseph (suffering). John would have known from his mother Elizabeth that his cousin was the promised Davidic messiah (Luke 1), and on this basis uttered the protest of Matt 3:14. However, he did not recognize him as the one who would baptize with the Spirit until he saw the spirit descend on him at the time of his baptism.*

*3. I prefer to see a distinction in the **means** by which John recognized the Lord. Recall that in Luke, before his birth, John responded spiritually to the presence of the Lord (Luke 1:41-44). He*

may well have had such a response when Jesus approached him at the Jordan; and he no doubt had the testimony of his mother Elizabeth as well. Either or both would have been sufficient to justify his protest in Matt 3:14. But God had given him a particular sign by which he was to recognize the promised Messiah, and neither his own experience nor the testimony of others could take the place of that promised sign. Until that sign appears, he will not be certain.

Application: We are in a similar position to John. God has given us both personal spiritual instincts, and the fellowship of other believers, and both are powerful and important guides. Ultimately, though, the authority for our lives is the revelation that God has given us, which in our case is his word, and we must never allow our feelings or the words of others to overrule what he has told us.

The Spirit descending.—Here is the “anointing” that makes Jesus the “Messiah,” the anointed one.

Baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.—This description of the Messiah’s role is common to all four gospels (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). This characterization has its roots in the OT promise of the New Covenant and the future age of blessing on Israel.

- Isaiah 44:3 (after a description of how Israel was scattered for her disobedience, and a promise of regathering through God’s grace): “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: **I will pour my spirit upon thy seed**, and my blessing upon thine offspring.”
- Joel 2:28 (after the description of the locust plague, and the subsequent restoration of the nation): “And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* **I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” (quoted by Peter as fulfilled on the day of Pentecost)
- Ezek 36:26-27 (in the description of the new covenant, after a description of the judgments that God brought on Israel, followed by his regathering of them): “A new heart also will I give you, and **a new spirit will I put within you**: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And **I will put my spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.”
- Ezek 39:29 (same kind of context as ch. 36): “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for **I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel**, saith the Lord GOD.”

Thus the special endowment of the Spirit to Jesus is the heart of God’s broader program to pour out the spirit on the nation Israel, and beyond that (Joel) upon “all flesh.”

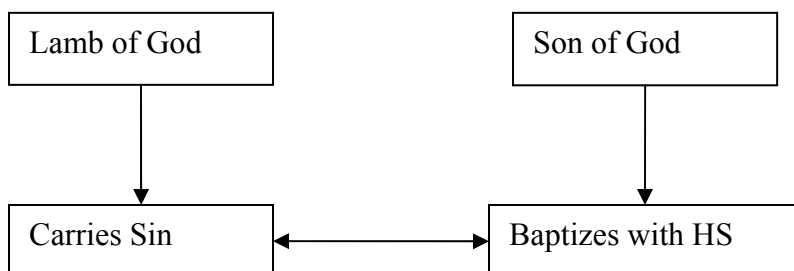
John is more preoccupied with the HS than any of the other gospels: 13 references in 19k words (.07%), compared with 10/23.7k (.04%) for Matt, 5/15k (.03%) for Mark, 15/26k (.06%) for Luke (whose second place finish is connected with the primacy of the Spirit in Acts). We will see a major focus on the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer in the upper room discourse, ch. 12ff, fulfilling this promise.

Son of God.—The title comes from 2 Sam 7:14 (compare Psa 2), and is an unmistakable Messianic title. Yet the inquisitors from Jerusalem do not use it, perhaps because it seems threatening to their rigid concept of monotheism. It is connected with the incarnation (Luke

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1:35), the joining of God and man in a single being, something that the Jews could not conceive, but a central theme of this gospel (1:14) and of the Baptist's testimony (1:15).

The chiasm leads us to connect our Lord's *titles* and his *functions*, and to connect the two images with each other. It is easy to see how the Lamb of God is the sin-bearer. Meditating on the Son of God as the baptizer with the HS will help us understand both concepts.



First, consider the vertical relations in the diagram.

“Son of God” emphasizes the intimacy of the relation between our Lord and the Father. In John, though the translation sometimes obscures it, only he is the Son *huios* of God; we are called simply “children” *tekna*. The rich pouring out of God's Spirit is the means of bringing us into this intimacy of relation with God. Compare 14:23 “we will come unto him and make our abode with him.” The indwelling Spirit is the form that this abiding takes, and we have access to it through the Lord Jesus.

Illustration: when I was a boy, I would bring my friends home for supper, and they were always welcome, because they were my friends. My position as a son in the house enabled me to make others, as it were, children of my parents, members of the extended family around the table

So our Lord, as the Son of God, brings us home for supper. We enjoy the intimacy of God's presence with us only because of his position.

Now consider the horizontal relation in the figure. All of Scripture reminds us that we cannot have intimacy with God as long as we are guilty sinners.

- In Eden, once Adam and Eve sinned, they had to hide themselves from God.
- Isa 59:2, your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

So we see that his work as Lamb of God prepares us for his work as Son of God. He carries our sin away so that he might endow us with his Spirit. The two are different sides of the same coin, inseparable from one another. Without the sin-bearing, there could be no spirit baptism. Without the spirit baptism, the sin-bearing loses its purpose. Together, they sketch out the mission of the Messiah to which the Jewish hierarchy was blind, but that will dominate the rest of John.

35-42, Andrew, Simon, and the Evangelist: Jesus is the Messiah

This episode unfolds in three steps. First, John bears witness. Then Andrew and his companion respond, and finally they bring Peter.

35-36, John's Testimony

Behold the Lamb of God.—Of all the titles that John could have emphasized, this continues to be his favorite. His baptism was a baptism of repentance, and his focus is on the means that God has provided to take away sin.

37-39, Andrew and John respond

37, two of his disciples.—One is named (v.40) as Andrew. The other is not, but goes on to follow Jesus. This is the first of several appearances in the gospel of an unnamed disciple. We see him also

- 13:23, closest to Jesus at the last supper
- 18:15, followed Jesus to the palace of the high priest
- 19:26-27, given responsibility for Mary
- 20:2, present at the tomb with Peter
- 21:7, recognizes Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection
- 21:20-23, in the discussion of Peter's death.

19:35 and 21:24 suggest that this disciple wrote the record from which the gospel was derived, and he is commonly assumed to be the disciple John, the brother of James. Like his original teacher John the Baptist, he does not seek to promote himself, but recedes into the background so that the Lord Jesus will be the focus of attention.

37, heard him speak.—The picture is not that John pointed Jesus out to them privately, but that they heard the public announcements he was repeatedly making, and responded. John casts the seed openly on the ground, and those whose hearts are prepared respond to it. He does not seek to pressure them into a decision. When the seed begins to germinate, they take action.

Application: This corrects the notion that one person can or should stimulate a crisis that will force another person into a decision. The biblical pattern is that one plants, another waters, but God gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6,7).

They followed Jesus.—Notice the string of actions that mark their response: they follow Jesus (37), talk with him (38), abide with him (39), and begin to tell others about him (41). The Baptist has drawn their attention to Jesus; now their attention is captured, and they find themselves drawn to him step by step, until they begin to draw the attention of others to him as they were themselves first drawn. Even so, they are not said to “believe” until 2:11, and their faith is not complete until they meet the risen Lord in ch. 20. Their experience illustrates salvation as a process.

- All people start life lost, separated from God by sin. If they were to die, they would go to hell.
- Some people end life saved, with their sins forgiven and God dwelling within them. When they die, they go to heaven.
- The transition between these two states can be complex. The Scriptures make much of the notion that being saved is like the germination and growth of a seed (Mark 4), or

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conception and birth (1 Pet 1:23, an idiom that originates in our Lord's teaching in John 3). These processes take time.

- The parable of the soils shows that the process can be short-circuited. Germination of the seed (stony ground) does not guarantee life (Luke 8:13 “for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away”). (Recall that salvation is promised to those who persevere to the end:
 - Colossians 1:22 [He will] present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: 23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel,...
 - Hebrews 3:6 Christ [is] a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.
 - Hebrews 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;
 - Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.
- What is the state of someone in the middle of this process? What happens if they die? Was their faith genuine or superficial? Saving or fleshly? God knows, and it is purposeless for us to try to guess. Our confidence is that “he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). If the work is real, he will carry it through.

The tenth hour.—Time in the ancient world was reckoned from sunset, which would make this about 4 PM, so they spent the evening with him. We can imagine them sharing together in a simple meal.

We think of the work of a preacher as something public, behind the pulpit. Much of our Lord's work was done at table:

- the bread of life discourse when he fed the 5000 (John 6)
- dinners with Pharisees: Luke 7:36 (discourse on forgiveness); 11:37 (discourse on hypocrisy); 14:1 (many parables)
- At Bethany in the home of Lazarus (Luke 10:38ff; John 12:2ff)
- the upper room discourse (John 13-15)
- Emmaus (Luke 24:30)
- By Galilee after his resurrection (John 21)
- All this is consistent with the imagery of the coming kingdom as a feast: Isa 25:6; Luke 14:15; 22:30; Rev 19:9

These examples should broaden our view of the family table. It is not just a place to nourish the body, but also to feed the soul. Exhortations for us:

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- Make opportunities to eat together. Don't let sports, TV, or school activities destroy the family table.
- Seek to guide the table conversation in ways that stimulate godliness and provoke spiritual thought.
- Be mindful of the exhortations to hospitality. Your table, like the Lord's, can be a means of reaching out to the lost and of encouraging believers.

The tenth hour (v.39): Is this reckoned from midnight or from sunrise? Westcott and others favored midnight in order to reconcile 19:14 and Mark 15:25, basing their claim on Roman custom, but lately it is argued that even Roman custom was ambiguous (see Wood for excellent discussion), and we should attribute the mismatch to the looseness of ancient time reckoning and John's desire to align with the Passover ceremonies. Let's follow out Westcott's analysis of the other time references in John:

- *4:6 brings the Lord to the well at Sychar about the sixth hour, where he meets the woman who came to draw water. If the day starts at sunrise, this would be an unusual time to draw water, but that may be exactly why the Lord chose that time—to have an uninterrupted discussion. The disciples had gone into the city to buy food—would the market be open later in the day, around 6 PM?*
- *4:52 has the healing of the nobleman's son at the seventh hour, and the nobleman's return from Cana to Capernaum occurring on the following day. Either mode of reckoning would fit here. The time is about January or Feb (4:35) and the days would be short. Sunrise would be about 6:45, so the "seventh hour" would be close to 2 PM, and with sunset at 5 PM, there would not be time for the 4-5 hours estimated by Westcott to return home.*

So there is no conclusive evidence for a midnight reckoning. We should understand the reference here as 4 PM.

40-42, Bringing Peter

The time reference in v.39 suggests that this occurs on the following day, bringing us to the fourth day of the "new creation week" that the evangelist is describing.

Three details in this episode merit our attention.

1. Andrew seeks out his brother Peter. "He first findeth his own brother ... and ... brought him to Jesus." There are two lessons here.
 - a. **First.**—Evangelism starts close to home and then works out. Compare Acts 1:8. Those of our own family or neighborhood may be the most difficult to evangelize, but they are the starting point.
 - b. **Brought.**—The task of the evangelist is not to argue or persuade, but to introduce. We are to call peoples' attention to the Lord. Then the Lord will do his own work in their hearts. Cf. the Baptist's approach, "Behold."
2. Andrew confirms one of the three titles of interest to the Jews from Jerusalem, "Messiah." This is not the title that the Baptist emphasized but may have been the focus of the evening discussion that John and Andrew had with the Lord. Compare the discussion

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with which the Lord ends his ministry in Luke 24:25-27, in which he argues explicitly from the OT concerning the character and work of Messiah. Something similar may have been the topic of this evening discussion.

3. The Lord gives Peter his distinctive name.
 - a. His original name is Simeon *symewn* (Acts 15:14; 2 Pet 1:1), which in the LXX translates the name of Jacob's son, the founder of the tribe of Simeon. Recall from Gen 29:33 that Simeon is derived from the Hebrew root "to hear." The NT much more often (31vv) spells his name *simwn* "Simon", which was a common Greek name without Semitic roots (Cullmann in TDNT), reflecting the Hellenism of the time.
 - b. His new name is "rock," or as we might say, "Rocky." Aramaic *Cepha* is nowhere used as a proper name except for Peter, so the literal meaning must have been in everyone's mind when they used this term.
 - c. What is the force of the renaming? In the synoptics, and in particular Matt (16:17ff), it is linked with the building of the church, and Peter himself (1 Pet 2) speaks of stones (though *liqoi* rather than *petroi*) as the components of the church. There, the name is the *result* of Peter's confession. Here, it *precedes* anything that he has done, emphasizing the point already made in 1:13 that our spiritual destiny is produced by God's sovereign power, not by our own works. Note that in all the gospels, except for the final invitation in Mk 16:7, the narrator speaks of Peter or Simon Peter, but the Lord always addresses him as Simon. Not until after the resurrection does his character as the rock emerge.

43-51, Philip and Nathanael: Jesus is the Prophet

The day following.—Recall the successive days of the "new creation week" that John is outlining:

- 19, Jews from Jerusalem
- 29, John announces Jesus
- 35, Andrew and the evangelist follow Jesus
- 40, Andrew brings Peter
- 43, Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael
- (empty day)
- 2:1, the wedding in Cana.

Jesus would go forth into Galilee.—Perhaps because of the upcoming wedding. They pick up Philip and Nathanael as they start or along the way.

Jesus findeth Philip.—Compare the different ways that people come to the Lord.

- Some are directed by a recognized authority figure (John the Baptist introducing Andrew and John)

John 1b John Introduces the Word

- Some are brought by a family member (Andrew bringing Peter) or friend (we will see Philip bringing Nathanael)
- Sometimes, the Lord himself draws an individual directly, as here. But Andrew and Peter may have spoken of him, since he comes from their town, on the NE shore of the Sea of Galilee.

This statement provides a corrective to Andrew's comment to Peter, "We have found the Messiah." It's not as though Jesus was lost and needed finding! Sometimes we feel as though we are seeking for the Lord, but in fact it is he who came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

44, Bethsaida.—Calvin recalls that this city is the object of some of our Lord's harshest condemnations, in Matt 11:21 and Luke 10:13, as being particularly resistant to his message. It is remarkable, then, that even from that city he is able to bring his chosen ones to himself. It ought to encourage us that even in the most ungodly cities there may be some whom the Lord is drawing.

45, Nathanael.—*This disciple is named only here and in 21:2, where we learn that he was from Cana in Galilee. Apparently, he is known in the other gospels by another name, and the most likely candidate is Bartholomew. Bartholomew means "Son of Tholomew," and so is a family name, while Nathanael means "God has given" or "Gift of God," and would be his proper name. Support for this is twofold:*

- *John never mentions Bartholomew, while the synoptics never mention Nathanael.*
- *John shows that Philip is close to Nathanael, and is three times named next to Bartholomew in the synoptic lists (Mt. 10:3; Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:14).*

him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write.—Recall that the narrative started with Jewish leaders asking the Baptist whether he was the fulfillment of three OT prophecies: the Messiah, Elijah, and "that prophet" of Deut 18:18. He denied all three. In 1:41 Andrew recognizes Jesus as the Messiah when he tells Peter about him. Now Philip recognizes him as the prophet promised by Moses, as well as the Messiah promised by the prophets.

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.—Philip is wrong on both counts. Through lack of learning in the scriptures, he does not recall that Messiah is to come from Bethlehem, not Nazareth (Mic 5:2), and he has not yet learned of the virgin birth. Yet he is zealous to make the Lord known, and the Lord honors that zeal. We should not feel that we cannot speak to others because we don't know enough yet. In that case, we will never speak, for we will never know all that there is to know. Philip has been touched personally, and that is enough for him to want to tell others.

46, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?—Galilee itself was considered unsophisticated by the urban elite of Jerusalem (Acts 2:7), and this verse shows that among Galileans, Nazareth was particularly looked down upon. (There may be a tribal rivalry here. Cana and Bethsaida are both in Naphthali, while Nazareth is in Zebulun.)

Note the condescension of the Son of God, making his home not only among men, but in a despised village, a place whose residents were looked down on by the rest of the population. But this is itself only figurative of how he came to take our sin upon himself.

Nathanael's question was not without foundation. The "prophets" quoted by Philip pointed to Bethlehem in Judaea, not Nazareth in Galilee, as the home of the Messiah (Micah 5:2). Even the learned Pharisees recognized that Galilee was out of the focus of God's prophetic work (John 7:52), although they overlooked Jonah (2 Kings 14:25 with Josh 19:13; Gath Hopher is in Zebulon, as is Nazareth).

Thus Philip's error concerning the Lord's earthly origins nearly put Nathanael off the track.

Come and see.—Philip's response is exemplary of Christian testimony. He does not argue with Nathanael, but piques his curiosity with a practical challenge. Come and see. Look into it yourself. Be open to learn something new. In this, he follows the example that the Lord used with Andrew and John (1:39).

In fact, this is a key theme of John's gospel. It uses the verb "to see" more frequently than any of the other gospels, and John 1 is the densest of any chapter in the gospels.

- The point of the incarnation is to make the invisible God, visible (1:18).
- The emphasis on "witness," another of John's favorite words, is attesting to what one has seen (e.g., 1:32,33,34).
- Thomas insists on seeing (ch. 20).

Compare John's testimony in his first epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). The repeated challenge throughout this gospel is to look, see, consider the facts and decide. Contrary to a common caricature, the theme of true Christianity is not slavish adherence to the authority of the church, but willing personal submission to the evidence that God directly presents to the individual heart by the Holy Spirit.

an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.—Jesus greets Nathanael with a summary of his character, as though he had known him before.

"An Israelite indeed" anticipates Paul's distinction in Rom 2:28,29. The evangelist has already warned us that "his own received him not." The gospel is thus a search for those of physical Israel who qualify to be considered "Israelites indeed."

His comment embeds two allusions to the OT.

1. It is a pun. Recall that "Israel" is the name that God gave Jacob on his way back from Haran to Canaan. "Guile" is *dolos*, whose first occurrence in the LXX is at Gen 27:35, where Isaac describes to Esau how Jacob "came with subtilty [*dolos*], and hath taken away thy blessing," and Esau explains in the following verse, "Is not he rightly named Jacob?" In effect, Jesus is saying that Nathanael is an Israelite in whom there remains no trace of Jacob.
2. It recalls Psa 32:2, "Blessed *is* the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile." This freedom from hypocrisy and deception is a central characteristic of those whom the Lord has forgiven. As we have often commented, it is the nature of God that his word is completely aligned with reality—so much so that if there is a difference, reality changes, as in Gen 1. He leads his children to share this characteristic of absolute truthfulness and transparency. Deception and hypocrisy have no place among those who are true Israelites.

48, when thou was under the fig tree, I saw thee.—Nathanael is surprised that the Lord would venture a character judgment on someone whom he has just met, but the Lord explains that he knew that Nathanael had been “under the fig tree.” What is the relation between being under a fig tree and being a sincere Israelite?

1. Fig trees were notable places for shade and rest, when a person had some leisure time, Micah 4:4.
2. The rabbis described the shade of a fig tree as a likely place for studying the law or praying (see Gill).

So it is likely that Nathanael had been engaged in spiritual exercises, and the Lord shows his knowledge of this tender heart toward the Lord.

This would also explain why the Lord describes him as guileless. Compare Matt 6:5,6. It is the hypocrite, one concerned with impressions rather than integrity, who prays openly in the street. One who diligently exercises his devotions in seclusion does so for true motives. Matthew Henry compares him with Jacob at the Jabbock, who was “left alone” when he wrestled with God (Gen 32:24).

Unpacking these allusions, what the Lord said to Nathanael amounts to this: “I know that you are a devout believer, because I saw you pursuing your devotions, not ostentatiously, but in the secluded shade of a fig tree.”

Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.—Such knowledge on the part of Jesus is overwhelming to Nathanael. Just because he is guileless and unpretentious, he has sought seclusion for his devotions. He tried to be undetected, yet the Lord has seen not only his outward situation but the inward state of his heart. In response, he turns from criticizing the Lord’s civic associations to submitting to his authority. Like Andrew and John in v.38, acknowledges him as “Rabbi,” “my teacher.” Then he joins two further titles: “Son of God” and “King of Israel.”

The fact that he puts these titles together means that he has in mind passages like 2 Sam 7 and Psa 2, which describe the promised Messianic king as the Son of God.

2 Sam 7:12-14, And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

Psa 2:6-7 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

How does he reach this conclusion? Probably from Psa 2, which earlier states that “the rulers take counsel together” (a private action), yet “he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh,” being fully cognizant of what they are doing. It is the prerogative of deity to examine the thoughts of the heart (Psa 139; Psa 19:12). His prayer may very well have been Psa 139:23f, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” And now one appears who declares these thoughts to him. How can this be anyone other than the promised Messiah?

50 greater things than these.—Many of us, like Nathanael, have been drawn to the Lord by the realization that he knows us better than we know ourselves. But that is only the beginning of our

relation. Now the Lord goes on to see that he not only *knows* us, but is the mechanism for God's *care* for us.

Ye shall see.—Note the shift from singular to plural. Now he is speaking to the entire band of disciples: Andrew, John, Peter, and Philip as well as Nathanael. What are the “greater things” that they will see?

the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.—There is a clear allusion to Gen 28:12, Jacob's dream. But the allusion is frequently misunderstood, as though the Lord were describing himself as the ladder on which the angels ascend and descend.

The angels do ascend and descend using the ladder in Gen 28, an expression that the LXX translates using *epi* with the genitive for “descending on it.” Our Lord uses *epi* with the accusative. Elsewhere in the NT, *epi* + acc with “descend” *katabainw* describes the *destination* of movement, not its *path*: John 6:16; Luke 3:22; cf John 1:32,33. The point is that the angels come to minister to the Lord, just as they did to Jacob. Having recognized Nathanael as a genuine, guileless son of Jacob, the Lord now claims to be the second Jacob, enjoying angelic protection as Jacob did during his sojourn to Haran.

Consider the angelic ministrations to our Lord:

- Announcing his birth, Luke 2:9-13;
- in the wilderness, Mark 1:13; Matt 4:11
- in the garden, Luke 22:43;
- at the resurrection, Matt 28:2-4; John 20:12-13.

The early confessions of the church insisted that he was “seen of angels” (1 Tim 3:16). As he is our example in godliness and in submission to the Father's will, so we should take encouragement from him at the angelic care that God has provided for us. This is the focus of the “greater things” that he promises his disciples.

Son of Man.—This is our Lord's favorite title for himself in the synoptics, but John uses it less than the synoptics, and focuses on more on “son of God (1:34, 49). Not surprisingly, the titles emphasize his humanity and deity, respectively. Here, the human emphasis is important, because he is talking about the ministry that he, like Jacob, received from the angels.

Segue

The one title rejected by John and not yet ascribed to Jesus is “Elijah.” This is covered, although obliquely, in the next chapter. As the introductory time reference shows, the chapter break is ill-placed; we are still within the “new creation week.”

Notes

Usage of “son of God” vs “son of man.” Note particularly the interchange in 5:25, 27. It is as the son of God (having divine power and authority) that he brings the dead to life, but as the son of Man (sharing our infirmities) that he is authorized to judge them.

Son of God

John uses “Son of God” more times (10) than any other gospel, and also more frequently (it is the second shortest gospel, after Mark). This is not surprising, given the gospel’s objective (20:31). Four of these (below) are on the lips of Christ himself. By contrast, in the synoptics, this title is never on the Lord’s lips, though he acknowledges it when it is used by others (Mark 14:62; Luke 22:70; Matt 26:64). This title is thus characteristic of John. The instances cited show that it emphasizes his authority (bringing the dead to life) and his identity with the father.

John 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the **Son of God**: and they that hear shall live.

John 9:35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the **Son of God**?

John 10:36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the **Son of God**?

John 11:4 When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the **Son of God** might be glorified thereby.

Son of Man

This title occurs fewer times (12) in John than any other gospel, and also least frequently (Matt is most). Ten of these (cited below) are on the Lord’s lips. These show that the title emphasizes his humanity.

John 1:51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the **Son of man**.

John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the **Son of man** which is in heaven.

John 3:14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the **Son of man** be lifted up:

John 5:27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the **Son of man**.

John 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the **Son of man** shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the **Son of man**, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

John 6:62 *What* and if ye shall see the **Son of man** ascend up where he was before?

John 8:28 Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the **Son of man**, then shall ye know that I am *he*, and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

John 12:23 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the **Son of man** should be glorified.

John 13:31 Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the **Son of man** glorified, and God is glorified in him.

2:1-11, The Wedding in Cana: Jesus is Elijah