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Discover Your Bible Series

Discover
JOHN
THE WORD BECAME FLESH



Part One of a Two-Part Study

LEADER GUIDE

LEADER GUIDE

Discover
JOHN
THE WORD BECAME FLESH



by
Brent and Diane Averill


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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lessons, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*. This book is a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leading with Love in the Coffee Break Core Values series is another important tool for leadership development.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend one or more of the many leadership training workshops offered each year in connection with small group ministry.

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Introduction

We all like a good story, especially an eyewitness account. The gospel of John is a personal account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as told by one of his closest disciples.

The apostle John was one of the first people whom Jesus called to be a disciple, and he was present at every major event in Jesus' teaching ministry. According to Matthew 4:21-22 and Mark 1:19-20, John and his brother James had a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee with their father, Zebedee. But John and James left all that behind when Jesus of Nazareth called them to follow him. Why would they do this? Scholars explain that in the Jewish culture of that day it was a great honor to be called to follow a Jewish teacher, or rabbi. So James and John and the rest of Jesus' twelve disciples took this opportunity to begin a journey that would change their lives forever.

As you set out on this journey through the book of John, we encourage you to take its words personally. As great truths come alive for you through the pages of this personal history, make what you learn here a part of your own personal history. We pray that as you do, you will see yourself as a disciple of Jesus too.

While many people can learn to read commentaries and gain understanding about the gospel, it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to change people through the gospel message. Some members of your group may have read and studied John before. Others may be looking at John for the first time. Some may not question anything about this Bible book, such as its authorship or the content of the miracles it records. Others, influenced by the skepticism of our age, may question every claim they encounter. They might view Christianity as just one choice among many valid religions.

Just as John wrote this gospel account in the cultural context of his day, we should aim to bring its message into our culture. Be prepared for the skeptic who not only needs to hear the truth but also needs to sense the love of Christ. Pray for wisdom to answer skeptical questions in a way that does not compromise the Word of God but also communicates in a loving, respectful way (Eph. 4:15; 1 Pet. 3:15-16). Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to discern questions that come not only from the head but also from the heart.

Some of the lessons in this study cover a bit more material than others. As you work through these lessons with your group, remember that you do not have to cover each passage in an exhaustive way. Make use of the Scriptures and the questions in this study to whet people's appetites for spiritual growth and learning, and encourage everyone to keep studying on their own.

Glossary of Terms

Abraham—the father of the Israelite nation whom God called to follow him in faith. God also promised to bless “all peoples on earth” through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Jesus ultimately fulfilled that promise by making God’s salvation possible for people of all nations. Abraham is also called the father of all believers (Rom. 4:11-12; see Gal. 3:29).

Aramaic—one of the common languages used in Palestine during the time of Jesus’ public ministry.

baptism—In the ministry of John the Baptist, this was an outward sign indicating repentance on the part of the sinner who wanted to be forgiven (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:1-5). Baptism in Christ is a sign of the inward washing away of sin and the dying of the sinful nature to rebirth and renewal (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1-4; Titus 3:4). This sacrament is usually performed by sprinkling with or by immersion in water.

blasphemy—scoffing at or misusing the name of God. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed to be God, and they refused to believe him.

the Christ—see **Messiah**.

circumcision—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as an outward sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives. In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not of the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

David—a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who became one of the greatest kings of ancient Israel. He wrote many psalms and established the worship of God in Jerusalem. (See 1 Sam. 16:1-1 Kings 2:12.) According to God’s promise in 2 Samuel 7, the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

eternal life—life that lasts forever with God. It begins when one receives Jesus by faith as Savior, and it reaches fulfillment in the new heaven and earth when the believer’s soul is reunited with his or her resurrected body to live in God’s presence forever (1 Cor. 15:20-54).

the Father—the first person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being.

Feast of Dedication—a winter celebration commemorating the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem after a defeat of Greek oppressors in 164 B.C. This feast is also known as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.

Feast of Tabernacles—a fall harvest festival commemorating God’s covenant with Israel during their stay in the wilderness after being freed from slavery in Egypt. This was one of three annual feasts that all Jewish males were required to attend; the other two were the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

Galilee—the northernmost province of ancient Palestine. It was separated from Judea by Samaria, and the Aramaic dialect of this region was noticeably different from the Aramaic spoken in Judea. It was also an area where many Gentiles lived. Most Jews in the south thought Galilee was on the fringe of Judaism, both culturally and spiritually. Jesus grew up in the village of Nazareth in Galilee, and a great deal of his public ministry took place in this region.

glory—splendor, majesty, power, worth, excellence of quality and character. Jesus revealed God’s glory and his unity with God through his teaching and miracles (John 2:11) and through his death and resurrection.

gospel—This word literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This word can also refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tell the good news story about Jesus.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace “in the flesh” for the salvation of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior.

Greeks—another name for Gentiles who lived in Israel and who mainly spoke Greek as a result of Greek influence over the region since the time of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.).

Holy One of God—a name for the promised Messiah of Israel.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being.

Isaiah—one of the major prophets of Israel. Isaiah prophesied from 740-681 B.C. and delivered a number of clear prophecies about the Messiah of Israel.

Jacob—grandson of Abraham and father of the twelve tribes of Israel. God renamed him Israel, which means “he struggles with God” (see Gen. 32:28). Jacob bought some land near Sychar and dug a well there (John 4:5-6). The land was given to the descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph, and in Jesus’ day this well was in Samaritan territory.

Jerusalem—the capital of Judea and the religious center for all Jews. The temple was located there.

Jewish ruling council—see **Sanhedrin**.

Jews—descendants of the Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin who returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord after 538 B.C. The gospel writer John uses this term frequently, sometimes to refer to the Jewish people but most often to refer to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem.

John the Baptist—the last prophet who called people to repentance to help them prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John baptized people in the Jordan River as a symbol of their repentance and preparation. John was also Jesus' cousin. (See Luke 1:5-66; 3:1-6, 15-20.)

John the disciple—a close friend and disciple of Jesus who wrote the gospel of John. He also wrote three letters and the book of Revelation in the New Testament. (See the Introduction to this study for additional background on John.)

Joseph—A favorite son of the patriarch Jacob. He was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers, but by God's grace he found favor with his masters and rose to become the second-highest ruler in Egypt. During a great famine he invited his family to move to Egypt, and they flourished there for many years, but eventually a new ruler came into power and enslaved them. The people of Israel remained slaves in Egypt for more than four hundred years, until God delivered them through the leadership of Moses (see Gen. 37-Ex. 12).

Lamb of God—John the Baptist used this phrase to describe Jesus at the time of his baptism as he began his public ministry (John 1:29, 35). This title implied that Jesus as Messiah would be a sacrificial substitute for sins (based on traditional sacrifices for Passover and atonement for sin—Ex. 12; Lev. 16; see also Heb. 10:1-18).

the Law (and the Prophets)—In Jesus' day people often used this term to refer to the body of Old Testament writings that made up the Jewish Scriptures (see Matt. 5:17; 22:40).

manna—a food that God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert after their release from slavery in Egypt. The manna appeared on the ground each morning, except on the Sabbath, and could be used for baking bread. Many of the Jews believed the Messiah would renew the sending of this "bread from heaven" (see John 6:32-35).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God's people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean "Anointed One." Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah to deliver God's people from evil oppressors and to rule them in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood these promises, however, and looked for a

Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all their physical enemies. But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God's people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. He rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time, he will fully establish God's everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

money changers—officials who exchanged Roman currency into the Jewish currency acceptable to temple authorities for the payment of offerings and temple taxes.

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Palestine). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God's protection of Israelite households during a final plague God sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. During the night, an angel of death visited Egypt to take the lives of all firstborn sons, but it *passed over* all the households that had the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their doorposts (see Ex. 12).

Pharisees—an elite group that emphasized precise obedience to scriptural and traditional law. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

priests—officials who served in the temple and belonged to the tribe of Levi; also often called Levites.

Pool of Siloam—a pool at the southern end of Jerusalem.

the Prophet—In Deuteronomy 18:15-19 Moses describes this person whom God promised to raise up to teach the people in the name of the Lord. While other great prophets such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist served God faithfully and filled this description in some ways, Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise.

rabbi—a Jewish religious scholar and teacher. Well-known rabbis often had disciples.

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week (Saturday), set aside as a day of rest and restoration according to the law of Moses. Jewish religious leaders developed a stringent code of rules for keeping the Sabbath, and Jesus often criticized them for being too legalistic in this regard (see Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:16-17; 7:21-24).

Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews, made up of seventy-one officials including Pharisees, Sadducees, leading elders, legal experts, and priests. Nicodemus was a member of this group (John 3:1), and so was Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43; John 19:38-42).

Samaritans—residents of Samaria who descended from the ten northern tribes of Israel. The Samaritans had intermarried with other peoples in the region and claimed that God was to be worshiped at Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. They despised the Jews (who descended from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the Jews despised them.

Sea of Galilee—a large freshwater lake in Galilee that was also known as the Sea of Tiberias (after a town on its western coast, named for a Roman caesar—see John 6:1, 23; 21:1).

Solomon's Colonnade—an ornate covered porch running along the east side of the temple in Jerusalem. Apparently some people thought it dated back to King Solomon's time, but the temple built by Solomon was destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25).

Son of God—Jesus used this term to describe his relationship as God the Son with God the Father. The Jewish leaders clearly understood this term to mean having equality with God.

Son of Man—Jesus used this term to describe his humanity as well as to refer to a title associated with the Messiah as described by the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64).

Spirit—see **Holy Spirit**.

synagogue—the local gathering place for weekly services in Jewish communities. There were many synagogues throughout Palestine, but the only temple was in Jerusalem.

temple—the religious center of Judaism in the Old Testament and in Jesus' day. Located in Jerusalem, it was the place of worship and sacrifice, the site of major Jewish festivals, and the gathering place of religious thinkers, teachers, and leaders.

the Twelve—another name for Jesus' twelve disciples.

the Word—In the original Greek language of John's text, the word *logos* (translated as "Word") could have several meanings. Greek philosophers often used this word to refer to the unifying force of the universe. Given the context of statements like "In him all things were made" and "In him was life" (John 1:3-4), we can see that John was using *logos* to speak of Jesus as the divine Word who holds all things together (see also Col. 1:15-20).

Lesson 1

John 1:1-28

One of Us

Additional Related Scriptures

Genesis 1:1

Isaiah 9:2; 25:7

Luke 1:5-66; 3:1-6, 15-20

John 8:12-59; 10:1-39

Hebrews 2:17

Introductory Notes

In her book *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*, English writer Dorothy Sayers describes the uniqueness of Christianity with these words:

For whatever reason God chose to make man or woman as he/she is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—He had the honesty and courage to take His own medicine. . . . He has kept His own rules and played fair. . . . He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death.

In this first chapter of the book of John we discover something quite amazing. God loves us so much that he willingly entered our world to save us. Though we might not be comfortable describing God as taking his own medicine or playing by his own rules, the truth is that God the Son willingly gave up the glory of heaven to come and live among us. A modern song asks, “What if God was one of us?” The answer is that for two thousand years now *God has been one of us*. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, put on human flesh and “made his dwelling among us,” says John 1:14. And because Jesus did that, the world has never been the same.

Some group members may find the opening section of the book of John unusually challenging. (One new Christian said that reading these verses was like trying to understand a foreign language!) Indeed, this opening section is complex. Other sections of John’s gospel account are complicated as well. So as we begin this study of the book of John, we need to recognize that we won’t be able to discuss every verse or its meaning in detail. But we can attempt to cover the major themes and content that John provides here. As leader, you may want to assure group members that they need not understand every statement right away; they’ll have several weeks to

consider and reflect on the truths in John and see them fleshed out in the life and teachings of Jesus.

As you begin this lesson, point out the glossary and the map of Jesus' ministry as well as the description on how to study—all available in each study guide. Read the introduction together and point out that the lessons in this study will serve mainly as a starting point for further growth and learning. Invite everyone also to pray with you. Ask God to help each of you see this study as a personal journey in which you can grow to know Jesus in new ways through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session, or it may fit better at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group. (If you have a copy of the *NIV Serendipity Bible for Groups*, you may find that some of the share questions it offers can also enhance your group discussions.)

How did you get your name? Does it have a particular meaning? Does that make a difference in how you think of yourself? Explain.

After group members have volunteered their thoughts about their own names, draw attention to the lesson material by noting that in the opening verses of John we find an unusual name for Jesus. Then invite everyone to join with you in reading and discussing the opening section of John 1.

1. *John 1:1-3*

Before discussing the Scripture for this lesson, it will be best to read verses 1-14 together. In these verses John introduces us to “the Word”—and you may want to note right away that John is talking here about Jesus. Point to the glossary's explanation of “the Word” and what it meant in the Greek world of John's day. Then take a few moments to discuss why John would have used such a term in describing Jesus.

John was relating not only to his own Jewish culture, in which people were familiar with God's ancient promises to provide them a Savior, but also to the Gentile (Greek) culture, in which people had formed their own religions and philosophies about the meaning of life. In some ways we can think of this as speaking to people today who are familiar with the Bible and to others who have little or no knowledge of the Bible. Today we might use commonly understood metaphors in our own culture—such as *spirituality*, *path*, or *journey*—and we could define them in Christian terms to help people understand the good news of Jesus.

As you will notice when you read John 1:6, you may also need to identify the person who “was sent from God” and whose “name was John.” People who are well-acquainted with the Bible know this was John the Baptist. But anyone who is new to the Bible can easily confuse this John with the one who became Jesus’ disciple and who wrote the book of John. If necessary, refer group members again to the glossary and offer a brief explanation of John the Baptist as compared to John the disciple.

a. *Why do you think the writer John uses the phrase “In the beginning”?*

- **Does this remind you of another passage in the Bible? If so, which one?**

John uses a phrase that would naturally remind members of the Jewish community of the first three words in the book of Genesis. In fact, as Joseph Ryan points out in his book on the gospel of John (*That You May Believe*), the book of Genesis was commonly called “In the beginning.”

b. *What do we learn about “the Word” in these verses?*

- **What should we understand by the term “was” in John 1:1?**

John is saying that “the Word” existed way back—“in the beginning”—when “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). And the Word was not only “with God” in the beginning; the Word also “was God.” The description of the Word’s identity intensifies as John speaks of him in terms that describe only the Creator of all things. This is a lot of information packed into a few short verses.

If you haven’t already done so, you should note at this point that the Word is Jesus. We know this because of information we discover later in this opening chapter of John (see 1:15-18, 29-30). John is describing Jesus in a sort of poetic, mysterious way—perhaps to highlight the mystery that surrounds Jesus *as God* and *as God becoming human*. The Bible doesn’t explain exactly how Jesus, the Son of God, could become a human being, or how the Word (Jesus) can be fully God along with God the Father (1:14, 18) and God the Holy Spirit (14:16-17, 26; 16:7-15; 2 Cor. 3:17-18), who make up the holy Trinity. So there is a great deal of mystery involved in learning about Jesus and getting to know him. But even the little we can learn is enough to fill our hearts with awe and praise at the amazing things God has done.

If group members have questions about the Trinity, refer them to the glossary (see **the Father, Son of God, Holy Spirit**) and offer to talk with them later about this mystery. If you can locate a copy of the Athanasian Creed (perhaps in your church’s worship book or on the Internet), you may

find it helpful in exploring many aspects of the Trinity as taught by the Christian church for centuries.

In addition, if group members raise questions about whether Jesus is really God, point out that Jesus made this claim for himself and that we are called to accept this teaching by faith. You may want to urge people to read John 8 and John 10, for example, in anticipation of discussing them later in this study.

Always give group members the freedom to question, challenge, or disagree. Sometimes those who disagree simply need to know they will be accepted, even when they express doubts.

- **Why do you think John focuses on “the Word” as a name for Jesus?**
- **What are the purposes of words? How do they help us?**

If you haven't already discussed John's use of *logos* to speak of Jesus as the Word who holds all things together (as described in the glossary), take a moment to do so now. In addition, you might note the purpose of words as tools for instruction, expression, communication, self-revelation, and more. In a sense, the Word is God's ultimate expression of himself. No one else can express the heart of God as the Word does.

2. *John 1:4-9*

- a. *What do the words “in him was life” imply about Jesus and his purpose?*

Jesus' role as the source of spiritual life is suggested by John's references to light and life. Mention to group members that the concept of life in Christ is repeated many times in John's gospel.

- b. *Discuss the concepts of light and darkness in these verses. What is light? What does it do?*

Talk with your group about light's ability to reveal, assure, and guide.

- **How does this term apply to Jesus?**
- **What is darkness? What might this term mean as John uses it here?**

Darkness conceals and contains the unknown. In the gospel of John this darkness is not merely the absence of light; it is spiritual darkness. As verse 5 implies, it has intelligence and power. Sometimes the darkness of this world is described as a shroud interwoven with the deceptions of sin

and its effects (suffering, despair, death) that distract us from seeing and living by the light of God's love (see Isa. 9:2; 25:7).

- **What do these verses reveal about the relationship between light and darkness?**
- **What is the effect of the Word's light on darkness?**

Some translations of this passage say the darkness has not "understood" the light (NIV); others say the darkness has not "overcome" the light (NRSV). Both of these translations give insight. Spiritual darkness, with all it implies in terms of sin, ignorance, and evil, cannot understand or overcome the spiritual illumination the Word brings.

If you have time, you might discuss the meaning of the light (Jesus) being "the true light" (John 1:9). Explore what it means to be true (accurate, authentic, genuine).

- **What is true light?**

Talk about how different kinds of light on the same scene or object can give different impressions of what we see. (For example, have you ever been in a room that used ultraviolet lighting? What did you notice? Things that are colored white stand out, while most other colors fade into the background.)

The Greek word for "gives light" (or "enlightens"—NRSV) in John 1:9 is *photizei*, which comes from the same root as our word *photograph*. Joseph Ryan notes that Jesus "is not anyone's perception or preference of truth; he is the true light that enlightens, that photographs God for [everyone]. He is the true and perfect image of God" (see Heb. 1:3).

- **How does Jesus compare to other lights (religions, philosophies, enlightened ideas) in this world?**

John is telling us that Jesus, the true light, came to show us the way things really are in this world. He came to help us see what was wrong in our lives and in our world and to show us the way out of darkness into light and new life.

- c. *According to these verses, who was John (the Baptist) and what was his mission?*

If you haven't already done so, point out the information on John the Baptist in the glossary and, if you have time, summarize Luke 1:5-66; 3:1-6,

15-20. John was the last of the prophets who prepared God's people for the coming of the promised Messiah (Jesus).

- **What is the purpose of a witness?**

One function of a witness is to tell the truth, and John's mission was to tell the truth about Jesus.

- **Why is it necessary to clarify that John the Baptist was not the light?**

John's ministry, as we will learn later in this lesson, was so powerful and significant that many people thought of him as an important figure, perhaps even the Messiah. For this reason it was necessary to point out John's actual place in history. John the Baptist always made clear that he was not "the light" but was only a witness to point others to the light.

3. *John 1:10-13*

- Describe people's different reactions to the Word.*

In the same way that some people can look at creation and miss the Creator, some people saw the Word and missed the message. Many people who were part of the Jewish nation, for example, should have recognized the Messiah. Their preconceived notions about the Messiah blinded them to who he really was. This happened especially among the Jewish religious leaders, many of whom were "blind guides" who ignored the spiritual and physical needs of many of their own people (Matt. 23:16-28). But there were others, such as Jesus' disciples and many other followers, who listened to Jesus and recognized him as the Messiah.

- What does the phrase "believe in his name" suggest?*

A person's name in the Bible often describes his or her character. What does it mean to you if something is stamped with a symbol that reads, "Prime Choice—Grade A" or "Seal of Approval"? Believing in Jesus' name means believing in the character and power of Jesus. A person who believes in the name of Jesus is placing trust in the claims of Jesus.

- How does one become a child of God?*

God gives us the right to become his children through faith in Jesus—that is, through receiving him as the Savior he claims to be, through believing in his ability to save us from sin and death while admitting we are

utterly powerless to save ourselves. Becoming a child of God means being adopted into God's family (Eph. 1:5).

If any group members are not yet believers or if they need to be affirmed in their faith, take the opportunity while discussing these verses to remind them of God's great love for us all. Even at this early point in your study the Holy Spirit may be preparing hearts to take the step of faith or recommitment, so be prepared to be available later for group members who may wish to talk further about committing or recommitting their lives to the Lord. (See "An Invitation" and "Prayer of Commitment" at the back of this guide and in the study guide for some help in this process.)

4. *John 1:14*

a. *Explore what it means that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."*

- **What is the relationship of the Word to the world and humanity?**

"The Word became flesh" is wonderful news for all humanity, because it means God loves and values us enough to become one of us and save us. In order to save us from sin and its consequences (death and everlasting separation from God), the Son of God had to become one of us and take our punishment upon himself to pay the debt of our sin for us (Heb. 2:17). We cannot earn salvation for ourselves because we are locked in slavery to sin (Rom. 7:14-8:17), but the sinless Son of God, the Word who became flesh, could do it for us (Heb. 4:14-16).

As scholars often point out, we can say that when the Word "made his dwelling among us," he "pitched his tent" with us. This rendition stems from a more literal translation of the word *eskinosin*, which means "tabernacled." A tabernacle was a temporary shelter such as a tent, and in Jewish (Israelite) history this word commonly described the dwelling place of God among the people as they traveled out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan (see Ex. 25:8-9; 40:34-38). *The Message*, a recent Bible paraphrase, interprets John 1:14 this way: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." All of this means that God came to be one of us and to live with us so that we can live forever with him, as God intended from the beginning.

b. *What is implied by the description of the Word (Jesus) as "the One and Only"?*

When someone is the "one and only," no one else can be like that person or take that person's place. Jesus is unique—the one and only Son of God, the

one and only Savior, the one and only divine person who became human to live among us and to die to save us so that we can live forever with God.

Note: Some group members may have a Bible translation that refers to the Word as “the only begotten of the Father,” as in the King James Version, but careful study has revealed that phrasing as a mistake. Back in the fourth century, when St. Jerome translated the Greek text of the New Testament into everyday Latin in the Latin Vulgate, he used the word *unigenitus* (“only begotten”) instead of the more accurate *unicus* (“only”) to translate the Greek word *monogenes*, which means “one of a kind,” or “one and only.” Other Bible translations render this part of John 1:14 as “the glory as of a father’s only son,” as in the New Revised Standard Version, and some people find helpful nuances of meaning in this phrasing. If we translate the phrase literally, the result is “glory as of a one of a kind from a father,” and most scholars admit that this is a most challenging phrase to render into English.

- **What is grace?**

Grace is undeserved favor. It means getting what we do not deserve or have not earned (see glossary). Again and again in the gospel of John we will encounter the grace of Jesus, which can also be described as the free and abounding favor of God revealed for the sake of God’s glory.

- **What is truth?**

The word *truth* occurs often in the gospel of John. One dictionary definition of *truth* is “being in accord with fact or reality.” In other words, something is true when it’s “the real thing,” as we sometimes say. The book of John closely links the meaning of this word with Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself says in John 14:6, “I am the truth.” Jesus makes that claim because he is God and is the one who reveals God to us.

- **What does the word *glory* mean to you?**

Group members may come up with responses such as “splendor,” “light,” “awe,” and “wonder.” Many commentators state that glory is wherever God is present. (Also see glossary.)

5. *John 1:15-18*

a. *How does John the Baptist compare himself to Jesus?*

- **What does John mean by saying, “He who comes after me . . . was before me”?**

- **Who was born first?**

John the Baptist was born six months earlier than Jesus, and he began his ministry before Jesus did. In the culture of that day, John's earlier beginning would have given him a higher status. But here John the Baptist acknowledges the superiority of Jesus. As we noted earlier, John understood his calling and knew exactly who Jesus was. Knowing that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God, John understood that Jesus was far greater and had been in existence with God the Father "in the beginning" (John 1:1). Be sure to point out the amazing humility that John models consistently as he presents Jesus.

- **Do you think it was easy for John the Baptist to take a second-place position? Explain.**

If you have time, you might explore with your group how John might have felt in his role. If he were preparing the way for Jesus today, he might well be on the cover of every major news magazine or interviewed on major TV news shows. Mark 1:5 tells us that "the whole Judean countryside and all of Jerusalem went out" to hear him preach. Even with this incredible popularity, John always accurately stated that the one who was to come was greater than he.

b. How does John the Baptist compare Moses to Jesus?

Again, it may be helpful to point group members to the glossary, which offers some background on Moses. While Moses may be understood as the person who brought the law to Israel, Jesus Christ is the one who brought "grace and truth" and fulfilled the law's requirements (see Matt. 5:17).

The law could only point out our inability to keep it perfectly. Jesus, however, could keep God's law perfectly, and he could do so on our behalf. Jesus shows us God and his glorious love in a way that Moses never could.

If group members haven't already noticed, point out that the first time Jesus' name is mentioned in the book of John is in 1:17.

c. What appears to be the main conclusion of verse 18?

People cannot see God with their eyes because "God is Spirit," as Jesus himself says later in John 4:24. But "God the One and Only"—that is, the Word, Jesus—has made God known to the world.

- **How did “the One and Only” make God known?**

The one and only Son of God came to earth as one of us. He became human as Jesus Christ, our only Savior. Living with us, he revealed the character of God, showing us how to live for God. Dying in our place, he saved us from death. Rising to life again, he gives us new life so that we can begin, even now, to live for God, guided by the Holy Spirit. The remainder of our study of the book of John will fill in many details on how Jesus Christ reveals God and his amazing grace to us all.

Question for Reflection

If you were either John the disciple or John the Baptist, what would you say about the Word, Jesus?

Use this question to review important points from this study lesson. Remember that Jesus is God; he was involved in creating all things, became human for our sake, is the One and Only who reveals God to us all, and more. Invite group members to share what they have learned, and if they aren't certain they agree with everything covered, allow room for them to think and talk about the things we've touched on in these opening verses of John.

Also remember to pray for your group members, asking the Spirit of God to speak to their hearts and to help each one grow through this study of the gospel record.

Discover Your Bible Series

Discover
JOHN
THE WORD BECAME FLESH



Part One of a Two-Part Study

STUDY GUIDE

STUDY GUIDE

Discover
JOHN
THE WORD BECAME FLESH



by
Brent and Diane Averill



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you discover for yourself what the Bible says. This is inductive Bible study—in which you will discover the message for yourself.

Questions are the key to inductive Bible study. Through questions you search for the writers' thoughts and ideas. The questions in this booklet are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they discover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this booklet will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Step 1. Read each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about their meaning. Ask questions about the passage.

Step 2. Answer the questions, drawing your answers from the passage. Remember that the purpose of the study is to discover what the Bible says. Write your answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries or Bible handbooks, do so only after completing your own personal study.

Step 3. Apply the Bible's message to your own life. Ask,

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me? Encourage me?
- Is there a promise I should claim? A warning I should heed?
- For what can I give thanks?

If you sense God speaking to you in some way, respond to God in a personal prayer.

Step 4. Share your thoughts with someone else if possible. This will be easiest if you are part of a Bible study group that meets regularly to share discoveries and discuss questions. If you would like to learn of a study group in your area or if you would like more information on how to start a small group Bible study,

- write to Discover Your Bible at

2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

or

P.O. Box 5070
STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.SmallGroupMinistries.org (for training advice and general information)
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

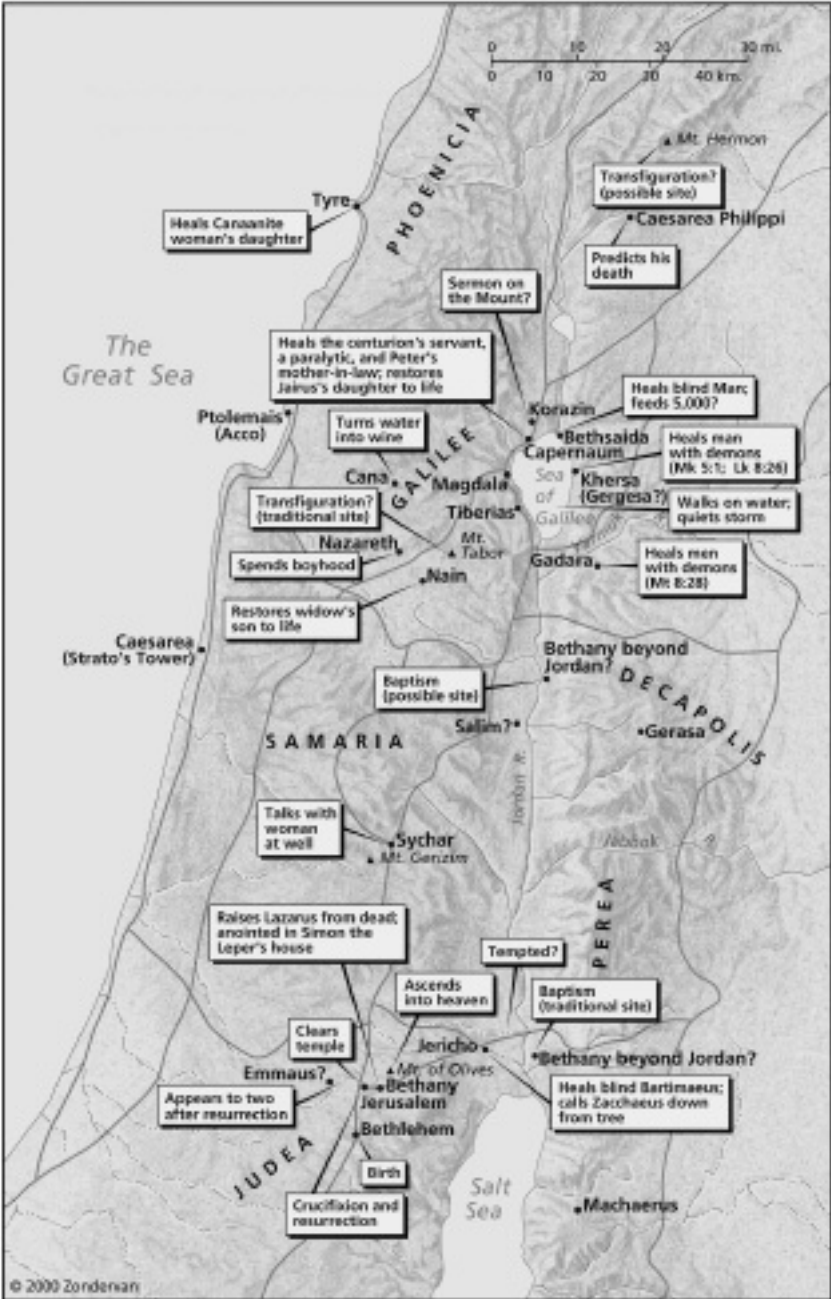
Introduction

We all like a good story, especially an eyewitness account. The gospel of John is a personal account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as told by one of his closest disciples.

The apostle John was one of the first people whom Jesus called to be a disciple, and he was present at every major event in Jesus' teaching ministry. According to Matthew 4:21-22 and Mark 1:19-20, John and his brother James had a fishing business on the Sea of Galilee with their father, Zebedee. But John and James left all that behind when Jesus of Nazareth called them to follow him. Why would they do this? Scholars explain that in the Jewish culture of that day it was a great honor to be called to follow a Jewish teacher, or rabbi. So James and John and the rest of Jesus' twelve disciples took this opportunity to begin a journey that would change their lives forever.

As you set out on this journey through the book of John, we encourage you to take its words personally. As great truths come alive for you through the pages of this personal history, make what you learn here a part of your own personal history. We pray that as you do, you will see yourself as a disciple of Jesus too.

Jesus' Ministry



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Glossary of Terms

Abraham—the father of the Israelite nation whom God called to follow him in faith. God also promised to bless “all peoples on earth” through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Jesus ultimately fulfilled that promise by making God’s salvation possible for people of all nations. Abraham is also called the father of all believers (Rom. 4:11-12; see Gal. 3:29).

Aramaic—one of the common languages used in Palestine during the time of Jesus’ public ministry.

baptism—In the ministry of John the Baptist, this was an outward sign indicating repentance on the part of the sinner who wanted to be forgiven (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:1-5). Baptism in Christ is a sign of the inward washing away of sin and the dying of the sinful nature to rebirth and renewal (Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1-4; Titus 3:4). This sacrament is usually performed by sprinkling with or by immersion in water.

blasphemy—scoffing at or misusing the name of God. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed to be God, and they refused to believe him.

the Christ—see **Messiah**.

circumcision—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as an outward sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives. In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not of the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).

David—a shepherd boy from Bethlehem who became one of the greatest kings of ancient Israel. He wrote many psalms and established the worship of God in Jerusalem. (See 1 Sam. 16:1-1 Kings 2:12.) According to God’s promise in 2 Samuel 7, the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

eternal life—life that lasts forever with God. It begins when one receives Jesus by faith as Savior, and it reaches fulfillment in the new heaven and earth when the believer’s soul is reunited with his or her resurrected body to live in God’s presence forever (1 Cor. 15:20-54).

the Father—the first person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. They are three persons in one being.

Feast of Dedication—a winter celebration commemorating the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem after a defeat of Greek oppressors in 164 B.C. This feast is also known as Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights.

Feast of Tabernacles—a fall harvest festival commemorating God’s covenant with Israel during their stay in the wilderness after being freed from slavery in Egypt. This was one of three annual feasts that all Jewish males were required to attend; the other two were the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

Galilee—the northernmost province of ancient Palestine. It was separated from Judea by Samaria, and the Aramaic dialect of this region was noticeably different from the Aramaic spoken in Judea. It was also an area where many Gentiles lived. Most Jews in the south thought Galilee was on the fringe of Judaism, both culturally and spiritually. Jesus grew up in the village of Nazareth in Galilee, and a great deal of his public ministry took place in this region.

glory—splendor, majesty, power, worth, excellence of quality and character. Jesus revealed God’s glory and his unity with God through his teaching and miracles (John 2:11) and through his death and resurrection.

gospel—This word literally means “good news” and refers to the message of God’s salvation from sin and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This word can also refer to one of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that tell the good news story about Jesus.

grace—God’s undeserved favor and forgiving love. Jesus is the full expression of God’s grace “in the flesh” for the salvation of all who believe in him as Lord and Savior.

Greeks—another name for Gentiles who lived in Israel and who mainly spoke Greek as a result of Greek influence over the region since the time of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.).

Holy One of God—a name for the promised Messiah of Israel.

Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity. The other two persons are God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ). They are three persons in one being.

Isaiah—one of the major prophets of Israel. Isaiah prophesied from 740-681 B.C. and delivered a number of clear prophecies about the Messiah of Israel.

Jacob—grandson of Abraham and father of the twelve tribes of Israel. God renamed him Israel, which means “he struggles with God” (see Gen. 32:28). Jacob bought some land near Sychar and dug a well there (John 4:5-6). The land was given to the descendants of Jacob’s son Joseph, and in Jesus’ day this well was in Samaritan territory.

Jerusalem—the capital of Judea and the religious center for all Jews. The temple was located there.

Jewish ruling council—see **Sanhedrin**.

Jews—descendants of the Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin who returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord after 538 B.C. The gospel writer John uses this term frequently, sometimes to refer to the Jewish people but most often to refer to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem.

John the Baptist—the last prophet who called people to repentance to help them prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John baptized people in the Jordan River as a symbol of their repentance and preparation. John was also Jesus' cousin. (See Luke 1:5-66; 3:1-6, 15-20.)

John the disciple—a close friend and disciple of Jesus who wrote the gospel of John. He also wrote three letters and the book of Revelation in the New Testament. (See the Introduction to this study for additional background on John.)

Joseph—A favorite son of the patriarch Jacob. He was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers, but by God's grace he found favor with his masters and rose to become the second-highest ruler in Egypt. During a great famine he invited his family to move to Egypt, and they flourished there for many years, but eventually a new ruler came into power and enslaved them. The people of Israel remained slaves in Egypt for more than four hundred years, until God delivered them through the leadership of Moses (see Gen. 37-Ex. 12).

Lamb of God—John the Baptist used this phrase to describe Jesus at the time of his baptism as he began his public ministry (John 1:29, 35). This title implied that Jesus as Messiah would be a sacrificial substitute for sins (based on traditional sacrifices for Passover and atonement for sin—Ex. 12; Lev. 16; see also Heb. 10:1-18).

the Law (and the Prophets)—In Jesus' day people often used this term to refer to the body of Old Testament writings that made up the Jewish Scriptures (see Matt. 5:17; 22:40).

manna—a food that God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert after their release from slavery in Egypt. The manna appeared on the ground each morning, except on the Sabbath, and could be used for baking bread. Many of the Jews believed the Messiah would renew the sending of this "bread from heaven" (see John 6:32-35).

Messiah—the promised deliverer of God's people. Both the Hebrew word *Messiah* and the Greek word *Christ* mean "Anointed One." Through the prophets God promised to send the Messiah to deliver God's people from evil oppressors and to rule them in righteousness forever. The people misunderstood these promises, however, and looked for a Messiah who would be a political ruler and gather an army to rout all

their physical enemies. But as Jesus revealed through his work and teaching, the Messiah came to save God's people from the oppression of sin and death and to give them new life forever with God. He rules today in heaven at the right hand of the Father, and when he comes again at the end of time, he will fully establish God's everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth. (See Matt. 26:63-64; John 16:5-16; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5.)

money changers—officials who exchanged Roman currency into the Jewish currency acceptable to temple authorities for the payment of offerings and temple taxes.

Moses—the leader of the Israelites when God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land (Palestine). Moses received the law from God and taught it to the Israelites.

Passover—This feast took place each spring to celebrate the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt. The name commemorates God's protection of Israelite households during a final plague God sent to convince the Egyptian king (pharaoh) to let the Israelites go. During the night, an angel of death visited Egypt to take the lives of all firstborn sons, but it *passed over* all the households that had the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their doorposts (see Ex. 12).

Pharisees—an elite group that emphasized precise obedience to scriptural and traditional law. A number of Pharisees were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

priests—officials who served in the temple and belonged to the tribe of Levi; also often called Levites.

Pool of Siloam—a pool at the southern end of Jerusalem.

the Prophet—In Deuteronomy 18:15-19 Moses describes this person whom God promised to raise up to teach the people in the name of the Lord. While other great prophets such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist served God faithfully and filled this description in some ways, Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise.

rabbi—a Jewish religious scholar and teacher. Well-known rabbis often had disciples.

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week (Saturday), set aside as a day of rest and restoration according to the law of Moses. Jewish religious leaders developed a stringent code of rules for keeping the Sabbath, and Jesus often criticized them for being too legalistic in this regard (see Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:16-17; 7:21-24).

Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews, made up of seventy-one officials including Pharisees, Sadducees, leading elders, legal experts, and

priests. Nicodemus was a member of this group (John 3:1), and so was Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43; John 19:38-42).

Samaritans—residents of Samaria who descended from the ten northern tribes of Israel. The Samaritans had intermarried with other peoples in the region and claimed that God was to be worshiped at Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. They despised the Jews (who descended from the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin), and the Jews despised them.

Sea of Galilee—a large freshwater lake in Galilee that was also known as the Sea of Tiberias (after a town on its western coast, named for a Roman caesar—see John 6:1, 23; 21:1).

Solomon's Colonnade—an ornate covered porch running along the east side of the temple in Jerusalem. Apparently some people thought it dated back to King Solomon's time, but the temple built by Solomon was destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25).

Son of God—Jesus used this term to describe his relationship as God the Son with God the Father. The Jewish leaders clearly understood this term to mean having equality with God.

Son of Man—Jesus used this term to describe his humanity as well as to refer to a title associated with the Messiah as described by the prophet Daniel (see Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64).

Spirit—see **Holy Spirit**.

synagogue—the local gathering place for weekly services in Jewish communities. There were many synagogues throughout Palestine, but the only temple was in Jerusalem.

temple—the religious center of Judaism in the Old Testament and in Jesus' day. Located in Jerusalem, it was the place of worship and sacrifice, the site of major Jewish festivals, and the gathering place of religious thinkers, teachers, and leaders.

the Twelve—another name for Jesus' twelve disciples.

the Word—In the original Greek language of John's text, the word *logos* (translated as "Word") could have several meanings. Greek philosophers often used this word to refer to the unifying force of the universe. Given the context of statements like "In him all things were made" and "In him was life" (John 1:3-4), we can see that John was using *logos* to speak of Jesus as the divine Word who holds all things together (see also Col. 1:15-20).

Lesson 1

John 1:1-28

One of Us

Additional Related Scriptures

Genesis 1:1

Isaiah 9:2; 25:7

Luke 1:5-66; 3:1-6, 15-20

John 8:12-59; 10:1-39

Hebrews 2:17

Introductory Notes

In her book *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*, English writer Dorothy Sayers describes the uniqueness of Christianity with these words:

For whatever reason God chose to make man or woman as he/she is—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—He had the honesty and courage to take His own medicine. . . . He has kept His own rules and played fair. . . . He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death.

In this first chapter of the book of John we discover something quite amazing. God loves us so much that he willingly entered our world to save us. Though we might not be comfortable describing God as taking his own medicine or playing by his own rules, the truth is that God the Son willingly gave up the glory of heaven to come and live among us. A modern song asks, “What if God was one of us?” The answer is that for two thousand years now *God has been one of us*. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, put on human flesh and “made his dwelling among us,” says John 1:14. And because Jesus did that, the world has never been the same.

1. *John 1:1-3*

- a. Why do you think the writer John uses the phrase “In the beginning”?

- b. What do we learn about “the Word” in these verses?

2. *John 1:4-9*

- a. What do the words “in him was life” imply about Jesus and his purpose?

- b. Discuss the concepts of light and darkness in these verses. What is light? What does it do?

- c. According to these verses, who was John (the Baptist) and what was his mission?

3. *John 1:10-13*

- a. Describe people’s different reactions to the Word.

b. What does the phrase “believe in his name” suggest?

c. How does one become a child of God?

4. *John 1:14*

a. Explore what it means that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

b. What is implied by the description of the Word (Jesus) as “the One and Only”?

5. *John 1:15-18*

a. How does John the Baptist compare himself to Jesus?

b. How does John the Baptist compare Moses to Jesus?

c. What appears to be the main conclusion of verse 18?

Question for Reflection

If you were either John the disciple or John the Baptist, what would you say about the Word, Jesus?