**THE INCARNATE WORD: A 4 WEEK STUDY OF JOHN**

**WEEK #1: JOHN 1:1- 4:54**

**INTRODUCTION TO JOHN**

* **Author: The Apostle John, *the disciple that Jesus loved* (13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20, 24)**
* **Date: A.D. 85 – A.D. 90**
* **Place: Ephesus based on testimony of early church fathers: Eusebius and Irenaeus.**
* **Key Verse: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”…John 6:51**

**STUDY OUTLINE – JOHN 1:1 – 4:54**

1. **2 INTRODUCTORY TESTIMONIES**
2. **Christological Prologue (1: - 1:18)**
3. **John the Baptist and First disciples (1:19 – 51)**
4. **Jesus Transforms Jewish Institutions (2:1 – 4:54)**
5. **The First Sign: Water into Wine – A New Joy (2:1-11)**
6. **Temple Cleansing – A new Temple (2:12-25)**
7. **Nicodemus and the Baptist – A New Birth (3:1-36)**
8. **Ministry in Samaria – (4:1-54)**
9. **The Woman at the Well (4:1-42)**
10. **The Second Sign: Healing the Official’s Son (4:43-54)**

**POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

**Chapter 1**

**Christological Prologue[[1]](#footnote-1)**

* **Logos: a widely used term (Stoic life force; God’s spoken word for Hebrews) which could refer to God’s way of communicating to mankind. So John is stressing that Jesus is the one and only way for true communication with God. (John 1:1-18)**
* **Jesus as Logos is incarnate as *sarx*, a genuine flesh and blood human being. Jesus is the Incarnate Word. John stresses the full humanity of Jesus throughout his Gospel. The life setting (*sitz im leben*) for this emphasis is the high probability of a docetic teaching circulating at the end of the first century that Jesus was not a genuine human being. Such teaching would undermine the truth of Christ as the Lamb of God sent as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the world. John is the only New Testament writer to call Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; and 27 times in Revelation).**
* **John’s Christological Prologue is perhaps the strongest testimony to both the complete divinity and complete humanity of Jesus as the Incarnate Word that is recorded in the New Testament. (Compare with Phil. 2: 5-11 and Col. 1: 15-20.) In a style that is both concentrated yet exquisitely detailed John describes the one and only Son of God in the following ways:**

1. **1:1 – *in the beginning was the Word* – John’s description of Jesus begins in Heaven. His divine nature did not begin with his incarnation. Jesus has pre-existed eternally in his own right as the second person of the Godhead.**
2. **1:2 – *he was with God in the beginning* – His relationship with God is eternal. There has never been a time when he was at all separated from God.**
3. **1:3 – *through him all things were made* – He is God’s Agent of Creation and transcends in his being all that has been created. If he does not transcend Creation he cannot rule over it.**
4. **1: 4-5 – *in him was life; the light shines in the darkness –* Christ is life, a major and repeated emphasis in John. Christ is also the light that shines in the darkness of the world bringing true and eternal life which for John reveals the essence of the mission of the Incarnate Word.**
5. **1:6-10 – Overall idea is that now the eternal enters into human (the world) history through the testimony of John the Baptist as a witness to Christ as the true light. Christ shines light on the darkness of the human condition which is pictured as antagonistic to heaven. The world’s failure to recognize and receive Jesus as the Christ is the primary result of the human darkness.**
6. **1:11-13 – The gift of faith in Christ is the *right to become children of God.* The birth into God’s family is not through any natural activity. It comes only from above from God who is the source of eternal life. (Relate this to Jesus’ teaching with Nicodemus on the necessity of being *born from above.*)**
7. **1:14-16 – *the Word became flesh:* Flesh (sarx) refers to the human realm compared to the heavenly. Jesus does not become a personality through the incarnation. He has always pre-existed as a personality. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God *full of grace and glory* that testifies to his divine nature.**
8. **1:17-18 – John contrasts two basic OT principles with God’s new revelation in Christ as the *Word became flesh:* 1)Whereas God had bound the old Israel to himself through the Law, he now calls people to himself through faith in the saving power of Christ. 2) The OT principle that *no one has seen God* is replaced by the Incarnate Word who makes God fully visible in the world.**

**REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

**Which aspect of the Word revealed in John’s prologue is most significant for you? Explain briefly.**

**John the Baptist and First Disciples – 1:19 – 51**

* **The Baptist’s significance:**

1. **Forerunner of the Lamb of God.**
2. **Fulfills prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6.**
3. **His is a baptism of repentance.**
4. **Jesus as the Lamb: purity, innocence, substitutionary atonement, obedience, redemptive power.**

* **Five disciples join Jesus: Andrew and an unnamed disciple (possibly John); Peter, Philip, Nathanael.**
* **The fig tree is a place for meditation on the Law: Nathaniel’s move to Jesus may picture the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant in Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**Chapter 2**

**The First Sign at Cana: Water Into Wine – 2: 1-11**

* **Jesus uses 6 stone jars used by the Jews for ceremonial cleansing.**
* **3 levels of significance:**

1. **The wine is the New Joy that Jesus brings in restoring true fellowship with God through forgiveness of sin.**
2. **The Lamb exchanges the old law for a higher law – the law of grace.**
3. **A sign that points to the New Covenant established by the cleansing blood of the Lamb.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

* **Result: The disciples believed in him as the Messiah.**

**REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

**What water has Jesus turned into wine in his relationship with you?**

**Temple Cleansing at Passover in Jerusalem – 2:12-25**

* **Motivation and prophecy fulfillment: Psalm 69:9.**
* **Jews demand a sign: Jesus alludes to his passion and himself as the Temple. They do not understand.**
* **Jesus does not trust faith based on miracles only (2:23-25).**

**Chapter 3**

**Nicodemus Visits Jesus – 3:1-21**

* **The message to Nicodemus is universal in application.**
* ***Gennethe anothen*: born again, born from above, and born anew.**
* **Born of *water and spirit* (3:5): refers to repentance (baptism of John) and regeneration of the spirit. Both are essentials for birth into God’s family.**
* **Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36: 24-29.**

**REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

**Can you describe your *BORN ANEW* experience?**

**The Additional Witness of John the Baptist – 3:22-36**

* **John is not the Christ but the attendant of Christ who is the bridegroom. The wedding imagery represents the coming of the Christ as a joyous occasion. See the link to Cana.**
* **Jesus is the *One from Above* in contrast to *those from the earth.***
* **God gives the Spirit *without limit* through the Son. This is a powerful claim to messianic identity in the context of Jewish expectations. For the Jews only the Messiah could bring back the Spirit of God.**
* **The chapter ends with a strong Trinitarian statement of the functional subordination of each member to the others. God confers eternal life through belief in the Son (vv. 35-36).**

**Chapter 4**

**Jesus Speaks with a Woman at the Well of Sychar – 4:1-42**

* **Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom. It fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. The Assyrians deported 30,000 Jews and resettled the area with foreigners. The Jews hated the Samarians considering them to be ritually unclean half-breeds – for many reasons not the true Israel.**
* **Key verse: “…but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (v.14) Note the universal availability of the spiritual water that imparts eternal life to all men – a favorite theme in John.**
* **Verse 26: “I who speak to you am he.” One of many *I AM* statements in John. This is the first self-confession of Jesus in John.**
* **Verse 29: “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” The woman comes to faith in response to Jesus’ personal knowledge of her. Hers is a picture of being *born from above* through the power of the *one sent from above.***

**REFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

**Jesus won this woman to true faith in God through the power of personal relationship. How can you use his model to enrich the personal relationships in your world?**

**Jesus Heals the Official’s Son – 4:43-54**

* **This man is a royal official serving in the court of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. Commentators are divided as to whether he is a Jew or perhaps a Gentile centurion.[[4]](#footnote-4)**
* **V.48 can be understood as a warning: miracles only point to the reality of God. They are not sufficient by themselves for complete faith in God.[[5]](#footnote-5)**
* **This is the second sign miracle in John. Notice the similarity to the healing of the centurion’s servant in Matt. 8: 5-13. Both healings are done at a distance.**
* **This section, Chapters 1-4, ends where it began; in Cana. Cana is a place of great significance in John. It reveals the New Joy and the New Life of the Messianic Age.**

**RFLECTION AND RESPONSE**

**Can you identify the aspects of your life that are drawing you away from the New Joy and New Life in Christ? Seek deliverance in Him.**

1. David Ellis, *John, NIV BIBLE COMMENTARY, F.F. Bruce, ed.,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979, 1232-1234. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kenneth O. Gangel, *HOLMAN NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY,* Max Anders, ed. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2000, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gangel, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gangel, 83 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ellis, 1241 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)