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God Is Here!

John 1

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" asked Solomon as he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:27). A good question, indeed! God's glory had dwelt in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), and in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11); but that glory had departed from disobedient Israel (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22-23).

Then a marvelous thing happened: the glory of God came to His people again, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. The writers of the four Gospels have given us "snapshots" of our Lord's life on earth, for no complete biography could ever be written (John 21:25). Matthew wrote with his fellow Jews in mind and emphasized that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Mark wrote for the busy Romans. Whereas Matthew emphasized the King, Mark presented the Servant, ministering to needy people. Luke wrote his Gospel for the Greeks and introduced them to the sympathetic Son of man.

But it was given to John, the beloved disciple, to write a book for both Jews and Gentiles, presenting Jesus as the Son of God. We know that John had Gentiles in mind as well as Jews,

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because he often "interpreted" Jewish words or customs for his readers (1:38, 41-42; 5:2; 9:7; 19:13, 17; 20:16). His emphasis to the Jews was that Jesus not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, but He also fulfilled the *types*. Jesus is the Lamb of God (1:29) and the Ladder from heaven to earth (1:51; and see Gen. 28). He is the New Temple (John 2:19-21), and He gives a new birth (3:4ff). He is the serpent lifted up (3:14) and the Bread of God that came down from heaven (6:35ff).

Whereas the first three Gospels major on describing *events* in the life of Christ, John emphasizes the *meaning* of these events. For example, all four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000 but only John records Jesus' sermon on "The Bread of Life" which followed that miracle when He interpreted it for the people.

But there is one major theme that runs throughout John's Gospel: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if you commit yourself to Him, He will give you eternal life (20:31). In this first chapter, John recorded seven names and titles of Jesus that identify Him as eternal God.

1. The Word (John 1:1-3, 14)

Much as our words reveal to others our hearts and minds, so Jesus Christ is God's "Word" to reveal His heart and mind to us. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). A word is composed of letters, and Jesus Christ is "Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:11), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. According to Hebrews 1:1-3, Jesus Christ is God's *last* Word to mankind, for He is the climax of divine revelation.

Jesus Christ is the *Eternal Word* (John 1:1-2). He existed in the beginning, not because He had a beginning as a creature, but because He is eternal. He is God and He was *with* God. "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58).

He is also the *Creative Word* (1:3). There is certainly a parallel between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, the "new creation"

and the "old creation." God created the worlds through His word: "And God said, Let there be . . ." / "For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). God created all things through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16), which means that Jesus is not a created being. He is eternal God.

The verb *was made* is perfect tense in the Greek, which means a "completed act." Creation is finished. It is not a process still going on, even though God is certainly at work in His creation (John 5:17). Creation is not a process; it is a finished product.

Jesus Christ is the *Incarnate Word* (1:14). He was not a phantom or a spirit when He ministered on earth, nor was His body a mere illusion. John and the other disciples each had personal experience that convinced them of the reality of the body of Jesus (1 John 1:1-2). Even though John's emphasis is the deity of Christ, he makes it clear that the Son of God came in *the flesh* and was subject to the sinless infirmities of human nature.

In his Gospel, John points out that Jesus was weary (4:6) and thirsty (4:7). He groaned within (11:33) and openly wept (11:35). On the cross, He thirsted (19:28), died (19:30), and bled (19:34). After His resurrection, He proved to Thomas and the other disciples that He still had a real body (20:24-29), howbeit, a glorified body.

How was the "Word made flesh"? By the miracle of the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). He took upon Himself sinless human nature and identified with us in every aspect of life from birth to death. "The Word" was not an abstract concept of philosophy, but a real person who could be seen, touched, and heard. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is God.

The revelation of God's glory is an important theme in the Gospel. Jesus revealed God's glory in His person, His works, and His words. John recorded seven wonderful signs (miracles) that openly declared the glory of God (2:11). The glory

of the Old Covenant of Law was a fading glory, but the glory of the New Covenant in Christ is an increasing glory (see 2 Cor. 3). The Law could reveal sin, but it could never remove sin. Jesus Christ came with *fullness* of grace and truth, and this fullness is available to all who will trust Him (John 1:16).

2. The Light (John 1:4-13)

Life is a key theme in John's Gospel; it is used thirty-six times. What are the essentials for human life? There are at least four: light (if the sun went out, everything would die), air, water, and food. Jesus is all of these! He is the Light of life and the Light of the world (8:12). He is the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2). By His Holy Spirit, He gives us the "breath of life" (John 3:8; 20:22), as well as the Water of life (4:10, 13-14; 7:37-39). Finally, Jesus is the Living Bread of Life that came down from heaven (6:35ff). He not only has life and gives life, but He is life (14:6).

Light and darkness are recurring themes in John's Gospel. God is light (1 John 1:5) while Satan is "the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). People love either the light or the darkness, and this love controls their actions (John 3:16-19). Those who believe on Christ are the "sons of light" (12:35-36). Just as the first Creation began with "Let there be light!" so the new creation begins with the entrance of light into the heart of the believer (2 Cor. 4:3-6). The coming of Jesus Christ into the world was the dawning of a new day for sinful man (Luke 1:78-79).

You would think that blind sinners would welcome the light, but such is not always the case. The coming of the true light brought conflict as the powers of darkness opposed it. A literal translation of John 1:5 reads, "And the light keeps on shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it or understood it." The Greek verb can mean "to overcome" or "to grasp, to understand." Throughout the Gospel of John, you will see both attitudes revealed: people will not understand

what the Lord is saying and doing and, as a result, they will oppose Him. Chapters 7—12 of John's Gospel record the growth of that opposition, which ultimately led to the crucifixion of Christ.

Whenever Jesus taught a spiritual truth, His listeners interpreted it in a material or physical way. The light was unable to penetrate the darkness in their minds. This was true when He spoke about the temple of His body (2:19-21), the new birth (3:4), the living water (4:11), eating His flesh (6:51ff), spiritual freedom (8:30-36), death as sleep (11:11-13), and many other spiritual truths. Satan strives to keep people in the darkness, because darkness means death and hell, while light means life and heaven.

This fact helps explain the ministry of John the Baptist (1:6-8). John was sent as a witness to Jesus Christ, to tell people that the Light had come into the world. The nation of Israel, in spite of all its spiritual advantages, was blind to their own Messiah! The word *witness* is a key word in this book; John uses the noun fourteen times and the verb thirty-three times. John the Baptist was one of many people who bore witness to Jesus, "This is the Son of God!" Alas, John the Baptist was martyred and the Jewish leaders did nothing to prevent it.

Why did the nation reject Jesus Christ? Because they "knew Him not." They were spiritually ignorant. Jesus is the "true Light"—the original of which every other light is a copy—but the Jews were content with the copies. They had Moses and the Law, the temple and the sacrifices; but they did not comprehend that these "lights" pointed to the true Light who was the fulfillment, the completion, of the Old Testament religion.

As you study John's Gospel, as mentioned previously, you will find Jesus teaching the people that He is the fulfillment of all that was typified in the Law. It was not enough to be born a Jew; they had to be born again, born from above (chap. 3). He deliberately performed two miracles on the Sabbath to teach

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them that He had a new rest to give them (chaps. 5; 9). He was the satisfying manna (chap. 6) and the life-giving Water (7:37-39). He is the Shepherd of a new flock (10:16), and He is a *new* Vine (chap. 15). But the people were so shackled by religious tradition that they could not understand spiritual truth. Jesus came to His own world that He had created, but His own people, Israel, could not understand Him and would not receive Him.

They saw His works and heard His words. They observed His perfect life. He gave them every opportunity to grasp the truth, believe, and be saved. Jesus is the way, but they would not walk with Him (6:66-71). He is the truth, but they would not believe Him (12:37ff). He is the life, and they crucified Him!

But sinners today need not commit those same blunders. John 1:12-13 gives us the marvelous promise of God that anyone who receives Christ will be born again and enter the family of God! John says more about this new birth in chapter 3, but he points out here that it is a spiritual birth from God, not a physical birth that depends on human nature.

The Light is still shining! Have you *personally* received the Light and become a child of God?

3. The Son of God (John 1:15-28, 49)

John the Baptist is one of the most important persons in the New Testament. He is mentioned at least eighty-nine times. John had the special privilege of introducing Jesus to the nation of Israel. He also had the difficult task of preparing the nation to receive their Messiah. He called them to repent of their sins and to prove that repentance by being baptized and then living changed lives.

John summarizes what John the Baptist had to say about Jesus Christ (John 1:15-18). First, *He is eternal* (v. 15). John the Baptist was actually born six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36); so in this statement he is referring to our Lord's preexis-

tence, not His birth date. Jesus existed before John the Baptist was ever conceived.

Jesus Christ *has fullness of grace and truth* (John 1:16-17). Grace is God's favor and kindness bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. If God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive; but He deals with us on the basis of grace *and* truth. Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, met all the demands of the Law; now God is free to share fullness of grace with those who trust Christ. Grace without truth would be deceitful, and truth without grace would be condemning.

In John 1:17, John did not suggest that there was no grace under the Law of Moses, because there was. Each sacrifice was an expression of the grace of God. The Law also revealed God's truth. But in Jesus Christ, grace and truth reach their fullness; and this fullness is available to us. We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9), but we also live by grace (1 Cor. 15:10) and depend on God's grace in all that we do. We can receive one grace after another, for "He giveth more grace" (James 4:6). In John 1:17, John hinted that a whole new order had come in, replacing the Mosaic system.

Finally, *Jesus Christ reveals God to us* (1:18). As to His essence, God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27). Man can see God revealed in nature (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1-6) and in His mighty works in history; but he cannot see God Himself. Jesus Christ reveals God to us, for He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). The word translated "declared" gives us our English word *exegetis*, which means "to explain, to unfold, to lead the way." Jesus Christ explains God to us and interprets Him for us. We simply cannot understand God apart from knowing His Son, Jesus Christ.

The word *Son* is used for the first time in John's Gospel as a title for Jesus Christ (John 1:18). The phrase "only-begotten" means "unique, the only one of its kind." It does not suggest

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that there was a time when the Son was not, and then the Father brought Him into being. Jesus Christ is eternal God; He has always existed.

At least nine times in John's Gospel, Jesus is called "the Son of God" (1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31). You will recall that John had as his purpose in writing to convince us that Jesus is the Son of God (20:31). At least nineteen times, Jesus is referred to as "the Son." He is not only the Son of God, but He is God the Son. Even the demons admitted this (Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41).

John the Baptist is one of six persons named in the Gospel of John who gave witness that Jesus is God. The others are Nathanael (1:49), Peter (6:69), the blind man who was healed (9:35-38), Martha (11:27), and Thomas (20:28). If you add our Lord Himself (5:25; 10:36), then you have seven clear witnesses.

John gave the record of four days in the life of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the first disciples. He continues this sequence in chapter 2 and presents, as it were, a "week" in the "new creation" that parallels the Creation week in Genesis 1.

On the first day (1:19-24), a committee from the Jewish religious leaders interrogated John the Baptist. These men had every right to investigate John and his ministry, since they were the custodians and guardians of the faith. They asked him several questions and he clearly answered them.

"Who are you?" was a logical question. Was he the promised Messiah? Was he the Prophet Elijah who was supposed to come before the Messiah appeared? (Mal. 4:5) Great crowds had gathered to hear John, and many people had been baptized. Though John did no miracles (John 10:41), it was possible the people thought that he was the promised Messiah.

John denied being either Elijah or the Messiah. (In one sense, he was the promised Elijah. See Matthew 17:10-13.) John had nothing to say about himself because he was sent to talk about Jesus! Jesus is the Word; John was but "a voice"—

and you cannot see a voice! John pointed back to Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 40:1-3) and affirmed that he was the fulfillment.

Having ascertained who John was, the committee then asked what he was doing. "Why are you baptizing?" John got his authority to baptize, not from men, but from heaven, because he was commissioned by God (Matt. 21:23-32). The Jewish religious leaders in that day baptized Gentiles who wanted to adopt the Jewish faith; *but John baptized Jews!*

John explained that his baptism was in water, but that the Messiah would come and baptize with a spiritual baptism. Again, John made it clear that he was not establishing a new religion or seeking to exalt himself. He was pointing people to the Saviour, the Son of God (John 1:34). We shall learn later that it was through baptism that Jesus Christ would be presented to the people of Israel.

4. Lamb of God (John 1:29-34)

This is the second day of the week that the Apostle John recorded, and no doubt some of the same committee members were present to hear John the Baptist's message. This time, he called Jesus "the Lamb of God," a title he would repeat the next day (vv. 35-36). In one sense, the message of the Bible can be summed up in this title. The question in the Old Testament is, "Where is the lamb?" (Gen. 22:7) In the four Gospels, the emphasis is "Behold the Lamb of God!" Here He is! After you have trusted Him, you sing with the heavenly choir, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Rev. 5:12)

The people of Israel were familiar with lambs for the sacrifices. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb; and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the temple altar, plus all the other lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs were brought by men to men, but here is God's Lamb, given by God to men! Those lambs could not take away sin, but the Lamb of God can take away sin. Those lambs were for

Israel alone, but this Lamb would shed His blood for the whole world!

What does John's baptism have to do with Jesus as the Lamb of God? It is generally agreed by scholars of all denominations that, in the New Testament, baptism was by immersion. It pictured death, burial, and resurrection. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, Jesus and John were picturing the "baptism" Jesus would endure *on the cross* when He would die as the sacrificial Lamb of God (Luke 12:50; Isa. 53:7). It would be through death, burial, and resurrection that the Lamb of God would "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Perhaps John was mistaken. Perhaps John was not sure that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God or the Son of God. But the Father made it clear to John just who Jesus was by sending the Spirit like a dove to light upon Him. What a beautiful picture of the Trinity!

5. The Messiah (John 1:35-42)

This is now the third day in the sequence. The seventh day included the wedding at Cana (2:1); and since Jewish weddings traditionally were on Wednesdays, it would make this third day the Sabbath Day. But it was not a day of rest for either John the Baptist or Jesus, for John was preaching and Jesus was gathering disciples.

The two disciples of John who followed Jesus were John, the writer of the Gospel, and his friend Andrew. John the Baptist was happy when people left him to follow Jesus, because his ministry focused on Jesus. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30).

When Jesus asked them, "What are you seeking?" He was forcing them to define their purposes and goals. Were they looking for a revolutionary leader to overthrow Rome? Then they had better join the Zealots! Little did Andrew and John realize that day how their lives would be transformed by the Son of God.

"Where are You dwelling?" may have suggested, "If You are too busy now, we can visit later." But Jesus invited them to spend the day with Him (it was 10 A.M.) and no doubt He told them something of His mission, revealed their own hearts to them, and answered their questions. They were both so impressed that they found their brothers and brought them to Jesus. Andrew found Simon and John brought James. Indeed, they *were* their brothers' keepers! (Gen. 4:9) Whenever you find Andrew in John's Gospel, he is bringing somebody to Jesus: his brother, the lad with the loaves and fishes (John 6:8), and the Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (12:20-21). No sermons from Andrew are recorded, but he certainly preached great sermons by his actions as a personal soul winner!

"We have found the Messiah!" was the witness Andrew gave to Simon. *Messiah* is a Hebrew word that means "anointed," and the Greek equivalent is "Christ." To the Jews, it was the same as "Son of God" (see Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:67-70). In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and thereby set apart for special service. Kings were especially called "God's anointed" (1 Sam. 26:11; Ps. 89:20); so, when the Jews spoke about their Messiah, they were thinking of the king who would come to deliver them and establish the kingdom.

There was some confusion among the Jewish teachers as to what the Messiah would do. Some saw Him as a suffering sacrifice (as in Isaiah 53), while others saw a splendid king (as in Isaiah 9 and 11). Jesus had to explain even to His own followers that the cross had to come before the crown, that He must suffer before He could enter into His glory (Luke 24:13-35). Whether or not Jesus was indeed the Messiah was a crucial problem that challenged the Jews in that day (John 7:26, 40-44; 9:22; 10:24).

Simon's interview with Jesus changed his life. It also gave him a new name—*Peter* in the Greek, *Cephas* in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke—both of which mean "a rock." It took a great

deal of work for Jesus to transform weak Simon into a rock, but He did it! "Thou art. . . thou shalt be" is a great encouragement to all who trust Christ. Truly, He gives us the "power to become" (1:12).

It is worth noting that Andrew and John trusted Christ through the faithful preaching of John the Baptist. Peter and James came to Christ because of the compassionate personal work of their brothers. Later on, Jesus will win Philip personally; and then Philip will witness to Nathanael and bring him to Jesus. Each man's experience is different, because God uses various means to bring sinners to the Saviour. The important thing is that we trust Christ and then seek to bring others to Him.

6. The King of Israel (John 1:43-49)

Jesus called Philip personally and Philip trusted Him and followed Him. We do not know what kind of heart preparation Philip experienced, for usually God prepares a person before He calls him. We do know that Philip proved his faith by seeking to share it with his friend Nathanael.

John 21:2 suggests that at least seven of our Lord's disciples were fishermen, including Nathanael. Fishermen are courageous and stick to the job, no matter how difficult it may be. But Nathanael started out a doubter: he did not believe that anything worthwhile could come out of Nazareth. Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, but He grew up in Nazareth and bore that stigma (Matt. 2:19-23). To be called "a Nazarene" (Acts 24:5) meant to be looked down upon and rejected.

When Nathanael hesitated and argued, Philip adopted our Lord's own words: "Come and see" (John 1:39). Later on, Jesus would invite, "Come and drink!" (7:37) and, "Come and dine!" (21:12) "Come" is the great invitation of God's grace.

When Nathanael came to Jesus, he discovered that the Lord already knew all about him! What a shock! By calling him "an Israelite in whom is no guile," Jesus was certainly referring to

Jacob, the ancestor of the Jews, *a man who* used guile to trick his brother, his father, and his father-in-law. Jacob's name was changed to "Israel, a prince with God." The reference to "Jacob's ladder" in John 1:51 confirms this.

When Jesus revealed His knowledge of Nathanael, where he had been and what he had been doing, this was enough to convince the man that Jesus indeed was "the Son of God, the King of Israel." His experience was like that of the Samaritan woman at the well. "When He [Messiah] is come, He will tell us all things.... Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did" (John 4:25, 29). The revealing of the human heart should also take place in the ministry of local churches (1 Cor. 14:23-35).

When Philip witnessed to Nathanael, the evidence he gave was Moses and the prophets (John 1:45). Perhaps Jesus gave Philip a "quick course" in the Old Testament messianic prophecies, as He did with the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13ff). It is always good to tie our personal witness to the Word of God.

"King of Israel" would be a title similar to "Messiah, anointed One," for the kings were always God's anointed (see Ps. 2, especially vv. 2, 6-7). At one point in His ministry, the crowds wanted to make Jesus king, but He refused them (John 6:15ff). He did present Himself as King (12:10ff), and He affirmed to Pilate that He was born a king (18:33-37).

Some students believe that Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person. John never mentions Bartholomew in his Gospel, but the other three writers name Bartholomew and not Nathanael. Philip is linked with Bartholomew in the lists of names (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14), so it is possible that the two men were "paired off" and served together. It was not unusual in that day for one man to have two different names.

7. The Son of Man (John 1:50-51)

"Son of man" was one of our Lord's favorite titles for Himself; it is used eighty-three times in the Gospels and at least thirteen

times in John. The title speaks of both the deity and humanity of Jesus. The vision in Daniel 7:13 presents the "Son of man" in a definite messianic setting; and Jesus used the title in the same way (Matt. 26:64).

As Son of man, Jesus is the "living link" between heaven and earth. This explains His reference to "Jacob's ladder" in Genesis 28. Jacob the fugitive thought he was alone, but God had sent the angels to guard and guide him. Christ is God's "ladder" between heaven and earth. "No man cometh to the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Often in this Gospel, you will find Jesus reminding people that He came down from heaven. The Jewish people knew that "Son of man" was a name for their Messiah (12:34).

At the close of that fourth day, Jesus had six believing men who were His disciples. They did not immediately "forsake all and follow Him"; that was to come later. But they had trusted Him and experienced His power. In the three years that lay ahead, they would grow in their faith, learn more about Jesus, and one day take His place on the earth so that the Word might be carried to all mankind.

Jesus of Nazareth is God come in the flesh. When Philip called Him "the son of Joseph," he was not denying Jesus' virgin birth or divine nature. That was merely His legal identification, for a Jewish person was identified according to who his father was (John 6:42). The witness of this entire chapter is clear: Jesus of Nazareth is God come in the flesh!

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