

JOHN 1

The Origin of Jesus and of the New Community

PROLOGUE (1:1–18)

The Gospel of John commences with the prologue (1:1–18), which, by virtue of major themes it covers, is called the “window” through which the whole Gospel may be read.¹ The structure of the prologue betrays a Jewish poem or hymn rather than “rhythmical prose” with at least six strophes (1:1–3, 3–5, 10–11, 12–13, 14–16, 17–18), with the author’s insertion of verses 6–8 and 15.² The prologue serves as a “poetic preamble” to John’s Gospel, composed by the author himself, perhaps by using the hymn on Wisdom.

Pre-Existence of Christ as the Word (1:1–5)

John’s opening statement, “In the beginning was the Word,” takes us not only to the existence of the Word (*logos* in Greek) before creation, but also sets God’s redemptive work in the context of the eternal existence of the Logos. The phrase “in the beginning,” unlike that in Genesis 1:1, speaks of the time before the genesis (cf. Prov 8:23). The word *Logos* here is a title used in an absolute sense.

By referring to the Logos, John uses a term that was familiar to all sections of the society in the first century CE (see the excursus below). The Logos was in existence *as a personal being* and the sphere of his existence was God himself, as the assertion “the Logos was with God” (1:1b) shows. The phrase “with God” does not have the sense of “motion towards God” but the sense of “being from God” (6:46) or “living in communion with God.” That is, the Logos was living so close to God that he was sharing in

1. Dunn 1989: xxviii.

2. Hengel 2008: 268–89.

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the very life of God. The Logos and God, as two personalities, were living so close with one another that they cannot be separated one from the other. Such union means an active partnership or a reciprocal indwelling between two personalities.³

The Word's mutual indwelling and life in oneness with God are eternal, as the statement "the Word was God" (1:1c) shows. Like Philo, John also identifies the pre-existent Logos with God without the definite article, for in 1:1c the Logos, as God, is differentiated from "the God." Otherwise, 1:1c will contradict what is expressed in 1:1b–2 and 14:28. Therefore it is needless to translate "divine (in essence) was the Logos."⁴ While "the God" points to "the one true God," the Father, "God," in this context, can only indicate the Logos as the manifestation of that God. "The God" refers to God in his transcendence, while "God" implies the revelation and immanence of that one God. This does not mean that the Logos was the "second God." The Logos is the self-manifestation of God precisely because he exists eternally in oneness with God, the Father. This is reiterated in 1:2.

John describes also the role of the pre-existent Logos in creation: "all things" came into being through him and "not even one that has come into being" came without him (1:3). That is, the totality of creation came into existence through the Logos. This does not mean that the Logos was merely an "instrumental cause" (Philo) in creation. The creative activity of the Logos was the creative activity of God. The Logos and Wisdom are parallels, for Wisdom too pre-existed with God and was engaged in God's creative activity (Prov 3:19–20; 8:22–31; Sir 1:1–10). All things in heaven and on earth were created through Christ and for Christ (1 Cor 8:6b; Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:2; Rev 3:14).

God's creation was community oriented (Gen 1–2), for God created "all things" as families according to their kinds (Gen 1:21, 24–25). John, therefore, begins his Gospel by disclosing the community motif embedded in creation. The whole creation constitutes one household of God. All creatures came to life by God's word, but human beings by God's breath (Gen 2:7; 1:26–27). Since life flows from God to the total creation, John categorically states, "In him was life" (1:4a). The Genesis story connects light with life. So also John presents divine life and light together by writing, "And the life was the Light of humankind" (1:4b). The life of Logos derived from

3. Schnackenburg 1980–84: 1.234.

4. Contra Haenchen 1984: 1.108, 110. The Greek word *theos* never means "divine."

the Father and the Light projected from it are essentially the same and they were one in existence eternally.

While narrating creation, John's special attention falls on "human-kind" (1:4), God's main focus in creation. The community he envisaged is a community of human beings, while other creatures were subject to them (Gen 1:28–30; Rom 8:19–22). As Light, the life in the Logos is the guiding principle for human life (cf. Ps 27:1; Ps 36:9; Hos 10:12 LXX; Wis 7:26, 27; Sir 17:11). For John the essence of the Logos is life, which gives light to human beings enabling them to experience end-time salvation both now and in future. This idea anticipates the later reference to Jesus as the Light and life (8:12).

The nature of light is to constantly shine and stand against "darkness" (1:5). Light and darkness in John are symbols of good and bad qualities of life, respectively, and they engage in combat against each other. Where there is light there is no darkness and vice versa. Such dualism is reflected in Qumran writings written in the second and first centuries BCE (e.g., 1QS 3.19–22; 1QM 13.5–6, 14–15). These writings use "day" figuratively with "light," and "night" with "darkness" (1QS 10.1–2), and so also John. The nature of the Light in 1:5 is in the present tense, "shines," but that of darkness is in the past tense, "did not overcome." This means that the Light keeps on shining. It exposes evil, guides human beings, illuminates and transforms human life, and judges human works (3:19–21). The nature of darkness, however, is to strive to overcome the Light, but the Light won over darkness once and for all.

Witness of John the Baptist to the Logos (1:6–8, 15)

Following the pre-existence of the Logos-Light, John traces the beginning of salvation history in John the Baptist, who was sent by God to bear witness to the Light (1:6–8; cf. Mark 1:1–5; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:23–25).

The Greek verb *egeneto* introduces the Baptist in the statement, "There was a man," and the same word is used to introduce the Word who "became" flesh (1:14a). This sets both Jesus and John the Baptist in the same mission of bringing God's salvation to humankind. The task of John the Baptist, however, is limited only to bearing witness to Jesus so that people may believe in Jesus as the Light. The task of bearing witness to the Logos-Light is repeated in 1:8 with an emphatic denial that John the Baptist himself was the Light. The Baptist was only a lamp whose witness was temporary (5:35).

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This is to rebut communities that regarded the Baptist toward the end of the first century as the Redeemer sent by God (cf. Luke 3:15) or even as the Light.

The Baptist's testimony prepares the way for the Logos to come in flesh to reveal God's character and to offer eternal life for those who believe. The Baptist confirms that Christ was pre-existent and that he is greater than the Baptist in status and rank (1:15). In fact, 1:15 does not interrupt the flow of thought between 1:14 and 1:16–18. Whereas 1:14 narrates the witness of the believing community to the glory revealed in the Logos-Son, 1:15 expresses the witness of the Baptist to the same glory, which was pre-existing as the Logos, even though temporally the Logos became flesh after the Baptist was born (cf. 1:26–27, 29–30; Matt 3:11 par.).

New humanity Enlightened by the Light (1:9–13)

The third section of the prologue introduces the Logos as “the true Light.” That is, he is the “genuine” or “authentic” Light, surpassing any other lights, which are “obsolete, defective, and unreliable.”⁵ He was coming into the world, the realm of human affairs, to enlighten every human being (1:9). “Enlightenment” means not just the attainment of intellectual knowledge but the insight one may get about God and his purpose for human beings. It is an illumination that transforms people from their evil nature to do good works. The universal implication of this mission is known from the word “every human.”

Even though the Light in the Logos came into the world, the world failed to know him (1:10). “Knowing” is a key word used in the Gospel to mean not so much the Hellenistic and Gnostic notion of intellectual perception as an active relationship between God and his people (see Amos 3:2 for God knowing his people in terms of choosing them and caring for them, and Jer 31:33–34 for the humans to know God in terms of their humble obedience and trust in him). The word “world” in John refers mainly to those who reject Jesus and his followers because of their hostility towards them (e.g., 15:18–19; 17:14). God's provision to humankind to become children of God and the world's rejection are prefigured in the prologue (1:9–10).

The Logos-Light was rejected, notably, by his own people. In John, the term “my own” denotes the people chosen by Jesus (or those given by God

5. Neyrey 2007: 43.

to Jesus) to be his followers (17:6, 10). The parallel phrase “his own people” (1:11b) confirms that those who did not receive the Light were Jesus’ own people, the Jews. It is noteworthy that only those who keep the covenant made by God are his “treasured possession” (Exod 19:5). However, the Jews who received God’s covenant belonged to the old and fallen humanity, and therefore they could not perceive the Logos-Light as the Messiah. John, in contrast, will declare in his Gospel that it is the people of God, under the new covenant, who will be “his own possession” (cf. 1:12).

In spite of the world’s rejection, God offered opportunity to the Jews and Gentiles to receive the Logos and to become his children. “Receiving” is the receptive aspect of believing. The object of faith is “his name.” In the OT, God manifests his character and work by revealing, or sometimes by concealing, his name, YHWH or “I am that I am” (e.g., Gen 32:27–30; Exod 3:13–14; 6:2–3; Isa 42:8). The Johannine Jesus bears this name so that he may manifest it to those who believe in him (17:6, 26). By revealing God’s name, Jesus reveals God himself. This powerful name of God enables those who receive him and believe in his name to be born in the family of God as his children, that is, to become members of new covenant community (1:12).

John discloses the source of new birth both in negative terms (i.e., neither of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man) and in positive term (i.e., of God). The new covenant community comes into being by the Spirit, the life-giving power of God, and not by any human effort (John 1:13; 3:3–8; cf. Deut 32:18; Ps 2:7).⁶

Dwelling of the Logos-in-flesh among humans (1:14, 16–18)

This section constitutes the fifth strophe of the hymn (1:1–18) and is the climax of what John wants to say in the prologue. His statement “the Word became flesh” (1:14a) would have kept many in astonishment in the late first century, since no philosophical or religious thought understood the concept of Logos in this way. The birth narratives of Matthew and Luke are summed up by John in one sentence: “And the Word became flesh.”

The conjunction “and” stresses the transition of the Logos from his pre-existent state to human history. Whereas 1:1 shows the transcendence

6. While the reference to the blood and flesh indicates mortal humanity (Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 15:50), the expression “the will of man” reflects the Jewish belief that a woman begets a child by a man’s initiative.

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of the Word, 1:14 describes how he became immanent—the supernatural natural, and the invisible visible.⁷ It would have been easier for understanding the incarnation if John had simply written, “The Word was born as a man” (cf. Phil 2:7b). Why should John use two catching words, “became” and “flesh”?

Some in the early church might have believed that by becoming a man Christ put off his divine glory in heaven (cf. Phil 2:7a). As observed above, there were heretics in the late first century who questioned either Christ’s divinity or his humanity. The word “became” (*egeneto*) implies that by taking human form the pre-existent Word did not cease to be God, just as Jesus continued to be Jesus of Nazareth even after he *became* a prophet (Luke 24:19; cf. 3 John 8).⁸ It does not support a “naïve Docetism”⁹ that minimizes the reality of Jesus’ humanity. In the earthly life of Jesus, his oneness with the Father continued. Otherwise it would be impossible to see the Father’s glory on earth.

The word “flesh” goes beyond mere humanness and points to the frailty and vulnerability of human beings (Isa 40:6; John 6:63).¹⁰ This means that Jesus, by assuming human flesh, experienced the weakness and helplessness of human beings, enabling him to be compassionate toward helpless sinners (cf. Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 8:9; Heb 2:17–18). John’s word “flesh” thus displays not merely a polemic purpose, but it also gives the good news that the one God, who is inaccessible (1 Tim 6:16), came to live with the fallen humanity.

This thought is carried forward by the statement “and he dwelt among us” (literally “and he tabernacled in the midst of us”). The Logos becoming flesh and his dwelling among human beings go together, as the conjunction “and” shows. The Greek word *eskēnōsen* (“he tabernacled/dwelt”) echoes the dwelling of God among his people in the tabernacle (Exod 25:8–9; 29:45–46; Zech 2:10–11). Besides the wilderness motif, one can also see a Wisdom motif¹¹: The Creator chose the people of Israel as the tent where Wisdom can dwell and minister before him (Sir 24:8, 10). What was applied to Wisdom is now applicable to the Logos, though with a conceptual difference. The eschatological motif in 1:14b becomes obvious in its allusion

7. Kanagaraj 2005: 53.

8. Kanagaraj 1998b: 80–81.

9. Käsemann 1968: 4–26.

10. Milne 1993: 46.

11. Keener 2005: 1.408–9.

to the Lord's dwelling in the midst of the people of Israel on the day when many nations will join themselves to be his people (Zech 2:10–11; cf. Rev 7:15; 21:3).¹² In this eschatological framework, the phrase “among us” does not indicate only the people of Israel, but broadly all human beings. Thus, in the coming of the Logos in human flesh, the end-time has dawned.

However, the personal pronoun “we” in “we beheld his glory” (1:14c) points exclusively to those who, by faith, could see and experience God's glory in the Logos incarnate. It need not be confined only to eyewitnesses or to the Johannine community. For unbelievers, however, the glory of God revealed in flesh remains hidden.¹³ “Seeing God's glory” can be connected with the tabernacle and the temple, where one can see God's presence or his glory (Exod 24:15–17; 25:8; 40:35; 1 Kgs 8:10, 11, 13). The temple is also the place where God put his name to dwell (1 Kgs 8:29; 9:3; 2 Chr 6:20). For John the name of God that dwelt in the tabernacle/temple and God's glory that was seen by the Israelites are the same, and now they are revealed in Jesus, the incarnate Logos (cf. 17:11–12 with 17:22, 26).

Moses saw God's glory in terms of his steadfast love and faithfulness (Exod 33:18–19; 34:6–7), which are equivalent to the twin words “grace and truth” (1:14). Jesus was bearing God's glory even in Jesus' pre-existent state (17:5, 24). It marks the oneness between them, on one hand, and the oneness between the believers, on the other (17:22). In this context, “glory” can mean the eternal relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son (17:24b).¹⁴ In the light of Lazarus' resurrection (11:4, 40), God's glory may also indicate God's saving power¹⁵ or God's love expressed in his generosity to restore life.¹⁶ The glory seen in the Son was God's splendor, manifested in his love and faithfulness to his covenant to give divine life. The idea of seeing God's glory in flesh could be a polemic against the then-prevalent interest in mystical visions to see God in heaven in his kingly glory and in human form.¹⁷

The sharing of glory by the Father and the Son, a mark of oneness between them, is confirmed by the Greek word *monogenēs* (“only Son”), used four times in John (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; cf. Wis 7:22 LXX). The word

12. Cf. Keener 2005: 1.409.

13. Cf. Bultmann 1971: 63–64.

14. Barrett 1978: 514.

15. Bratcher 1991: 23.

16. Pamment 1983: 14–15.

17. Kanagaraj 1998a: 214–47.

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means “only one of its kind,” but when used in relation to the Father it means the “only Son.”¹⁸ After introducing the Logos as God and narrating that the glory revealed is that of the only Son from the Father, John would not have hesitated to call the “only Son” as the “only God” (cf. 1:18 in some manuscripts). In sharing with God oneness in life, glory, name, status, and function, there is no one who is equal to the status of Jesus as God’s Son and therefore Jesus is the only Son of God. From 1:14 onwards the pre-existent Logos is spoken in John in terms of the “Son of God.”

God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to his covenant, which constitute his glory, are termed as “his fullness” in 1:16.¹⁹ All those who believe through the witness of the Johannine community received “grace upon grace.” Literally, the phrase “grace upon grace” can be translated as “grace in the place of grace.” It does not mean that in place of the Mosaic Law the grace through Jesus was given, for John never opposes the Law in his Gospel. The Law that marks the old covenant was also a gift of God given to his people out of his grace. This means that the OT manifestation of God’s gracious love and favor has become accessible to all who believe in Christ, replacing the impossible observance of the OT Law by a personal and unique manifestation through his Son.²⁰ Thus, “grace upon grace” implies God’s *continuous* supply of the same grace, expressed through the Law, from one degree to another by the gracious indwelling of Jesus.²¹ All human efforts to keep the Law in order to experience God are thereby made redundant.

The steadfast love and faithfulness of God, given in the OT Law in a shadowy way, have attained reality in the coming of the Logos-in-flesh, “Jesus Christ” (1:17). The phrase “given through Moses” implies the role of mediator played by Moses in giving the Law (cf. Gal 3:19b). The major aspect of God’s covenant with his people is God’s giving of the Law (Deut 5:1–21), which is the “Book of the Covenant” that was sealed by the offering of the “blood of the covenant” (Exod 24:7–8). The reference to the Law given through Moses (1:17), then, has an implicit reference to the covenant community. However, John looks beyond this old covenant community to a new covenant community that will be established in Jesus Christ, through whom came to humankind God’s “grace and truth.” These dual words allude

18. Dodd 1958: 305 n. 1; Barrett 1978: 166.

19. “Fullness” (*plērōma*) means “the totality of divine powers and attributes” revealed in Jesus; see Lightfoot 1997: 48, 78.

20. Cf. Edwards 1988: 8–9.

21. Lindars 1957: 27; Kanagaraj 2005: 61.

to God's mercy and initiative to forgive the sins of his people, who disobeyed his covenant, and to God's faithfulness to put the Law within their hearts as the mark of making a new covenant (Exod 34:6–7; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:22–32). By being in the “bosom of the Father,” Jesus alone knows God in the most intimate way and therefore he alone can reveal God to the world in his mercy and faithfulness (John 1:18; cf. 10:14–15; 14:10–11).

The whole Gospel, according to the prologue, evolves around one theme: *the revelation of the one God in his glory and his encounter with all human beings in the life and mission of Jesus, the pre-existent God-become-flesh, to found and nurture a witnessing new covenant community.*

Excursus: The Understanding of the Logos in the First Century CE

The first-century Jews treated the Logos as Wisdom and the Law in their pre-existence with the Creator (Prov 8:22–31; Sir 1:1–10; 24:3; Prov 3:19–20; Wis 9:1–2; Bar 3:9–4:4; *1 En.* 42; Sir 15:1; 19:20; 39:1; 24:23; 34:8; 39:1; 4 Macc 1:16–17) and as the creative word used by God in creation (Gen 1; cf. Ps 33:6, 9). For them the Logos accomplishes God's mission (Isa 9:8–9; 55:11) and brings healing and deliverance (Ps 107:20), a means by which God's will and message were communicated (Jer 1:4; Ezek 1:3; 6:1; Amos 3:1, 8). They understood the Logos as the Aramaic *memra*, a periphrasis for God and his powerful acts (e.g., *Tg. Exod.* 19:17; 31:13; *Tg. Onq. Gen.* 3:8; *Tg. Isa.* 48:13).

The Greeks understood the Logos as reason or the rational principle that is behind the world to keep it in order and within every human being. For the Stoics, the Logos controls the stars and seasons and pervades all things. Although one can be united with God through the Logos (*Corp. herm.* 13.6–7), reason can be built up in a person only after the immortal soul gets rid of bodily senses by escaping from the prison of the body. This is called “rebirth” (*Corp. herm.* 13.7–8).

The Hellenistic Jewish understanding of the Logos is known from Philo's writings. For Philo the Logos is a real being distinct from God and an intermediary between God and the world (*Her.* 2–5). Logos is the divine reason (*Cher.* 36), the second God (*QG* 2.62), God himself (without the definite article; *Somn.* 1.229–30). To perceive the Logos is to perceive the invisible God, for the Logos is that by which God draws the perfect man from earthly things to himself (*Sac.* 8). The unknowable God is knowable as Light through the

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Logos (*QE* 68; cf. *Mos.* 2.95–100). As the Logos belongs to the intelligible world (*Opif.* 4, 16; *Mos.* 2.127), it never descends to the sensible world, but one should move to the intelligible world to encounter the Logos.²² For Philo, mystical union with God in terms of indwelling within the soul's life is possible through the Logos (*Post.* 122, by interpreting Num 14:9).

Although people would have understood the Logos in different ways, the underlying common theme is that the Logos is God and in the Logos one can apprehend God. However, John's insight that the Logos became flesh is missing. No wonder first-century Christians meant by the Logos the "Christian message" (e.g., Mark 2:2; 4:14; Acts 14:25), the content of which is Christ and his glory (2 Cor 4:5–6) or "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 3:1), in whom one can see God.

Fusing the Horizons

Several years ago, one of my friends confronted me saying that Christianity came into being by the birth of Jesus about two thousand years ago, whereas other major religions had been in existence even before that time. This is an example of how the world thinks of Christ and the time of his existence. The proclamation of Jesus' story as beginning from his pre-existence with the eternal God as God would make it clear that Christ lived even before the time of creation and that God's plan to create a new community in Jesus Christ was in him before anything was created. This message will lead hearers, particularly those from other religious faith, to perceive Jesus as the unique revelation of God.

There is a deep aspiration among many religious groups today to see the one true God. People try to see God by spending a huge amount of money or even by subduing and wounding one's body. The Fourth Gospel proclaims that the one true God revealed his character in Jesus, who is the place in which one can see God now. God's new community is called to bear witness to this by words and deeds.

22. Sandmel 1979: 95; Kanagaraj 1998a: 72.

FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH (1:19–51)

Witness of John the Baptist (1:19–28)

The narrative of Jesus' life and ministry begins with the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus (cf. Matt 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 1:1–17). The commencing word “and” in 1:19 marks the continuity between the prologue and the whole Gospel story, by having the testimony of the Baptist as the starting point for the formation of new covenant community around Jesus. There was an apprehension among the religious leaders in Jerusalem about the Baptist's ministry, which drew many to become his disciples. Therefore they sent a delegation of priests and Levites to John the Baptist to gather firsthand information about his real identity and the purpose of his mission. The delegates met the Baptist at “Bethany beyond Jordan,” where John was baptizing (1:28).²³

The term “the Jews” in 1:19, in conjunction with 1:24, indicates “the Pharisees,” the “separated ones.”²⁴ These religious leaders had separated themselves politically from Hasmonean rule and religiously from others who were not observing the priestly laws of purity (Lev 1–15). They had vast political and social influence in Jesus' time,²⁵ but rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore they are identified in John with “the world,” which, in general, rejected Jesus (John 1:10; 7:7; 15:18; cf. 8:23). In response to their question, “Who are you?,” the Baptist answers, “I am not the Christ” (1:19–20). Probably the leaders suspected that the Baptist could be the long-awaited Messiah, the King and deliverer from the house of David. However, they did not dare to ask him whether he was the Messiah. The Baptist's unreserved denial (cf. 3:28) could be a polemic against those who claimed that he was the Messiah.

In Jesus' time, the scribes taught that Elijah should come first in order to prepare the way for Christ's appearance (Mal 3:1; 4:5–6; Mark 9:11–12). That is why the priests and Levites asked the Baptist, “Are you Elijah?” (John 1:21). After the Baptist's denial that he was Elijah, they asked him,

23. Possibly the “Bethany beyond Jordan” was on the eastern side of Jordan up in the northern end of Peraea, closer to Aenon (near Salim), a place of springs in the western bank of Jordan.

24. For various shades of meaning of the term “the Jews” in John see Griffith 2008: 185; Brown 2010: 157–75. The term also refers to the Jews who genuinely believed in Jesus after seeing Jesus' sign (11:45).

25. Cf. Dunn 2003: 265–70.

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“Are you the prophet?” perhaps having in mind Deut 18:15 and 18, which speak of a prophet like Moses whom God will raise up. It is unlikely that the delegates had in mind the prophet mentioned in Qumran writings (4QTest 5–8; 1QS 9.11), as the Qumran community separated itself by revolting against Jerusalem priests and their cultic practices. There is no evidence that, besides Elijah and a Moses-like prophet, the Jews were expecting any other figure as the eschatological prophet. Nor do we have evidence that John’s community identified Christ with a prophet-like figure.²⁶ After stating that he was not the prophet either, the Baptist explains his mission as preparing the way for the coming of the Lord (“Christ”). He was nothing but a voice that cried out in the wilderness in order to purify and prepare a group of people for God by declaring the coming of Christ, as the Scripture testifies (Isa 40:3; cf. Matt 3:3 par.).

The enquiry of the agents gives an opportunity for the Baptist to project Jesus’ greatness as the Christ who is present among them but hidden to their eyes (1:26–27).²⁷ Without comparing his baptism with that of Jesus (Matt 3:11 par.), the Baptist discloses the spiritual blindness of the religious leaders, who, by this time, should have rightly understood such scriptural passages as Isa 40:3 and Mal 3:1; 4:5–6. Although Jesus came to the human scene chronologically after the Baptist (cf. 1:15), the latter acknowledges Jesus’ greatness by stating, “the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” In a teacher-disciple relationship in rabbinic circles, a menial job such as untying the thong of a teacher’s sandals was not assigned to any of his pupils and still less to a slave.²⁸ The Baptist acknowledges his unworthiness even to be a slave to Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of God (1:34), for Jesus’ mission of bringing salvation to humankind by his death and resurrection surpasses any human enterprise.

Content of the Baptist’s witness (1:29–34)

In 1:29–34, the Baptist unveils who Jesus is and implicitly what he will accomplish. For the first time the name “Jesus” appears in 1:29 after 1:17. The day after the enquiry of Jerusalem leaders, John gives a picture of the real

26. John 6:14; 7:40; 9:17 do not prove that the Johannine community had developed a prophet Christology.

27. This reflects the current belief that the Messiah is concealed in the presence of God’s power from the beginning (1 En. 62:7; 4 Ezra 13:2–4, 52; Dan 7:13–14).

28. Barclay 1957: 1.62.

Christ, Jesus, who was coming toward the Baptist (1:29). There is no reference in this section either to the audience to whom Jesus was introduced or to his baptism. Perhaps John intended the audience to be anyone who reads it. The Baptist bears witness to Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who removes the sin of the world.”

The book of Revelation (5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:16; 7:9–10, 14, 17; 22:1, 3) refers to “the Lamb.” However, the Greek word used for “lamb” (*arnion*) is different from what is used in John (*amnos*), though there is not much essential difference.²⁹ There are three OT references to the “Lamb of God” (Gen 22:8; Exod 12:3–6; Isa 53:7). In Isaac’s sacrifice (Gen 22) there is no reference to the removal of sin, although it prefigures Jesus’ death and resurrection (cf. John 3:16; Heb 11:17–19).

Exodus 12 may give a possible background to John 1:29, since Jesus was identified in Christian circles as the Lamb of God in whose death people receive deliverance just like the people of Israel were delivered from Egyptian bondage by the offering of the paschal lamb (cf. 19:36 with Exod 12:46 and Num 9:12; 1 Cor 5:7). However, Isa 53:4–7 gives a relevant background to interpret “the Lamb of God” in John 1:29, 36. Just like the Servant of the Lord who would heal people by carrying their sorrows and sins (Isa 53:4–6), by offering himself for sin (Isa 53:10), and by pouring his soul to death (Isa 53:12), so also Jesus will take away human sin by pouring himself out to death on the cross. His death will bring deliverance for people from their suffering and eternal destruction. Thus, the Baptist witnesses to Jesus as the Lamb who will be slaughtered on the cross for human sin to bring salvation for all who believe. The readers can see a shadow of the cross in the Baptist’s witness.

After publicly acknowledging the superiority of the man Jesus in rank and status as the one who was existing before him (cf. 1:15, 27; 8:58), the Baptist acknowledges twice his ignorance of the identity of Christ, the Son of God (1:31, 33). He states that he came to baptize people with water so that the pre-existent Christ might be revealed to Israel (1:31). The term “Israel” could refer to the Jews who will believe and accept the God-sent Messiah, in contrast to “the Jews” in Jerusalem.³⁰

The Baptist could identify that it is Jesus who is the Son of God when he saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remaining on

29. For other arguments against the background of Revelation see Ridderbos 1997: 72; Keener 2005: 1.452.

30. Cf. Michaels 2010: 113.

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Jesus during his baptism (1:32; cf. Matt 3:16 par.). John uses the Synoptic tradition freely with an emphasis on the “remaining” of the Spirit on Jesus (1:32–33).³¹ Jesus was revealed to the Baptist by God, who sent John to baptize with water, as the one who baptizes people with the Holy Spirit by means of a vision of the descent of the Spirit that remained upon Jesus (1:33). This echoes Isa 11:1–2 LXX, where the identifying mark of the Christ is the resting of the Spirit of the Lord upon him. That Jesus is “the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” implies that Jesus, the bearer of God’s Spirit, is the one who fills those who believe in him with the same Spirit. The baptism with water can purify and prepare people to accept Christ, the Son of God, but the baptism with the Holy Spirit will enable believers to experience divine life and to continue his mission in the world (4:14; 7:37–39; 20:21–23).

Soon after the Baptist saw the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus, implicitly at the time of Jesus’ baptism, he bore witness that Jesus is the Son of God (1:34). In John the title “Son of God” is spoken of equally with God the Father (5:18; 10:30; 14:9–11), in contrast to the Roman emperor, who also was called “son of God.” In this sense, Jesus’ sonship is the only of its kind. The Jews in Qumran identified the “son” in 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 with the Messiah begotten by God (1QSa 2.11–12; 4QFlor 1.1–19), and similarly John identifies the “Son of God” with the Messiah. At first the Baptist cryptically introduces Jesus as “the one standing among you whom you do not know” (1:26), and the veil is removed for the “insiders” when he introduces Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29), and finally he reveals the one “upon whom the Spirit descends and remains” (1:33) as the Son of God.³²

Emergence of Jesus’ new community (1:35–51)

The next day after the Baptist unveiled who Jesus is, two of his disciples followed Jesus and came into fellowship with him. This initiates the dawn of the new covenant community around Jesus. The Baptist introduced Jesus, who was walking by, to these disciples saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1:36). The name of one of the two is mentioned as Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, but the name of the other is hidden (1:40). Their immediate response of following Jesus proves the convincing effect of the Baptist’s

31. The word “to remain” (*menein*), which is used about forty times in the Gospel, indicates the intimate union that exists between Jesus and the Father and also between Jesus and his followers.

32. Neyrey 2007: 53.

testimony, which enabled his disciples finally to accept Jesus as the Christ. In John's Gospel, a genuine "seeing" of Jesus is often preceded by "hearing" about Jesus and followed by "believing" and "witnessing."³³ Jesus, on seeing the two walking behind him, questioned them, "What are you seeking?" (1:38). On the surface, Jesus' question asks what they really want from him, but at a deeper level it means whether they are seeking the life that quench their spiritual thirst.³⁴

The two disciples, instead of answering the question directly, asked Jesus, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" The question shows that the two wanted to know Jesus more and have intimate friendship with him. The Greek word used for "staying" (*menein*) in John denotes intimacy with Jesus. The knowledge they had gained through the Baptist that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away human sin and who empowers believers with the Holy Spirit, could have created a spiritual longing within them. Therefore they wanted to remain with him and learn from him the Law, which was normally taught by Jewish rabbis even until late at night.³⁵ This explains why they called him "Rabbi," which means "my great one" or "teacher."

Jesus' answer, "Come and you will see," invites the seekers not only to come and stay with him but also to perceive him as the Messiah to whom the OT points (cf. John 6:37; Matt 11:28). Responding to Jesus' invitation, the two disciples went with him. The time of their stay with Jesus is specified as the "tenth hour," which, as per Jewish reckoning, would be 4:00 p.m. Does it denote the time when the disciples came to Jesus or the time when they left him? The statement "they stayed with him that day" (1:39b) implies that the two stayed with Jesus until 4.00 p.m. If the disciples' stay had fallen on a Friday, as Brown has calculated,³⁶ then the followers would have left Jesus before the Sabbath started, at 6.00 p.m.³⁷ In his dialogue with them throughout the day, Jesus convinced them through the Scriptures that he is the Messiah (cf. John 1:41, 45; Luke 24:25–27, 32). The disciples got new revelation about God and the Messiah, which marked a turning point in their lives.

33. Kanagaraj 2005: 84–85.

34. Cf. Carson 1991: 154–55.

35. Barrett 1978: 204.

36. Brown 1978: 1.98.

37. The reference to the precise time or day occurs often in John (e.g., 3:2; 4:6; 18:28; 19:39, 42; 20:1, 19), showing that the narrated events happened in history at a particular point of time.

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Their joy and new knowledge of Scripture inspired the two disciples to tell others that they found the Messiah.³⁸ Andrew shares this good news first to his brother Simon (1:41), who was inspired to see Jesus. Therefore Andrew brought him to Jesus to be a part of Jesus' community. With the Baptist as the origin, the two disciples became the pioneers of Christ's community, the church.

The Greek word *emblepsas* ("having looked at") in 1:42 implies Jesus' deep insight and inner perception into the life of Simon. Jesus had already known Peter by the name "Simon" and his father, John, for he foreknew each human being by name, background, and future destination (1:48; 2:24–25; 4:16–18; 13:38; 20:25, 27; 21:6). Simon will be called "Cephas" (*petros* in Greek), meaning "rock," because at his meeting with Jesus, Simon must have perceived him as the Christ. By changing his name, Jesus hints at a change in Peter's life and ministry thereafter.

Jesus takes the initiative ("Jesus decided") to shift the place of his ministry from the eastern side of Jordan to the western side of the Sea of Galilee, where he finds Philip of Bethsaida (cf. 12:21), a disciple who attains importance in John's Gospel (12:21–22; 14:8–9). Bethsaida is mentioned as the "city of Andrew and Peter" (1:44), whereas according to the Synoptic Gospels Andrew and Peter came from Capernaum (Matt 8:5, 14; Mark 1:21, 29; Luke 4:31, 38). However, both Bethsaida and Capernaum were situated in Galilee and after 70 CE the whole region around the Sea of Galilee was called "Galilee,"³⁹ and therefore John is not incorrect in mentioning the native place of Philip. He is the only disciple whom Jesus commands in John, "Follow me" (1:43), a command given to other disciples in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 4:19–22; 8:22; 9:9; Mark 1:17, 20; 2:14). Philip decided to follow Jesus, and this led him to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ to whom the Law of Moses and the OT prophets (the whole of OT) testify (John 1:45).

Philip immediately shared his conviction with Nathanael by witnessing, "We have found him . . ." Thus the circle of God's new community became bigger by the addition of those who believed Jesus as the Christ and bore witness to him enthusiastically. Since the foundation of this new community is faith in Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus, in John, is revealed and

38. For the sake of Greek readers the narrator translates the Hebrew "Messiah" into Greek "Christ" (cf. 1:38, 41).

39. Barrett 1978: 183.

confessed as the Messiah in the initial stage of his ministry, whereas in other Gospels it is divulged later (Matt 16:16, 20 par.).

Nathanael's immediate question, "Can any good thing be from Nazareth?" (1:46), reflects perhaps the civic rivalry between Cana, Nathanael's native place (21:2), and the neighboring Nazareth.⁴⁰ Philip's response, "Come and see," looks back to the same invitation given by Jesus to the two disciples (1:39). As Nathanael was approaching Jesus, Jesus called him an Israelite in whom there is no craftiness, because Jesus knew his inner thirst to see the Messiah (1:47), and this explains Jesus' foreknowledge of Nathanael even before Philip called him, because Jesus had seen him when Nathanael was under the fig tree (1:48). The statement "I saw you . . . when you were under the fig tree" indicates that Nathanael was looking for the Messiah to come and was, therefore, meditating on the Law under the fig tree to search for the Messiah and his activities. Some rabbinic texts claim that the more one studies the words of Law the more relish one finds in them, just like the one who searches on the fig tree finds more fruits on it (e.g., *b. Erub.* 54a).⁴¹ Nathanael's action is in line with the Jewish rabbis who studied under fig trees.⁴² Jesus' foreknowledge of Philip's meeting with Nathanael and of Nathanael's expectation of the Messiah proves that Jesus was divine even while he was a human.

In his first encounter with Jesus, Nathanael confesses that Jesus is the "Son of God" and the "King of Israel" (1:49). His search of the Scriptures had led him to identify both titles as denoting the Messiah, who will subdue the enemies of Israel and establish his kingdom. That Christ will come as King in the family of David in order to rule over Israelites with justice and peace is an OT concept (Isa 11:1–5; 35:4; Zeph 3:14–17; Zech 9:9–10). Christ is also portrayed as the Son begotten by God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7). The messianic title "King of Israel," in conjunction with "Son of God," alludes to these OT passages.

Nevertheless, Jesus questioned Nathanael's faith, for he had believed in Jesus as the Christ only by seeing his supernatural knowledge (1:50; cf. 2:23–25; 12:37; 20:29). In John, believing in Jesus just by seeing his supernatural deeds causes only an embryonic faith, and genuine faith comes by hearing his words. After pointing out his faith as based on seeing, Jesus gives him a promise that he will see greater things than Jesus' supernatural

40. Keener 2005: 1.484; Barrett 1978: 184.

41. Brown 1978: 1.83; Neyrey 2007: 58.

42. Cf. Barclay 1957: 1.77–78.

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knowledge. This promise is given also for all Jesus' followers, as the plural "you [will see]" in 1:51 shows.

The community of disciples will see greater things throughout Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus' promise is introduced with his solemn declaration, "Truly, truly I say to you," which appears twenty-five times in the Johannine sayings of Jesus. This implies that Jesus pronounces a heavenly truth that is confirmed and unchangeable. He promises a vision that will be seen collectively by all those who believe in Jesus.

God's new community, emerged around Jesus, will see "heaven opened" and get a vision of God's glory (Ezek 1:1; Mark 1:10; Acts 7:56; Rev 4:1; 11:19; cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Dan 7:13; Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; Rev 12:1; 15:1; etc.). It will see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, just like Jacob saw (Gen 28:12–17). Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder and at the top of it he saw the Lord God, who revealed himself to Jacob as the God of his fathers.

The Johannine Jesus replaces Jacob's ladder with the Son of Man on whom the angels were ascending and descending. This means that just as Jacob's ladder was the means of communication between earth and heaven, John portrays the Son of Man, Jesus, as the way from earth to heaven (John 14:6) and the means of communication with God. Moreover, there is no reference in John for the presence of God who revealed himself to Jacob (Gen 28:13–15). However, for John one can see the same God in the Son of Man. Thus Jesus, the Son of Man, becomes to all people both the way to heaven and the revelation of God's glory.

The idea of the Son of Man as the mediator between heaven and earth is based on Daniel's vision of "one like a son of man," who is the representative of both God and the saints of the Most High and through whom God's people will possess God's kingdom, dominion, and authority (Dan 7:9–27). It is possible that Jesus picked up the title "Son of Man" for himself from Daniel 7 to denote the communication between God and humanity.⁴³ At the same time, the term "son of man" was used to refer to the "man of God's right hand," implying the "anointed one of God" (Ps 80:17). When John was written, the Jews understood the title "Son of Man" in terms of the "Elect One" of God or the "Christ" (*1 En.* 37–71; *4 Ezra* 12–13). In John,

43. In the OT the term "son of man" means a mere mortal human being (e.g., Ps 8:4; Ezek 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; etc.), but Dan 7:13–14 shows "the son of man" as a heavenly being who comes with the clouds of heaven. In view of John's constant emphasis that Jesus came from heaven (e.g., 3:13; 6:38, 41–42, 50–51; 8:23), we should understand the title "Son of Man" against the background of Dan 7.

“Son of Man” is spoken by the people on par with “Messiah” (12:34). Thus, the “Son of Man” in 1:51 refers to Christ, who came from heaven to reveal God, his love and life-giving power. He is the place where one can see God’s glory in human form on earth (John 19:5; cf. Ezek 1:26–28). This could be a polemic against the Jewish mystics who claimed that one can see the kingly glory of God in human form only by ascending to heaven (cf. John 3:13).

The whole Gospel of John hereafter will show how Jesus’ promise in 1:51 was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus and how God was creating a new covenant community in the Son of Man. In this sense, 1:51 is a springboard for studying the Gospel of John.

SAMPLE