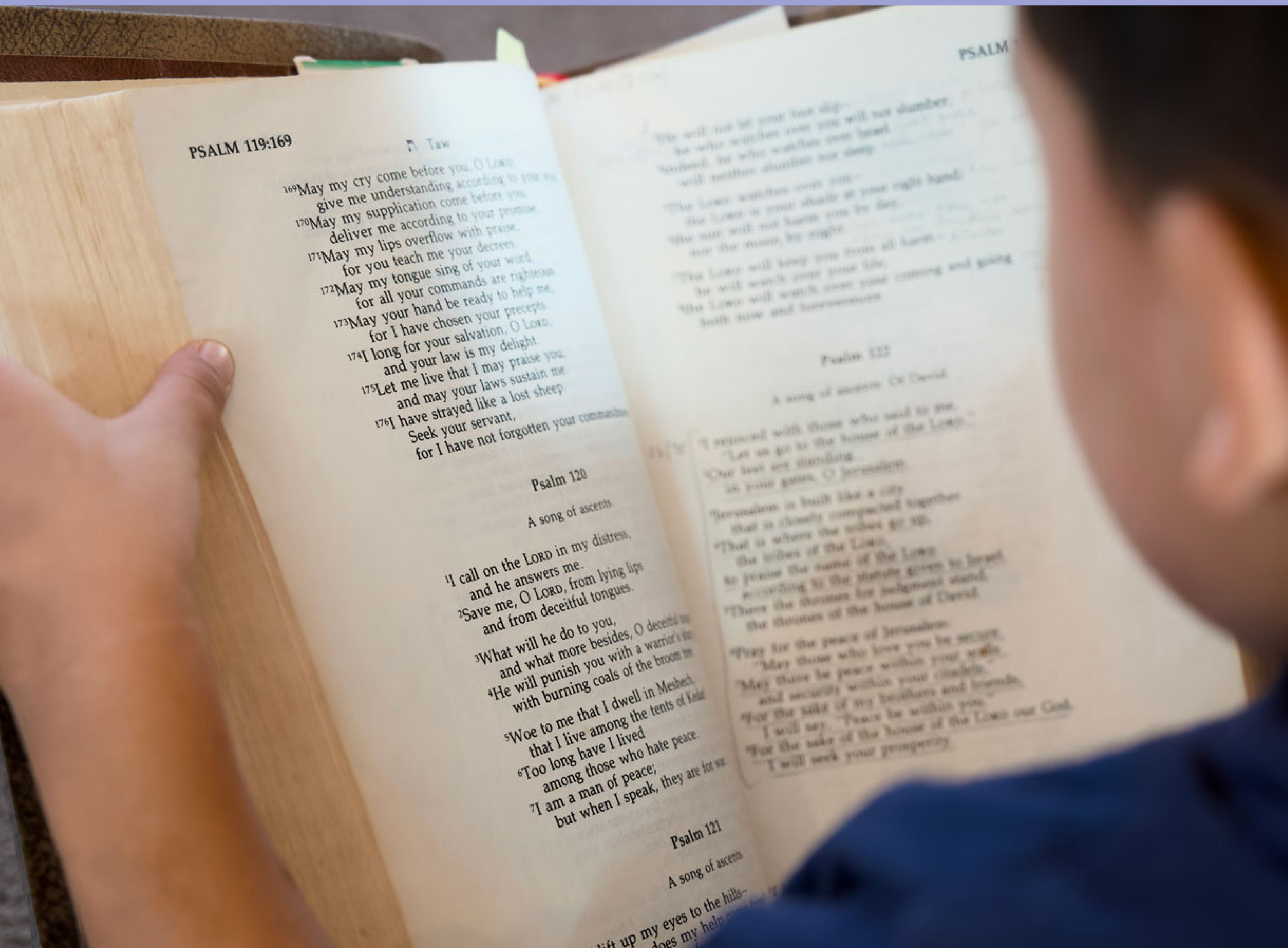




Into the Bible

**The purpose of into the Bible
is to get children into the Bible,
and to get the Bible into children.**

VOLUME 2 STEP 2: JOHN 1



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General Introduction



INTO THE BIBLE is a way to help children and young people, and anyone for that matter, to understand the Bible better. It's a simple translation from the original languages of the Bible, together with explanations, to make the Bible more clear.

Each Step INTO THE BIBLE is made up of three parts:

- 1) A **translation**, so that children can understand the passage in order to be able to read it in their own Bible.
- 2) An **introduction** to the passage for Beginners, so that they can get to know the background to the passage they are reading. This includes the history, geography, the issues of the time, and people involved, the culture, etc.
- 3) A **Bible study** on the passage for young people, or for parents, or teachers to help them grasp what the point of each paragraph is, and what are the issues spoken about in the text .

The method of INTO THE BIBLE is to consult the Hebrew or Greek lexicons (dictionaries) to find out what meaning of the Hebrew/Greek word best fits the context of the passage, and will also make clear sense to a young reader. Where a word is difficult to understand I may turn it into a sentence to make sense of it. Where an issue is rather complicated, I use a footnote to explain it.

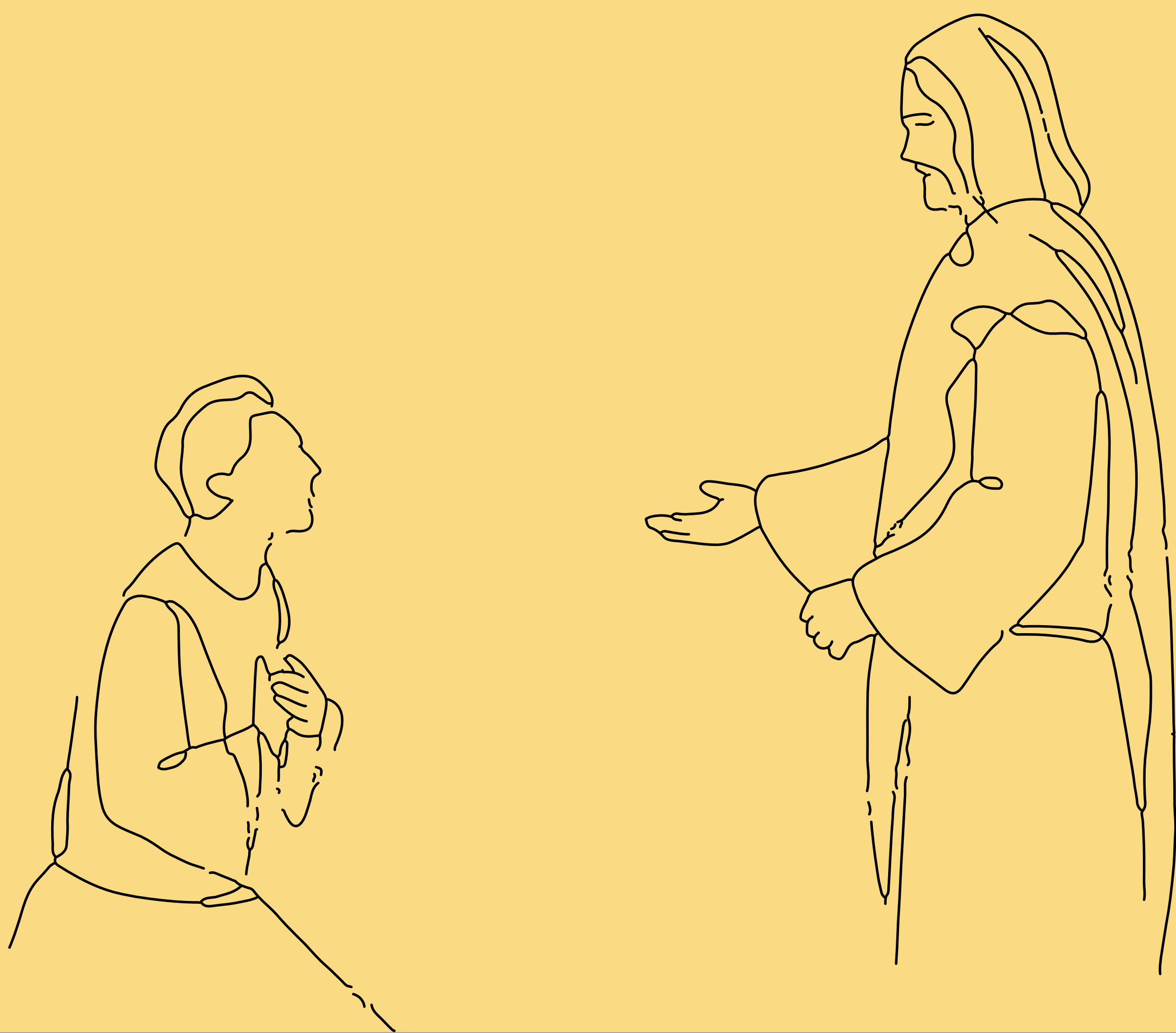
- INTO THE BIBLE is intended to prepare youngsters to be able to **read their own Bible.**
- INTO THE BIBLE is planned to **introduce children to most of the Bible.**
- INTO THE BIBLE is **educational.** It is meant to develop their reading skills as well as **their characters.** It can also be used by parents or teachers to teach their children. **The focus is on our children.**

Our children are our heritage from God, and the Bible is the heritage for our children, which is also from God. The purpose of Into the Bible is to get children into the Bible, and to get the Bible into children.

Yours in Christ,

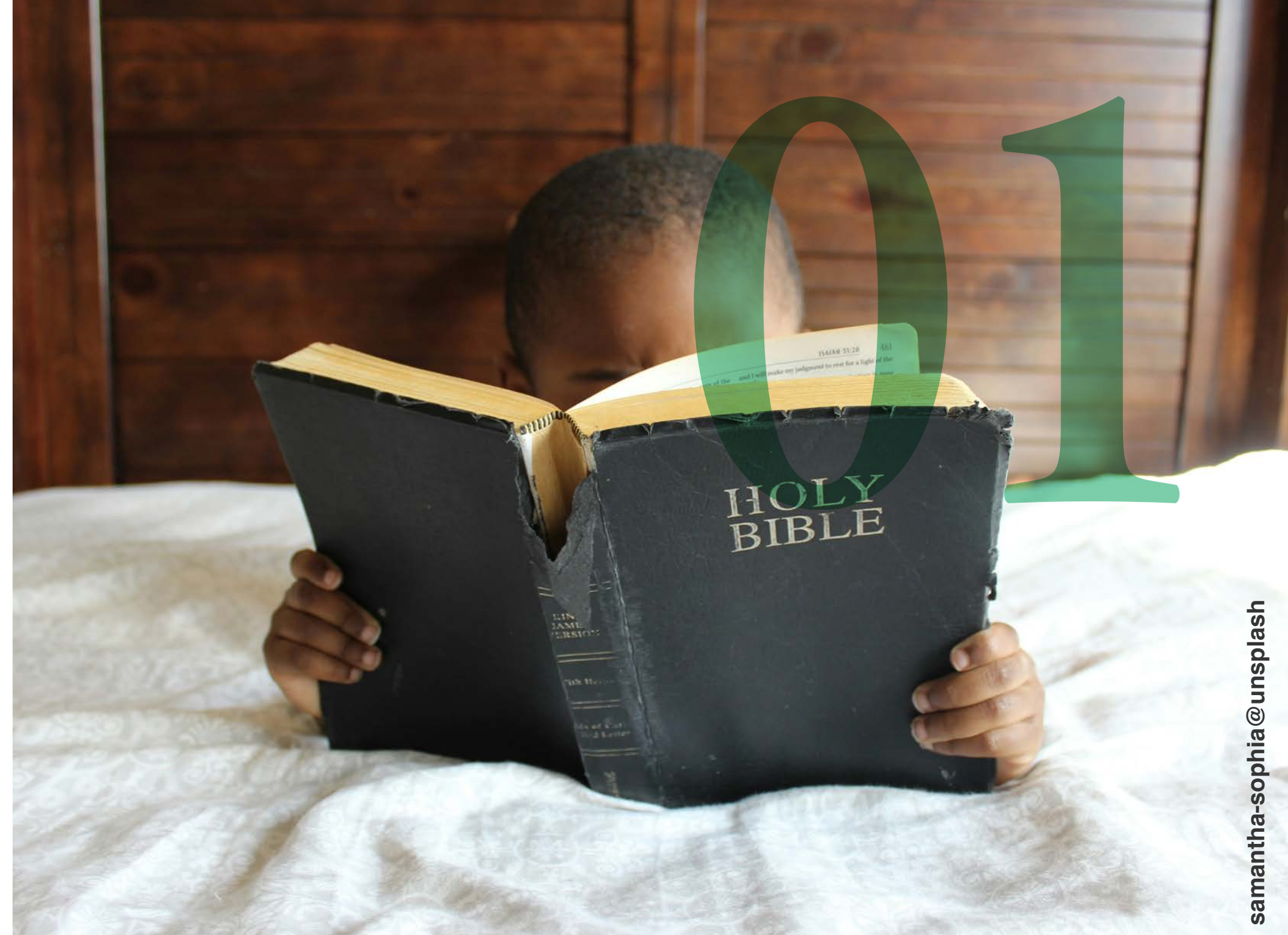
Peter Watson

John 1



John 1

A Simple Bible Translation



START HERE!

Read this simple translation to understand the passage, then read it in your own Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

1:1-5 JESUS IS THE WORD OF GOD

Right at the beginning Jesus was the word of God. Jesus, the Word of God, had always been with God. The Word was actually God.

Let me repeat that the Word of God was already there right at the very beginning, and that he was there together with God.

Everything that has happened in the world happened through Jesus Christ. Without him, nothing has ever happened at any time or anywhere - not a single thing!

Jesus holds the secret of life. He also shares the secret of life with people. Where people in the world are in trouble and confused, Jesus has got the answer to all their needs. He is like a bright light shining in the darkness.

It was so clear that he was good, and that he did what was right, and taught us what was true. Yet people did not accept him. They did not appreciate him. They did not understand him, because they did not want to. But he brought us God's truth even though so many people would not accept him.

1:6-11 JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

At that time a man appeared in Palestine who had been sent by God. His name was John the Baptist.

He came as a witness for God. His purpose or mission was to witness about Jesus. His job was to tell people about the Light that came from God and was about to shine

in the world. God wanted everyone to listen to John so that they would all believe in Jesus.

Although many people came to listen to John, he was not the light of the world. Although John was sent by God as a witness, he was not the word of God. John came just to tell people about Jesus Christ, who **is** the Word of God and the Light of the world.

The true Light, the one genuine light, was at that stage coming into the world. That good Light was Jesus Christ. He is the one who brings God's truth and hope into every person's life.

Jesus was here. He was in our world. He became a man just like us. But he was also different. He was much greater than anyone else. I repeat that everything that happened in our world happened because of him and through him. So he is at the heart and centre of all human life. He is the Leader of the whole world.

Yet when he came, the world did not know him. It did not want to. He even came to his own Jewish culture and to his own Jewish people. But even they did not welcome him. They did not want him, and they did not respect or honour him.

1:12-14 PEOPLE WHO DO BELIEVE IN JESUS

Though most people did not believe in Jesus, there were some people who did. They recognised his authority from God, and realised who he was. They believed in him. Jesus gave them the privilege and the ability to become the true children of God, the real people of God.

People are not Christians just because they have been brought up in a Christian way or in a Christian home. People are not Christians though they try hard to live a good Christian life. People are not Christians even if they earn a good reputation and deserve to be respected and admired. No, Christians are people who have become believers because they have found God. People are Christians when God himself has made them Christians.

So the Word of God became a man, a human being, just like us. He lived among us, and we actually saw how wonderful he was. He was just as wonderful as God his Father. Jesus was exactly like his Father, as any son is usually like his father. Jesus was absolutely special. He was God's one and only true Son. Like God, he was perfectly good, and utterly truthful. Because he lived with us, we could see for ourselves that he was extremely kind and completely truthful, just like God.

1:15-18 JESUS COMES TO US FROM GOD

In those early days John the Baptist was witnessing about Jesus. What he had to say was well-known. John has clearly said: I've told you about this man, Jesus. I said that he would come after me. But that does not mean that he is junior to me. No, actually, he is senior to me. He's my boss. He existed long before I did. He has become much more important to you than I am. He is far superior to me.

Jesus is much greater because it is from him that we all get God's kindness and goodness. God's kindness is called grace. Jesus was full of grace. He was filled with all God's goodness. When his goodness comes into our lives, we become good people too. We get our goodness from him. We get grace from his grace.

Jesus is even greater than Moses. That is because, although God's laws and high standards were given to us through Moses, God's grace and goodness came to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus has brought us the whole of God's truth: not just what God wants us to do, but also what God is doing for us and in us.

Remember that nobody has ever seen God. So no one really knows God. But it is Jesus, God's one and only Son, who has explained God properly to us. That is because he was God's best friend up there in heaven. He is the one person that God is truly proud of, and loves most. That is why he can tell us all that we need to know about God.

1:19-23 JOHN IS NOT THE MESSIAH

John the Baptist's duty was to tell people the truth. So when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites to find out who he thought he was, he told them the truth.

They wanted to ask him: Who are you?

John was quite open with them. He did not avoid their questions. He promised and assured them that he was not the Messiah or Christ. He said to them: You must NOT think that I am Christ.

So they said, Well then, what can you tell us? Are you the prophet Elijah who is to come back from heaven? But John kept on saying: No, I'm not! They then asked him: Are you the Prophet whom Moses predicted? John answered: Definitely not!

So they said to him: Then who are you? Tell us so that we can give an answer to the authorities who sent us. What do you say about yourself? Who do you claim to be?

John now opened up and explained to them: I am someone trying to get God's truth through to people. But I work far from where the people are, out in the empty desert places. My message to people is that you must live a good, straight life. You must live the right way. That is the way of the Lord. That's what the prophet Isaiah said.

1:24-28 THE PHARISEES QUESTION JOHN

Some people who came to John were also from the Pharisees.

They interviewed and questioned him: Why do you baptise our people if you are not Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet? Surely if you are not any of these great men, you do not have the authority to baptise people like this?

John answered them: I'm just baptising with water. I'm only urging people to repent. But there is someone living among you whom you don't know.

He is most important. He is going to take over my work. He is so good and so great that I am not fit to work for him at all. I'm not even good enough to be his most junior servant. He is the person you should be interested in, not me!

All this happened at a place called Bethany that was on the other side of the river Jordan. That was where John was baptising people.

1:29-31 JOHN REVEALS WHO JESUS IS

The next day John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him, and he calls out to the people who were there with him: Look at him! He is the Lamb of God who carries away the load of sin from people of the whole world.

This is the man about whom I said: After me comes someone who has become more important than I am, because he was senior to me.

To begin with even I did not know him. But then I was given the job by God of making him known to God's people. That's why I have come to baptise them.

1:32-34 HOW JOHN KNEW WHO JESUS WAS

Then John explained what he knew. He said: I saw the Spirit of God myself. It was coming down out of heaven, looking like a dove. It came onto Jesus and stayed on him.

At first I did not know who Jesus was. I did not understand how important he was. But when God sent me to baptise people with water, he told me: When you see the Spirit of God coming down upon someone, and settling on him, you shall know that he is the one who baptises people with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen that happen to this man Jesus, and I have explained to people that Jesus is the Son of God.

1:35-39 TWO DISCIPLES FOLLOW JESUS

The next day John was standing with two of his disciples.

He spotted Jesus walking past. John then says to them: Look at him! He's the Lamb of God!

Two of John's disciples heard him saying that, so they went off and followed Jesus.

Jesus turned around and saw them following him. So he says to them: What do you want? They said to him: Rabbi, where are you staying? We would like to visit you.

Jesus says to them: Come along and see for yourselves. Then you will find out what you want to know. So they went with Jesus and saw where he was staying. They also stayed with him that day. They had met Jesus at about the tenth hour.

1:40-42 JESUS MEETS PETER

One of the two men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus, was Andrew. He was the brother of Simon Peter.

Andrew first finds his own brother Simon, and excitedly says to him: We have discovered the Messiah!

Andrew took Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked thoughtfully at Peter, and then said to him: You must be Simon, and you are the son of John. But you will be called Cephas [**Kay-fas** or **See-fis**]. Cephas is a Hebrew name that we translate as Peter.

1:43-46 JESUS FINDS PHILIP WHO FINDS NATHANAEL

The next day Jesus wanted to go back to Galilee, and he finds Philip. Jesus says to him: I want you to follow me!

Philip happened to be from Bethsaida [**bayt-sa-ee-da**]. This was the town that Andrew and Peter were from.

Before he leaves with Jesus, Philip finds his friend Nathanael [**na-than-ee-l**], OR in Hebrew, [**na-tan-a-ayl**] and says to him: We have found (Eureka!) the Messiah whom Moses wrote about in the law, and whom the prophets predicted. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.

But Nathanael began to argue with him: Nazareth? Not likely! I cannot imagine that anything good could come from Nazareth. Philip simply says to him: Come and meet him yourself.

1:47-51 NATHANAEL MEETS JESUS

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he spoke about him. He said: Look, here comes someone who is a genuine Israelite. He will never cheat, no matter what. He is utterly honest, a man of integrity.

Nathanael heard what Jesus said about him, so he asks Jesus: How did you get to know this about me? Jesus replied: I knew you before Philip invited you to come to meet me. I've got respect for you because I watched you carefully while you were studying under the fig-tree. I knew exactly what you were thinking about!

Nathanael was stunned. Utterly amazed, he replied: Rabbi, you must be the Son of God! You are definitely the king of Israel, the Messiah! I salute you, Sir!

Jesus replied: So, you believe, just because I told you that I was able to see what you were thinking under that fig-tree, do you? Well, you are going to see much greater things than that.

Jesus then goes on to say to Nathanael: Do you people remember the dream that Jacob had of a staircase going up to heaven, with God at the top? There were angels going up and then coming back down on those stairs. Well, I promise you all that that dream is now going to come true. You people are going to see it happen, because I am that stairway. The angels will connect you with God by using the stairs that are the Son of Man.



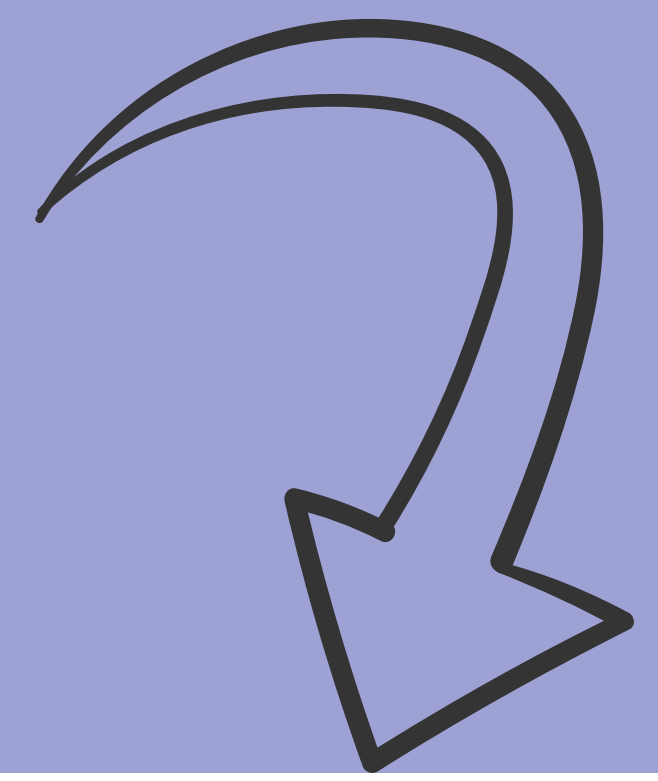
NOW YOU CAN READ JOHN CHAPTERS 1 IN YOUR OWN BIBLE.

John 1

Passage background & introduction



Read this part to get to know the background of the chapters you read in section 01.



John was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. He was one of the first disciples that Jesus chose. He was actually one of Jesus' best friends.

John wrote five books in the New Testament. They are the gospel, the first, second and third letters of John, and the book of Revelation, which is the last book in the Bible.

John wrote this gospel book more than fifty years after Jesus lived on earth. By that time there was a new problem in the Christian church. Christians were beginning to ask questions about what Jesus was really like. Was he like God? Was Jesus actually God? Was he just like us? Was Jesus really a man? Was he just a special man that God used, like the prophets, or was he both God and man? People were even arguing about who Jesus was, and what he was really like. Some preachers were saying one thing and other preachers another.

This is what makes John's gospel different from Matthew and Mark and Luke's gospels. John was writing to correct the wrong ideas that some people were starting to teach or argue about. The problem is that religious people disagree and argue and fight. Even Christians do this.

But Jesus did not want us to argue and fight. He wanted his people to be friends. This is difficult for all of us. But it's right, because there is one God and he has given us one Saviour and Lord, his Son Jesus Christ. On top of that we all receive the same Spirit from God.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us about John the Baptist. They say that John the Baptist told people to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. But when the apostle John tells us about John the Baptist, he says something more. He writes that John the Baptist also taught his disciples about Jesus.

John the Apostle wrote this gospel because he wanted people to believe in Jesus. He wanted people to believe the truth about Jesus Christ. He uses the word “believe” nearly 100 times. He liked to repeat things, to make sure that people understand the truth about Jesus.

John also tells us very little about what Jesus did, compared to the other three gospels. But each time Jesus did something, John tells us what he then taught people. John focuses on explaining what Jesus was really like. Then we can know what to believe when we decide to ask Jesus to forgive us. We can also know what we are doing when we trust him enough to put our whole life into his good hands.

John became the minister of the church in the town of Ephesus [e-fa-sis] which was in the west of what is now Turkiye. In those days Turkiye was called Asia Minor, or Smaller Asia. When Domitian was the Roman emperor, he sent John out of Ephesus into exile. John was expelled from the Christian ministry. He was taken to the small island of Patmos [pat-mos] which is about 30 miles (or 50 kilometres) off the west coast of Turkiye. In exile he was not allowed to teach anyone about Jesus.

However, another Roman emperor allowed John to go back to Ephesus.

The oldest copy of the New Testament that has been found was a piece of John’s gospel. It was found in Egypt, and was written before the year 150 AD (after Christ.) So that copy was made about 60-70 years after John wrote his gospel.

John wrote his gospel in Greek. But his own home language was Aramaic [a-ra-may-ik]. This is a language very similar to Hebrew. Aram was the ancient name for Syria. Aramaic was also Jesus’ home language. So, although John writes in the Greek language, he sometimes uses ideas that come from the Aramaic language.

JESUS AS GOD’S SON

The reason why God sent his Son into our world is that we have three problems that we cannot sort out, or solve, ourselves:

- We have all sinned.
- Therefore we are all going to die.
- None of us can get ourselves to heaven.

**The big problem that John is writing about is that
when Jesus came to solve these problems for us,
people did not want anything to do with him.**

God used all sorts of ways to show people that Jesus is his Son. The special way that he chose was to use John the Baptist to talk to them. Those people were tired of what the church was doing wrong in those days. They were even sick and tired of their own foolishness and sins. So they went in large numbers to hear John and get baptised in order to become clean. But John warned them that they needed something much more than just to be made clean with water. They needed God's Spirit.

Only the Son of God can give us God's Spirit.

Only God's Spirit can get us right with God.

While many people would not listen to Jesus, even though they liked John the Baptist, there were some people who did believe that Jesus was the Son of God. When they believed, their lives were wonderfully changed. They became God's children. They got in touch with God, and they went to heaven when they died.

JESUS AS GOD

Christianity is the only religion in the world that believes that Jesus Christ is God. All the other religions say, very clearly, that Jesus Christ was **NOT** God. Because of this big difference in what people think and believe, there are many people who do not like Christianity. There are even many people who hate it so much that they will attack and persecute Christians.

How do we know that Jesus Christ is God?

This is what John is telling us in his gospel.

The very first sentence of John's Gospel tells us that **Christ is God**. But there are people who argue with that. They say that John is NOT saying that Jesus is God. They say that John is saying only that Jesus is just "a god." But that is not true. People who say that John says that Jesus Christ is only another god like other gods simply do not understand the Greek language. John wrote his gospel in Greek. If one understands Greek then one can plainly see that John is saying that Christ is God. In fact, John is emphasising and stressing that Jesus is actually God. John then spends the rest of his gospel telling us why he knows that Jesus is God.

HERE IS A BEGINNER'S LESSON IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE, AND IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR:

This section is for older children. The younger children, the little ones, will accept what they are told and taught. The older ones may argue, as adults are likely to do. This lesson in language is to help teachers. It is also for younger Christians who hear people arguing about who Jesus really was.

As Jesus said, little ones don't argue when you teach them. They listen and learn and believe. That is why they are so welcome in the kingdom of heaven. And so shall we also be if we become like them.

When John writes about "the Word," or in Greek, "the logos," [lo-goss] he is talking about Christ, the Messiah. Writing in Greek, John says:

**In beginning was the logos,
and the logos was with the god,
and the logos was god.**

Normally we would translate "the god" as 'God,' and "god" as 'a god.' So some people teach that **"the logos was god"** means that the Word was only a god. But there is a huge, HUGE difference between a god and God. Any important or special person or leader could be a god. Someone who is an idol or a celebrity is a god. Anyone that some people worship is their god.

There are a number of differences between the way the Greeks speak and the way we speak in English. One of them is that when Greeks speak about "a" god, they just say, "god." There is no word for "a" in Greek. But when they speak about God, they say "the god." In Greek "god" is always spelt with a small "g" even if it means God. Names are spelt with capital letters, like David or Paul, but God in Greek is always god with a small g.

In English we translate "the god" in Greek simply as "God." We leave out the word "the."

(In Hebrew it is even worse: God is always 'gods.' So foreigners, like us, could confuse gods and God. But those who speak Hebrew always know the difference between gods meaning God and gods meaning gods. In the same way we also know when 'sheep' means one sheep and when it means many sheep. When Hebrew wants to emphasise that gods means God they say something like the God of Israel. When they want to emphasise that gods mean gods they say something like strange or foreign gods.)

Now look at this sentence: "The girl ate an apple." In Greek that would be, "the girl ate apple." In grammar we call the girl the subject and apple the object. You cannot change the object into the subject. That would be, 'the apple ate the girl,' which is nonsense.

But look at this sentence: “The girl was the cook.” The cook is NOT the object. It is called the complement, because you can change the complement with the subject: that would be to say, “the cook was the girl.” The reason for this difference is that “ate” is a DOING-verb while “was” is a BEING-verb.

But in the Greek language the way you can tell whether the subject is the girl or the cook, is to see which word has “the” next to it. If the subject is the girl then the sentence is “the girl was cook.” If the cook is the subject then the sentence in Greek would be “girl was the cook.”

We see this with the opening words of John’s gospel. In English it says, “In the beginning was the Word.” In Greek it says “In beginning was the logos.” Thus it is clear in Greek that “the logos” is the subject, not ‘the beginning.’

Another thing the Greeks want to do is show when they want to emphasise something. We put it in capital letters or underline it, or we use italics. To emphasise what the girl was we would say “the girl was the cook.” OR we could use italics: “The girl was *the cook*.” The Greeks did not use underlining or italics. To emphasise that she was ‘the cook’ they would put the word cook at the beginning of the sentence instead of at the end: “cook was the girl.” We would properly translate that as “the girl was the cook.

What John wrote in Greek was “god was the word.” The only proper way to translate that into English is “the Word was God” or even, “the Word was really God!” So when John wrote “god was the logos,” what he meant was this:

You must understand that the Messiah (logos) was actually God!

That is awesome!

On top of all that there is also the question of style. Everybody who writes has a certain style. Once John knows that his reader understands that he is talking about God, he sometimes leaves out the word “the” and just writes “god.”

Turn to your Bible and look at these other verses in this first chapter of John’s gospel:

Verse 6: There was a man having been sent from god (NOT “the god.”)

Verse 12: But as many as received him, he gave to them a right to become children of god (not “the god.”)

Verse 13: Who not of bloods not out of will of flesh not out of will of man but out of god they were born. (not “the god.”)

Verse 14: And the word became human and lived with us and we witnessed the glory of him, glory as of only-born from father. (not “the Father.”)

Verse 18: No one has ever seen god; only-born god, the one being closely belonging of the father, that one explained him. (NOT, “the god.”)

It must be obvious to anyone that all these verses refer to God, and definitely not a god. Therefore in Greek they should have been “the god” rather than just “god.” But in each case John has written just “god.” No one would be able to translate that as “a god.” Everyone must read it as God, the Father.

HOWEVER, remember that in verse 1 “the” is not left out because of style, but to show which is the subject and which is the complement, and especially that the complement is put before the subject for emphasis.

This is just one type of example of the problems of translating one language into another. It helps explain why sometimes parts of the Bible are difficult to understand. It also explains why there are so many different versions of the Bible in English. The translators try to find better ways of explaining to ordinary people what the Bible, written in Greek (New Testament) or Hebrew (Old Testament) is saying.

WHAT WE ARE TO BELIEVE

It is not hard to believe that Jesus is God when we read about his amazing life in the gospels. What does make it hard to believe that he is God is the fact that so many people around us do not believe this. They won’t believe it simply because they do not want to. It was the same when John wrote this gospel.

Some people get so angry with people who DO believe that Jesus is God, that they want to do them whatever harm they can. This is the world we live in, and this is the world that Jesus came from heaven to get us out of.

God wants us to believe in JESUS CHRIST:

We must believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

We must believe that Jesus Christ (the logos) is God!

The way we honour Christ is to believe that he is God.

The way we honour God is to believe that his Son is God.

We are to believe that Christ has saved us from sin and death and judgement - shame and hell. Only God can do that!

If we believe in Jesus, he gives us eternal life. Thanks to him we shall live forever. Only God can give us eternal life.

We are to be faithful to the Lord Jesus whatever people think or say, and whatever they do to us.

The way we honour the Father is to believe that his Son is just as good and wonderful as he is. As Jesus said:

Those who honour the Son honour the Father.

WHY is it so important that Jesus Christ is God, and not just a god?

A god means anyone who is important or a hero. The modern meaning for a god is a celebrity or a legend. However great that person may be as a leader or however famous or successful, he cannot solve our greatest problems. However good his achievements or useful his giftedness, no god can raise us from the dead. This is obvious because all gods die in the end just as we all do. Only God never dies, and only God can raise us from the dead! Not even a god or a hero can save us from being condemned on Judgement Day. Only God can. No god or parents or friends can get any one of us to heaven. Only the true God can.

No god can save us from our sins. No god can undo the wrongs we have done. No god can give us a clear conscience for life. No god can break the grip that sin has on human hearts. Only God Almighty can do this. And if God does not forgive us and deal with our sins and sinfulness, we shall never get to heaven, no matter what god we like to believe in, or however hard we try to do what is good. The problem is that just one sin in our life-time cancels out all our good deeds, in the same way that a person is a criminal if guilty of just one crime, whenever he committed it.

So Jesus Christ came down from heaven, as no god has ever done. He came directly from God. He was with God in the beginning, when human history began. He is the Son of God.

The words “Son of God” mean that ‘he is just like God,’ and that means that he IS God.

John, who was Jesus’ best friend, wrote his gospel to get us to believe in Jesus and to trust him to save us. Jesus came to get us right, because all of us have disobeyed God at some time in our lives. None of us is clean and pure and totally good. Only Jesus was.

Jesus was perfect because he was God.

It was so good of him to come and get punished for our sins, and he deserves our thankfulness and our trust. That is what believing in him really means:

Jesus Christ deserves our thanks and our trust.

May God get you to see the truth, and help you to believe it, whatever other people think.

John 1

A Bible study on our passage



Now let's grasp the points of each paragraph and the issues being spoken about, and together we can grow in our knowledge and love of God.



CHAPTER 1:1-5 JESUS IS THE WORD OF GOD

Right at the beginning ¹Jesus was the word of God. Jesus, the Word of God, had always been with God. The Word was actually God.

Let me repeat that the Word of God was already there right at the very beginning, and that he was there together with God.

Everything that has happened in the world happened through Jesus Christ. Without him, nothing has ever happened at any time or anywhere - not a single thing!

Jesus holds the secret of life. He also shares the secret of life with people. Where people in the world are in trouble and confused, Jesus has got the answer to all their needs. He is like a bright light shining in the darkness.

It was so clear that he was good, and that he did what was right, and taught us what was true. Yet people did not accept him. They did not appreciate him. They did not understand him, because they did not want to. But he brought us God's truth even though so many people would not accept him.

¹ **Jesus was the word of God:** John is trying to explain God and Jesus Christ in the Greek language. He calls Jesus “The Logos” [log-os], or “the Word.” The Logos is the Greek idea that God has **spoken** to man through Jesus Christ. He was the **greatest authority**

about God that the world has ever had. So logos means God's truth, where we get God's truth from. It actually means who we get God's truth from.

John explains that Jesus was there before God created people. John says that Jesus was with God as his friend before the world was made. Then John also teaches us that Jesus was God. He was just like God. Jesus was exactly the same as God. He, with God, was actually God. So Jesus was already there right at the beginning of life, at the very start of human history.

(For an explanation of why the Greek says that Jesus is God, see the Introduction.)

God, together with Jesus, made the world and its people. He made everything through Jesus. He also used Jesus to bring us the truth about God, and the good news about how we can get to heaven.

We must not misunderstand who Jesus is. Jesus is more important, by far, than any other man who has ever lived in the world. Jesus Christ is the only man who can ever be thought of as God.

The Son of God came into our world as a man.

He also comes into our lives as God when we believe in him.

1:6-11 JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

At that time a man appeared in Palestine who had been sent by God. His name was John the Baptist.

He came as a witness for God. His purpose or mission was to witness about Jesus. His job was to tell people about the Light that came from God and was about to shine in the world. God wanted everyone to listen to John so that they would all believe in Jesus.

Although many people came to listen to John, he was not the light of the world. Although John was sent by God as a witness, he was not the word of God. John came just to tell people about Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God and the Light of the world.

¹The true Light, the one genuine light, was at that stage coming into the world. That good Light was Jesus Christ. He is the one who brings God's truth and hope into every person's life.

Jesus was here. He was in our world. He became a man just like us. But he was also different. He was much greater than anyone else. I repeat that everything that happened in our world happened because of him and through him. So he is at the heart and centre of all human life. He is the Leader of the whole world.

Yet when he came, the world did not know him. It did not want to. He even came to his own Jewish culture and to his own Jewish people. But even they did not welcome him. They did not want him, and they did not respect or honour him.

¹The true Light: There is a reason why Jesus Christ is called “the Light.” We live in a world where there are lots of problems. Our world is in a mess. We call that darkness. We cannot see what the answer to all this trouble and suffering is. Darkness means hopelessness. Light means hope: we are able to see how we should live in order to get out of this mess, and to escape death. The person who has brought us this hope is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Light of the world.

1:12-14 PEOPLE WHO DO BELIEVE IN JESUS

Though most people did not believe in Jesus, there were some people who did. They recognised his authority from God, and realised who he was. They believed in him. Jesus gave them the privilege and the ability to become the true children of God, the real people of God.

¹People are not Christians just because they have been brought up in a Christian way or in a Christian home. People are not Christians though they try hard to live a good Christian life. People are not Christians even if they earn a good reputation and deserve to be respected and admired. No, Christians are people who have become believers because they have found God. People are Christians when God himself has made them Christians.

So the Word of God became a man, a human being, just like us. He lived among us, and we actually saw how wonderful he was. He was just as wonderful as God his Father. Jesus was exactly like his Father, as any son is usually like his father. Jesus was absolutely special. He was God’s one and only true Son. Like God, he was perfectly good, and utterly truthful.

Because he lived with us, we could see for ourselves that he was extremely kind and completely truthful, just like God.

¹People are not Christians just because: Here are the three main ways in which religious people, including Christians, get the wrong idea of what a believer is. Here are the common misunderstandings people have:

- **We are not genuine Christians because** we have a Christian background. The fact that our parents or family or relatives or friends are Christian does not make us one. Because we live in a Christian society or country does not make us real Christians. We are not Christians because we belong to a church. What other people are does not make us right with God.
- **We are not truly Christian because** we do our best to live a Christian life. However hard we try there are times when we go wrong, when we fail, when we do what we should not do. Good intentions do not last for a whole life-time. Even when we want to do what's right we do not always succeed. Sometimes things happen so suddenly that we react the wrong way. The higher we set our standards the more likely we are to fail.
- **We are not authentic Christians because** we are successful and do well and are respected by others. Other people may see our public successes but not our private failures. They may praise the good we do but be unaware of our secret faults. It is much easier to be popular than to be godly.

The more important or powerful people may be the more harm their mistakes will do to others. What is the use of bluffing people that you are someone special? You are only bluffing yourself!

The worst thing that can happen to someone important is when people discover he is not really what he wants everyone to think he is.

1:15-18 JESUS COMES TO US FROM GOD

In those early days John the Baptist was witnessing about Jesus. What he had to say was well-known. John has clearly said: I've told you about this man, Jesus. I said that he would come after me. But that does not mean that he is junior to me. No, actually, ¹he is senior to me. He's my boss. He existed long before I did. He has become much more important to you than I am. He is far superior to me.

Jesus is much greater because it is from him that we all get God's kindness and goodness. God's kindness is called grace. Jesus was full of grace. He was filled with all God's goodness. When his goodness comes into our lives, we become good people too. We get our goodness from him. We get grace from his grace.

Jesus is even greater than Moses. That is because, although God's laws and high standards were given to us through Moses, God's grace and goodness came to us through Jesus Christ. Jesus has brought us the whole of God's truth: not just what God wants us to do, but also what God is doing for us and in us.

Remember that nobody has ever seen God. So no one really knows God. But it is Jesus, God's one and only Son, who has explained God properly to us. That is because he was God's best friend up there in heaven. He is the one person that God is truly proud of, and loves most. That is why he can tell us all that we need to know about God.

¹**he is senior to me:** John and Jesus were cousins. John was actually about six months older than Jesus. But John had come to realise that Jesus had existed long, long before either of them were born.

IN THESE FIRST 18 VERSES, John tells us who Jesus was, and what he was really like. John relies on the testimony and witness of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the first person to understand properly who Jesus really was.

John is explaining to us that

Jesus is the Son of God.

Calling him the Son of God means that

Jesus is just like God.

John is informing us that

the Son of God became a man and he lived among us.

Jesus did this so that he could explain God to us.

That is why he is called the Word of God.

Jesus came to show us how to get to heaven, so that we may live there forever.

That is why he is called the Light of the world.

He shows us the way in this dark world that is full of ignorance and confusion and lies.

He did this for us even though the world rejected him.

From verse 19 onwards, John teaches us about the life of Jesus.

He tells us some of the things that Jesus did for people, and what Jesus taught us.

1:19-23 JOHN IS NOT THE MESSIAH

John the Baptist's duty was to tell people the truth. So when the Jewish leaders sent ¹priests and Levites to find out who he thought he was, he told them the truth.

They wanted to ask him: Who are you?

John was quite open with them. He did not avoid their questions. He promised and assured them that he was not ²the Messiah or Christ. He said to them: You must NOT think that I am Christ.

So they said, Well then, what can you tell us? Are you the prophet ³Elijah who is to come back from heaven? But John kept on saying: No, I'm not! They then asked him: Are you ⁴the Prophet whom Moses predicted? John answered: Definitely not!

So they said to him: Then who are you? Tell us so that we can give an answer to the authorities who sent us. What do you say about yourself? Who do you claim to be?

John now opened up and explained to them: I am someone trying to get God's truth through to people. But I work far from where the people are, out ⁵in the empty desert places. My message to people is that you must live a good, straight life. You must live the right way. That is ⁶the way of the Lord. That's what ⁷the prophet Isaiah said.

¹Priests and Levites: The priests were responsible for teaching the people about God, at the temple in Jerusalem. They also led the worship and offered the sacrifices to God for the people.

The Levites were responsible for seeing that the priests had what they needed for the worship of God. They looked after the temple, and helped the priests do their work. In those days when the slaughter of animals was not only for meat to eat, but also to worship at the temple, there was a lot of work for the Levites to do. Just keeping the area around the altar clean involved a huge amount of work. You get a small idea of this when you have friends around for a meal to celebrate something, and then have to wash up and clean up afterwards.

²**The Messiah or Christ: Messiah** is a Hebrew word, and **Christ** is the same word translated into Greek. It means someone who is appointed by God to do a special work. Whenever God appointed a special person, such as a king or a chief priest, he was anointed with oil. It was poured onto his head. This was a sign that God would give him the Holy Spirit to do his work for God.

So the word Messiah or Christ means **“Anointed by God’s Holy Spirit.”**

As a result of various prophecies in the Old Testament, Jews were hoping that God would send them a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans. The Romans, in the days of Pompey and Julius Caesar, had conquered the Jews. Since then the Romans had ruled over them. The Jews very much wanted to be an independent and free people. They dreamt of the good old days in the time of David and Solomon when they were a religious and great people.

The only place in the Old Testament where the word “Messiah” occurs is in Daniel 9. Daniel used this word over 500 years before the time of John the Baptist and Jesus.

³**Elijah:** In the last book of the Old Testament, called Malachi, there is this prophecy:

“Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet.” Malachi 4

Malachi made this prophecy over 400 years before the time of John and Jesus.

Elijah actually lived 400 years before Malachi. So what Malachi prophesied was that the prophet Elijah, who lived 400 years before him, would come again in 400 years’ time. This meant that Elijah would come in the form of John the Baptist who would do the same useful work for God that Elijah had done 800 years before.

⁴**The Prophet:** In the last book of the Law, called Deuteronomy [dew-ta-ron-o-mee], Moses prophesied:

“The Lord your God will raise up A PROPHET LIKE ME for you from among your people. You must listen to him.” Deuteronomy 18

This prophecy was made well over a thousand years before the time of Jesus.

⁵**In the empty desert places:** John worked in the Jordan valley which was very hot and dry. Few people lived there. So the people who came to be baptised by him walked a long, hard way to get to him. The religious leaders in Jerusalem could not understand why so many people went so far, and took so much trouble, to listen to John preaching. These leaders thought that all the best preachers were at Jerusalem.

⁶**The way of the Lord:** God has shown us the right way to live, and has told us what we must do. That is what is meant by “the way of the Lord.” If ever we need God’s help, we must listen to him. We must also obey God because we are going to have to meet him when we die.

⁷**The prophet Isaiah:** In Isaiah 40 it says:

There’s a voice of someone preaching out in the desert. He is saying:

Make clear the way of the Lord!

Make straight, in the wilderness, a highway for our God.

Isaiah’s prophecy was using a well-known picture or illustration. It is of people getting ready to greet and honour their king when he comes to their area. People always make a big fuss and celebrate when someone important comes to visit them. They make him feel welcome, and go to special efforts to show him that they respect him and are loyal to him.

In those days roads were rough, like tracks, and it was hard to travel. But once people knew the king was coming, they would work hard to make the road smooth and straight. This would make sure that both the king and the people could better enjoy the royal visit.

Today, officials would put out the long red carpet for an important person such as a president or a king or any other head of state.

When we want to tell guests that they are very welcome, we say that “we shall put out the red carpet for you.” That means that we will make sure that they feel wanted and comfortable and pleased.

Isaiah made this prophecy over 700 years before John and Jesus. The prophecy of Moses was made about 700 years before that of Isaiah.

1:24-28 THE PHARISEES QUESTION JOHN

Some people who came to John were also from ¹the Pharisees.

They interviewed and questioned him: Why do you baptise our people if ²you are not Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet? Surely if you are not any of these great men, you do not have the authority to baptise people like this?

John answered them: I'm just ³baptising with water. I'm only urging people to ⁴repent. But there is someone living among you whom you don't know.

He is most important. He is going to take over my work. He is so good and so great that I am not fit to work for him at all. I'm not even good enough to be his most junior servant. He is the person you should be interested in, not me!

All this happened at ⁵a place called Bethany that was on the other side of the river Jordan. That was where John was baptising people.

¹The Pharisees: The Pharisees were a religious group that was formed generations before John and Jesus were born. They followed the tradition of the people who had come back to Jerusalem after the Exile. Those people, who had lived under the Babylonians, had been determined never to let God down again. So they were strictly religious. They were determined to keep the Law of Moses faithfully. They were called the “Holy Ones” or the “Godly Ones.” As time went on and they were forced to live among many unbelievers, they began to realise that their religion could again be in danger. They were convinced that the only way to remain true to God was to live separately. Their church, or synagogue, became their home or their club. They became a religious family or community, separated from the world. The word “Pharisee” means “Separate.”

The main thing about the Pharisees was that they believed in God, and tried hard to please him. But so often they tried too hard, and made life difficult for people.

They were keen to keep all God's laws. God's laws were called the Torah [taw-rah]. They studied the Torah carefully and then used it to make up many other rules that everyone had to obey. They believed that strict rules made all of them better people.

When they heard about John the Baptist they wanted to find out what he was teaching. They wanted to know whether he taught the people the same traditions that they taught. Did he obey the Torah properly, the way they did?

But John was not teaching people about rules and traditions.

***John the Baptist wanted people to stop sinning against God,
and to welcome the Lord Jesus as their Messiah.***

² **you are not Christ, nor Elijah nor the Prophet:** Everyone believed in the Messiah. That is what **Christ** means. Obviously when the Messiah came he would do things differently because God had sent him. But here was John, a nobody as far as the religious leaders were concerned, and he was baptising Jewish believers! Who gave him the right to do that?

The same thing applied to Elijah. Elijah was the one person in Israel's history who had gone to heaven without dying. The learned Jewish teachers taught that one day Elijah would come back and put everything right for the nation. Then of course he might do such a thing as baptising Jews.

“The Prophet” was someone special that Moses had prophesied, someone who would one day be another Moses for God's people. **Deuteronomy 18** He would do great and wonderful things. John might be popular, but he did not perform any miracles, whereas Moses performed many great and awesome miracles. So what right had John to do what he was doing, which was something new? The Pharisees thought that anything new would just be man-made and not from God.

³ **Baptising with water:** While the Pharisees concentrated on the rules of the Torah, John concentrated on something else. John wanted people to become clean. He wanted them to stop sinning.

- The Pharisees wanted nothing to do with people who sinned.
- John wanted people to get rid of their sin.

Baptism meant to be washed. Once people were forgiven by God, they could make a fresh new start in life, and begin living a good life. The Pharisees wanted to keep sinners out of their lives. John wanted sinners to find God's forgiveness and become better people.

⁴ **Repent:** Repenting means three things:

- First, it means that we realise that we have done what is wrong.
We have **disobeyed God**.

- Secondly, to repent means that we are sorry that we have hurt God and displeased him. We have come to **regret** it deeply.
- Thirdly, repentance means that we have decided to stop sinning against God. We are determined to **listen to God** in future.

It was when people repented that John baptised them. By being baptised they were getting God's forgiveness. God was going to make them clean. Their lives were going to change and improve.

⁵ **A place called Bethany:** There were two little towns, or villages, called Bethany. The first one was near Jerusalem, just on the other side of the Mount of Olives. That is where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived.

The second Bethany was far away, on the other side of the river Jordan. That was where John was preaching and baptising. This meant that John was not trying to interfere with the work being done by the religious leaders in Jerusalem or in Judea. He was many miles away. The people of Jerusalem and Judah came to him; he did not go to them.

It was amazing that so many people, crowds of them, went down the steep mountains, past Jericho, then through the desert and over the Jordan River, to get to John. The Jordan valley lies about 1 000 feet below sea-level and is exceptionally hot. Jerusalem is up on the mountain range about 3 000 feet above sea-level. So the people had to go down a steep road, with a drop of about 4 000 feet, to get to the Jordan River. The distance from Jerusalem to the Jordan River was over 30 kilometres. It was a long way down, and a long and very hard way back.

At some time after the year 100 AD (after Christ's birth), a famous preacher called Origen [o-ree-gin] visited the area to look for Bethany on the other side of the Jordan. He could not find it. It had completely disappeared. We still do not know exactly where it was. A lot changes in the world in about 70 years. But truth never changes. The village vanished, but what John was doing there is well known to us nowadays.

We still need to repent of our sins, whoever we are, because soon we shall all have to meet and face Jesus, the Son of God and the Judge of all mankind.

1:29-31 JOHN REVEALS WHO JESUS IS

The next day was different for John the Baptist. Instead of having to argue with the Pharisees he was able to concentrate on telling people about Jesus.

The next day ¹John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him, and he calls out to the people who were there with him: Look at him!²He is the Lamb of God who carries away the load of sin from people of the whole world.

This is the man about whom I said: After me comes someone who has become more important than I am, because he was senior to me.

To begin with even I did not know him. But then I was given the job by God of making him known to God's people. That's why I have come to baptise them.

¹ **John the Baptist sees Jesus:** Instead of saying, “John the Baptist **saw** Jesus”, John the writer says, “John the Baptist sees Jesus.” John the writer switches from the past tense (what happened in the past) to the present tense (what is happening now.) John does this so that we who read this may feel that we are there, seeing and hearing these things happening. John changes his tense in order to involve us in what happened. John of the Gospel also wants us to meet Jesus, even though we were not there when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming.

² **He is the Lamb of God:** It is hard for us to understand what “the Lamb of God” means because we worship God differently from the way the ancient Hebrews or Israelites did.

When a man went to worship God, he took a one-year-old lamb and offered it to God as a sacrifice. The priest first checked that there was nothing wrong with the lamb. Then the man put his hand on the head of the lamb and admitted his faults and confessed his sins to God.

The lamb was then slaughtered or sacrificed. Its meat was placed over the fire that was burning on the altar. Some of its blood was poured out onto the altar.

In this way the man's sins were forgiven by God. The lamb had taken away the problem of his sins against God. He now had nothing more to worry about. God had made him clean and had accepted him. Eating the meat of the lamb was a sign of friendship between him and God. That was how God's people worshiped him at the temple in Jerusalem.

John the Baptist was preaching that God has sent Jesus to be offered as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Jesus was perfect, absolutely and utterly perfect! He was 100% pure. Therefore he could die for us. His blood contained his life as well as his goodness or merits. He gave his life for us, and shared his merits with us. He died not only to take away our sins, but also to make us better people by passing on his goodness to us.

This is what we call atonement. Jesus Christ atoned for all our sins. That is how we become God's friends, and how we are able to stop sinning against God. Christ's atonement gets rid of all our guilt. It also gets rid of the grip that sin has on our lives. That leaves us free to be able to do what is right.

To benefit from his sacrifice, we are to confess our sins to God, and put our trust in Jesus to make us acceptable to God. This changes our whole life. It's how we come right in life. This is how we get right with God.

THE GOSPEL, according to both John the Baptist and John the Gospel writer, is that

***JESUS CHRIST,
who is the Son of God,
is the Lamb of God
who carries away
the dreadful burden of the sins of the whole world.***

1:32-34 HOW JOHN KNEW WHO JESUS WAS

Then John explained what he knew. He said: I saw the Spirit of God myself. ¹It was coming down out of heaven, looking like a dove. It came onto Jesus and stayed on him.

At first ²I did not know who Jesus was. I did not understand how important he was. But when God sent me to baptise people with water, he told me: When you see the Spirit of God coming down upon someone, and settling on him, you shall know that he is the one who baptises people with ³the Holy Spirit.

I have seen that happen to this man Jesus, and I have explained to people that Jesus is ⁴the Son of God.

¹ **It was coming down out of heaven:** Normally when we talk about God's Holy Spirit we say "he", not "it." But in Greek the word "spirit" is not a masculine word. It is a neuter word, like a plant or an animal. Even in English we usually call a spirit "it," though we call God's Spirit "he." In Greek the Holy Spirit does not have capital letters, but is "holy spirit." That is just what Greek grammar is like. We break the rules of that grammar when we say he instead of it, and when we write Holy Spirit instead of holy spirit. John, the writer, stuck to correct Greek grammar at this point.

² **I did not know who Jesus was:** Actually, John and Jesus were cousins, because their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, were cousins. They were also about the same age. John was just six months older than Jesus. But although John knew Jesus, and knew what a good person he was, he never realised that Jesus was the Messiah.

It was only when God called John to preach and baptise, that God instructed him to keep his eyes open for something special to happen. One day he would baptise somebody, and would see the Holy Spirit come into him. That person would be the Messiah. And that is exactly what happened when he baptised Jesus.

³ **The Holy Spirit:** God gives the Holy Spirit to his people in order to help us do what is right. It is not easy always to do what is right. We need God's help. God's Holy Spirit helps us.

But the Holy Spirit of God is holy. Holy means clean or pure. We cannot have the Holy Spirit if we are sinning against God.

When John baptised people he told them that they must become clean. They must get rid of their sin. They must repent. That is what is meant by, "John baptised with water."

They must also believe in God's special Lamb that was to be sacrificed to take away our sin. Once we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, he washes us with his Spirit. That is what is meant by, "He will baptise with the Holy Spirit."

Repenting of our sins and believing in Christ is a great experience for us. It changes our lives. It brings us hope. It makes us better people.

⁴ **Jesus is the Son of God:** The Son of God is a Hebrew saying or expression. It means that the Son is exactly the same as the Father. It means that

Jesus is just like God.

1:35-39 TWO DISCIPLES FOLLOW JESUS

The next day John was standing with two of his disciples.

He spotted Jesus walking past. John then says to them: Look at him! He's the Lamb of God!

Two of John's disciples heard him saying that, so they went off and followed Jesus.

Jesus turned around and saw them following him. So he says to them: What do you want? They said to him: 'Rabbi, where are you staying? We would like to visit you.

Jesus says to them: Come along and see for yourselves. Then you will find out what you want to know. So they went with Jesus and saw where he was staying. They also stayed with him that day. They had met Jesus at about ²the tenth hour.

¹ **Rabbi:** “Rabbi” is a Hebrew word. It means “Teacher.” To call someone rabbi or teacher was to show him great respect. It was like saying, “Sir.”

² **The tenth hour:** It is difficult to know exactly what time it was. This is because there were two kinds of time in those days.

For the Romans, who were the rulers, the day began at midnight. So the tenth hour would be ten o'clock in the morning. In that case they spent the day with Jesus, as John says.

Today everyone uses the Roman system of telling the time.

But the Jews also had a different system. Their timing began at sunrise, which was roughly at six o'clock. Then the tenth hour would be about four o'clock in the afternoon. In that case it would mean that they spent the rest of the day with Jesus, which could have included the evening as well.

It would appear that John is using 10 o'clock as the time here. But the difference does not really matter, because the point is that they were able to spend time with Jesus. That was what they wanted.

1:40-42 JESUS MEETS PETER

One of the two men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus, was Andrew. He was the brother of Simon Peter.

Andrew first finds his own brother Simon, and excitedly says to him: ¹We have discovered ²the Messiah!

Andrew took Peter to Jesus. Jesus looked thoughtfully at Peter, and then said to him: You must be ³Simon, and you are the ³son of John. But you will be called ³Cephas [Kay-fas or See-fis]. Cephas is a Hebrew name that we translate as ³Peter.

¹ **We have discovered:** “This is a well-known Greek word, “Eureka!” [yoo-ree-ka]. It means, “I have it! I have found it! I’ve worked it out! Now I know! This word became well known over 200 years before Jesus was born.

In ancient Greece a king gave a large amount of gold to a goldsmith and told him to make a crown out of it. Then the king turned to the wise man Archimedes [ar-kee-mee-dees], one of the world’s first great scientists, and said: How do I know that he won’t trick me by taking out some of the gold in the middle of the block, and putting another kind of cheap heavy metal inside it? Then he could cover that metal with gold, so that the crown weighs the same as the lump of gold that I have given him. No one would know that there was other metal inside the gold. How can I prevent that?

This was a problem and a challenge for Archimedes. How could they know that the goldsmith had not cheated the king?

One day he was lying in his bath when he noticed that his body had a different weight under water. He shouted, “Eureka! I’ve got it! I’ve found the answer.”

(It is said that Archimedes got so excited that he jumped out the bath and ran off shouting, “Eureka! Eureka!” He forgot that he had not dried himself nor got dressed!)

Archimedes had worked out that if they weigh the gold, and then weigh it again under the water, they would get two kinds of true weights. If the goldsmith cheated, he could copy only the one weight. He could not possibly copy both weights at the same time. If there was any other metal inside the gold, it would have a different weight than gold under the water.

The king was pleased, and Archimedes had made history.

Andrew used the same word, Eureka, when he discovered that Jesus was the Messiah. The truth is that Andrew’s discovery was a far greater one than that of Archimedes.

God told John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah. John the Baptist taught that to Andrew and his friend. They spent some time with Jesus and left convinced that Jesus was truly the Messiah. Andrew then told his brother Peter that Jesus was the Messiah. It was a very exciting time for these men. They could even remember the time of day years later.

² **The Messiah:** The Jews were waiting for God to send them the Messiah. They got this idea, and hope, from the Bible. They believed that the Messiah would be a great Jewish leader, like King David, who would free them from the rule of the Romans. The Romans made life hard for the Jews in many ways. The worst thing for the Jews was that the Romans who ruled over them did not believe in God or the Bible.

Messiah is a Hebrew word that, when it is translated into Greek, is Christ.

³ **Simon - son of John - Cephas - Peter:** Jesus is telling Peter that he already knows who he is, what he is like, and what he is going to be:

- **SIMON** is a Hebrew name that means someone who listens, especially someone who listens to God. Jesus said to Peter: “You are Simon, someone who listens to God.”
- son of **JOHN** is also Hebrew. It means that Peter was just like his Dad who was called John. John is a Hebrew word meaning someone who is kind and good to know. It means “Grace,” which for us is usually a girl’s name. John actually means the same as Grace.
- **CEPHAS** is a Hebrew word, or more accurately, an Aramaic or Syrian word [a-ra-may-ik]. (Aram means Syria.) Cephas means someone who is reliable, steady and strong, like a rock, someone with courage. This is the kind of person one needs as a leader.
- **PETER:** When Cephas is translated into Greek it is Petros. When Petros is translated into English it is Peter. Jesus used Cephas to mean that Peter is reliable.

1:43-46 JESUS FINDS PHILIP WHO FINDS NATHANAEAL

The next day Jesus wanted to ¹go back to Galilee, and he finds Philip. Jesus says to him: I want you to follow me!

Philip happened to be from ²Bethsaida [Bet-sa-ee-da]. This was the town that Andrew and Peter were from.

Before he leaves with Jesus, Philip finds his friend Nathanael [na-than-ee-l, OR in Hebrew, na-tan-a-el] and says to him: We have found (Eureka!) the Messiah whom Moses wrote about in the law, and whom the prophets predicted. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth.

But ³Nathanael began to argue with him: Nazareth? Not likely! I cannot imagine that anything good could come from ⁴Nazareth. Philip simply says to him: ⁵Come and meet him yourself.

¹ **Go back to Galilee:** This was a journey that could take three or four days.

² **Bethsaida:** Bethsaida [Beth-sigh-da or Bet-sa-ee-da in Hebrew] was in Galilee, at the top end of the lake of Galilee. It was a fishing town. The name Bethsaida means town of fishing. (Beth, pronounced “bet”, is a Hebrew word that means a house or a place.)

³ **Nathanael:** Who was Nathanael? Even the experts are not sure who he was. But it does look as though he was one of Jesus’ disciples. If this is the case, he could have been Bartholomew [bar-thol-a-mew], who is mentioned by the other gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some experts think that this means that Nathanael is his first name, or Christian name, and Bartholomew is his surname. “Bar” is the same as “Ben”, which is Hebrew, and means “son of”.

Nathan means Gift, and El means God, so Nathanael is God’s Gift. Nathanael is often shortened to Nathan.

⁴ **Nazareth:** Nazareth [naz-a-rith] was about 20 miles to the west of the lake of Galilee, in the hills. From Nazareth it was an 80 mile walk to Jerusalem. Nazareth was not an important town in Galilee, and is never mentioned in the Old Testament.

Nathanael knew Nazareth. It was not far from Cana [kay-na] where he lived. Cana is about 20 kilometres (or 12 miles) to the north of Nazareth. Nazareth is the town where the people tried to kill Jesus after he began his ministry, even though he had lived there all his life. Nazareth had a poor reputation among strict Jews. Nathanael was probably right when he said that Nazareth was not a place that would impress anybody.

But Nazareth was where Jesus grew up. He lived there for about thirty years. After he was baptised by John the Baptist he went to live in Capernaum [ka-per-nee-im] on the northern shore of the lake of Galilee. That was his home town during his ministry of about three years. It was also Matthew's home town. However, Jesus spent most of his time touring around the country and visiting towns and villages in order to preach and teach. (Teaching is talking to people's minds, while preaching is talking to people's hearts and souls.)

⁵ **Come and meet him yourself:** These words have a special meaning for us. We too can meet Jesus. This is because he is God and he is Spirit. We can have a meeting with him in our spirit and in our heart. All we need is to want to meet him, and be willing to listen to him and learn from him. If we are prepared to believe in him and follow him we can meet him anytime and anywhere. He is always available and welcoming and friendly. When we meet him we won't doubt him or God anymore.

1:47-51 NATHANAEL MEETS JESUS

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he spoke about him. He said: Look, here comes someone who is a genuine Israelite. He will never cheat, no matter what. He is utterly honest, a man of integrity.

Nathanael heard what Jesus said about him, so he asks Jesus: How did you get to know this about me? Jesus replied: I knew you before Philip invited you to come to meet me. I've got respect for you because I watched you carefully while you were studying ¹under the fig-tree. I knew exactly what you were thinking about!

Nathanael was stunned. Utterly amazed, he replied: Rabbi, you must be the Son of God! You are definitely the king of Israel, the Messiah! I salute you, Sir!

Jesus replied: So, you believe, just because I told you that I was able to see what you were thinking under that fig-tree, do you? Well, you are going to see much greater things than that.

Jesus then goes on to say to Nathanael: Do you people remember ²the dream that Jacob had of a staircase going up to heaven, with God at the top? There were angels going up and then coming back down on those stairs. Well, I promise you all that that dream is now going to come true. You people are going to see it happen, because I am that stairway. The angels will connect you with God by using ³the stairs that are the Son of Man.

¹**Under the fig-tree:** A fig-tree has leaves that give good shade. It was an old Hebrew saying that if someone was “under the fig-tree” he was studying. It was a nice, quiet and cool place for a student to study.

So when Jesus said that he saw Nathanael under the fig-tree, we are not quite sure whether he meant ‘I saw you sitting under the tree,’ or whether he meant ‘I saw you studying.’ The important thing is that Nathanael was thinking seriously about something, and must have made up his mind that, no matter what, he was going to be honest about it. He was not going to cheat. He took that decision, and told no-one about it. He was the only one who knew what he had been thinking about. It was just between him and God – no one else.

Now he gets a great shock: This man knows what only Nathanael and God knew! It was awesome! He was stunned!

²**The dream that Jacob had:** Jesus is talking about a dream that Jacob had in Genesis 28. Jacob had cheated his father Isaac and his brother Esau. Jacob had desperately wanted God’s blessing from his father who was about to die. But his father wanted to give the blessing to Esau. So Jacob pretended to be Esau, and took advantage of the fact that his Dad was blind. He got the blessing, but Esau was furious. Jacob had to run away because Esau wanted to kill him. God encouraged Jacob by giving him a dream, or vision, as he slept on the first night of his long journey. He saw angels going up a staircase to God in heaven, and then coming back down the stairs. By this Jacob knew that he had God’s support, and that God would help him although he was in deep trouble.

As a result of that dream, Jacob found God. His life was changed. He made a commitment to be faithful to God for the rest of his life. He never cheated again. He relied on God instead. He also made a prayer to God, asking God to look after him. His prayer was answered. God took care of him on his long journey to the land his mother Rebecca and his grandfather Abraham had come from. God also looked after him there for many years, and made him a very successful man. Then God brought him safely back home, together with his whole family of twelve sons, and a daughter.

Jacob became a believer in God after having that dream. A believer is someone who listens to God properly, and is sure that God listens to him and answers his prayers.

³**The stairs that are the Son of Man:** Jesus liked to use picture language or illustrations. He also liked to remind people about what was written in the Old Testament.

The Son of Man not only means that Jesus was a real man just like us, but it also tells us that he was on our side. Jesus came into our world for our sakes.

Jesus brought God to us,

and he brings us to God.

Here Jesus is telling Nathanael and the others that he is the way to God. When we pray, Jesus makes it possible for the angels to take our prayers upstairs to God. And, because of Jesus, God will send the angels back downstairs to us with his amazing and wonderful answers to our prayers.

Thanks to Jesus,

we can be in contact with God,

and get his help and blessings.



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*(Further volumes 9 to 12 are to be planned, researched and written, God willing.)



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