

# EXPLANATION OF 43<sup>RD</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## JOHN 1:1-18 (A.D. 70-95)

### INTRODUCTION

John 1 to 12 relate the public ministry of Jesus Christ. He reveals himself in ever widening circles, but in the end he is rejected.

John 1:1-18 describes Jesus Christ as God and as Man.

Verse 1-3 describes the glory of the Word from the beginning, even *before creation*. Verse 4-18 describes his glory *after creation* at his incarnation, when God took on the human nature in Jesus Christ and entered his own creation and our human history in order to reveal himself to people and to save people.

John chapter 1 reveals Jesus Christ as *the Mediator of God: the invisible God makes himself known to man through Jesus Christ*. He revealed (made known) his existence, his essential nature, his words and his works to man (1:14,18). Jesus Christ is *the Mediator of creation*: he brought everything and everyone into existence (1:3). Jesus Christ is *the Mediator of salvation*: he earned and executes salvation of lost people (1:12). Jesus Christ is *the Mediator of grace*: he gives God's undeserved grace that forgives all sins to those who believe in him (1:17). And Jesus Christ is *the Mediator of truth*: he reveals the truth about everything man needs to know about God, about himself, about the world and about the purpose of living in this world (1:17).

### OUTLINE

#### **1:1-3. Jesus Christ before creation and time.**

- a. Jesus Christ is God (1:1-2).
- b. Jesus Christ is the Creator (1:3).

#### **1:4-18. Jesus Christ in history.**

- a. Jesus Christ reveals God, his being, his words and his deeds (1:4-5).
- b. Jesus Christ enlightens every man (1:6-10).
- c. Jesus Christ makes believers children of God (1:11-13).
- d. Jesus Christ brings grace and truth (1:14-18).

### EXPLANATION

#### **1:1-3. Jesus Christ before creation and time.**

##### a. Jesus Christ is God (1:1-2).

**1:1.** In the beginning (before creation) forever was (viia)<sup>1</sup> the Word, and the Word forever was (viia) face to face with God, and nothing less than GOD was (viia) the Word. (The predicate position of the word 'God' emphasises quality: The Word had the same nature as God).

1:2. He (the Word) himself continually was (viia) in the beginning face to face with God.

John 1:1-18 introduces Jesus Christ as the Word. *Just as audible human words explain inaudible thoughts in the mind, so the visible (speaking and acting) Jesus Christ explains the invisible, eternal and almighty God of the Bible.* Although the God of the Bible is unfathomable<sup>3</sup>, invisible (4:24) and unapproachable<sup>4</sup>, people can know God, but only to the extent that he has revealed himself!

The Bible teaches us that God has revealed himself to people as the Father, who spoke through his prophets throughout the Old Testament period<sup>5</sup>; as the Son, who once entered God's creation and human history through Jesus Christ (1:14,18)<sup>6</sup>; and as the Holy Spirit, who was poured out on believers in Christ in order to dwell with and in them (14:16-17).

**The Word existed in the beginning.** The original language of the New Testament uses the imperfect tense 'was' in verse 1 in contrast to the aorist tense 'became' in verse 3. *The imperfect tense expresses the continuous timeless existence of the Word.* The Word was never created, but existed before the creation of energy, matter, space and time. The aorist tense in verse 3 expresses the unique historical event of the Word (Jesus Christ) creating everything (except God himself).

<sup>1</sup> viia = word analysis: here: v=verb, i=indicative, i=imperfect, a=active.

Grammar of verbs: mood (Indicative, Subjunctive, Optative iMperative, iNfinitive, Participle)  
tense (Present, Imperfect, Future, Aorist, peRfect pLuperfect)  
voice (Active, Middle, Passive)

<sup>2</sup> case (Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, Vocative)  
gender (Masculine, Feminine, Neuter)  
person (X=first, Y=second, Z=third)  
number (Singular, Plural)

G = Greek: pros

<sup>3</sup> Job 11:7-8

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:16

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 1:1

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

**The Word expresses and reveals God.** In ordinary speech, ‘a word’ gives expression to a thought and reveals this thought to others. Likewise Jesus Christ is called the Word because he is the expression of the inner thought, mind or soul of God and because he reveals God to man. Jesus Christ is *the visible expression* of the invisible God (1:14,18; 14:9)<sup>7</sup>. He reveals God, who is everywhere present, all-knowing, almighty and all-glorious, to us humans in our limited human words and in our limited human existence.

He reveals to us God’s divine nature, his divine personality, divine character, his divine words and his divine deeds in history. There is no conflict between who God is and what he expresses, between the being of God and the words and deeds of God. Only Jesus Christ was present in God (14:10) and with God (1:1) to read his thoughts, to know his plan, to hear his words, etc. And only Jesus Christ revealed to us what we need to know about God and God’s plan<sup>8</sup>.

**The Word was forever with God.** The Word was *forever in a face to face relationship* with God. The relationship of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit within the Triune God is a union of everlasting love.

**The Word was forever God.** The Word was *forever God and nothing less than GOD or nothing other than God!* In order to emphasise this fact the predicate ‘God’ is put in front as the first word: literally: “GOD (and nothing less or other than GOD) was the Word”. In this predicate position the word ‘God’ emphasises quality: ‘The Word has the same nature as God’. In the Bible Jesus Christ is called ‘God’ (1:1)<sup>9</sup>.

**The Word in human history.** John 1:14<sup>10</sup> says that God took on the human nature besides his divine nature and entered his own creation and our human history in order to dwell among us! In this ontological quality, Jesus Christ is described by Christians as the second person within the Triune God. The word ‘person’ does not express what we call ‘an individual person’, but rather ‘*an inner distinction within the unity of the divine being*’. It expresses one of the three modes of being the Godhead. From eternity God’s essential, substantial and real being is Spirit (4:24). In human history at the first coming of Christ the divine being took on besides his divine nature also the human nature in Jesus Christ (1:14). And in human history at Pentecost the Spirit of God was poured out upon all believers. Throughout human history after these unique events in salvation history, God (the divine being) dwells as Spirit with and in believers forever (14:16-17). In this ontological quality, the Holy Spirit is described by Christians as the third person within the Triune God.

The Word, Jesus Christ, existed continuously from all eternity. He always existed in the closest possible fellowship and intimacy with God the Father. From all eternity he existed as a distinct person from God the Father. Thus, the Gospel of John emphasises three truths about Jesus Christ: he is fully divine, he existed from all eternity, and he existed as a distinct person from God the Father, with whom he enjoys loving fellowship forever.

#### b. Jesus Christ is the Creator (1:3).

**1:3. All things came into being<sup>11</sup> (viad) through him, and apart from him not a single thing that exists<sup>12</sup> (vira) came into being<sup>13</sup> (viad).**

The creation is a specific event in the beginning, expressed by the aorist tense (1:3a). The Word (Jesus Christ) is a continuous reality, expressed by the imperfect tense (1:1a). The Triune God existed from all eternity. The Word created everything that did not have existence before<sup>14</sup>. The perfect tense (1:3b) emphasises that nothing in creation has been excluded. Without exception Jesus created everything that now exists in the universe: all physical realities (energy, matter, space and time) as well as all spiritual realities (rational, psychological, emotional).

Jesus Christ is *the Mediator of creation*: through him the creation came into existence (1:3)<sup>15</sup>. Jesus Christ is also *the Mediator of salvation*: he not only earned salvation by his death and resurrection, but applies salvation to believers in him (1:12)<sup>16</sup>. He is *the Mediator of God’s grace*: through whom God shows his grace to lost people in the world (1:17). He is *the Mediator of truth* about God and about man: through him everything we need to know has been revealed (1:17). The Word causes us to know the existence of God, his nature, his words and his deeds (1:18).

### 1:4-18. Jesus Christ in history.

#### a. Jesus Christ reveals God: his being, his words and his deeds (1:4-5).

**1:4. In him (the Word) was continually (viia) life, and that life was continually (viia) the light of men.**

**1:5. And the light shines continually (keeps on giving light)(vipa) in the darkness, but the darkness did not take possession of (did not appropriate, attain, make one’s own)(or: did not understand, grasp)(or: did not overcome.**

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 1:15; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 11:25-27

<sup>9</sup> Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-9; 1 John 5:20

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:5-8

<sup>11</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>12</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>13</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 1:3

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter 3:18

(viaa) it (the light).

**Jesus Christ is the life.** Jesus Christ is ‘the life’ (14:6), because *he possesses* the same divine attributes as God the Father and expresses God’s attributes. In order to stress the fact that life resided in Christ from eternity, verse 4 uses the continuous tense of the verb. The term ‘life’ refers to the fullness of God’s divine essence, to his glorious divine attributes, like: the right and power to bestow life and activity, his truth (that is, his knowledge, wisdom and truthfulness), his presence everywhere, his holiness, his love, his almighty power, his sovereignty in every matter, etc. This life is not only completely spiritual life, but also the source of all physical life in the universe and spiritual life on earth. This life is also the source of both the general revelation of God and the special revelation of God to mankind.

Man does not possess God’s divine nature or attributes (God’s life) by nature. He possesses for ever only the human nature, which is now also a fallen and broken nature. But God gives to believers ‘life’<sup>18</sup>, ‘love’<sup>19</sup> and ‘holiness’<sup>20</sup>: in short, the privilege to share in the divine nature<sup>21</sup> in the sense that the believer shares in the same eternal life, self-sacrificial love and holiness, which God only possesses by nature.

**Jesus Christ is the light.** When ‘life’ is manifested, it is called ‘light’. Jesus Christ is called ‘the light’ (8:12), because *he manifests* God’s attributes. He visibly reveals God’s divine essence and divine attributes to people. Jesus Christ is not only *the Mediator of light*, but is the Light himself! The word ‘shines’ is in the present continuous tense: it always shines. It shone throughout the darkness of the Old Testament period and shines throughout the New Testament period (verse 5)<sup>22</sup>. Light enables people to know the nature of God and to recognise the work of God in the world. Jesus Christ is the visible expression and revelation of God and his glorious attributes (14:9)<sup>23</sup>.

People are always limited by their creation (limited in space and time and energy, etc. and limited in knowledge and capacity and abilities for example to express love, etc). Therefore people can only recognise, know and experience the one and only living God, his love, mercy, grace, holiness, righteousness, wisdom, power, etc. through Jesus Christ and to the extent it has been revealed. Whoever rejects Jesus Christ, rejects God<sup>24</sup> and thereby also rejects recognising, knowing and experiencing God and God’s love, mercy, holiness and righteousness.

In the Old Testament, Christ as the light shone in the prophecies, promises, invitations and the illustrations (types). First example: the daily sacrifices<sup>25</sup> and the Passover Lamb<sup>26</sup> pointed forward to the necessity of the atonement of sins and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Thus God’s wrath is turned away from those who believe in him. Second example: the serpent lifted up on a pole in the desert pointed forward to Christ who was lifted up on the cross so that whoever looks at him and believes in him will never perish, but have everlasting life (3:14-16)<sup>27</sup>. Third example: the words of the Old Testament prophets predicted the sufferings and glory of Jesus Christ<sup>28</sup>.

And in the New Testament, Jesus Christ as the Light shone in his divine and human nature. He is ‘God with us’ (Immanuel)<sup>29</sup>, that is, God with his divine nature who also took on the human nature and dwelt among us in order to reveal God visibly to the world and in order to execute God’s salvation of people who believe in him. Every attitude, word and deed of Jesus Christ revealed the nature of the invisible God to men. That is why Jesus says: “He who has seen me, has seen the Father” (14:9).

And yet, “The darkness has not overcome (overpowered, suppressed, extinguished, or quenched) the light. The best translation however says: “The darkness has *never* appropriated (attained, made one’s own, understood, or grasped) the light, because verse 5 is parallel to verse 10 and 11. Deliberate evil and hatred hides in the darkness, because it refuses to acknowledge or accept Jesus Christ as the Light (3:19-21). But the darkness no longer impresses or controls Christians, because whoever follows Christ as the Light will never again walk in darkness (8:12)!

#### b. Jesus Christ enlightens every man (1:6-10).

1:6. There came (arose, came about)<sup>30</sup> (viad) a man name John (the Baptist), sent (commissioned permanently as an authoritative personal representative)(vprp) by God.

1:7. He came (viaa) for the purpose of testifying, to testify (vsaa) concerning the light, in order that everyone through him might come to believe (vsaa).

<sup>17</sup> G: katalambanó

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>19</sup> Romans 5:5

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>21</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-4

<sup>22</sup> 1 John 2:8

<sup>23</sup> Colossians 1:15

<sup>24</sup> Luke 10:16

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 9:8-14

<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7

<sup>27</sup> Numbers 21:8-9

<sup>28</sup> 1 Peter 1:19-12

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 1:23

<sup>30</sup> G: ginomai

1:8. He was (viia) not that light; but (he came) in order that he might testify (vsaa) concerning the light.  
1:9. The true light, which enlightens<sup>31</sup> (vipa) every man, was in the act of (viia+) coming (+vppn) into the world.  
1:10. In the world he was (present and existed)(viia) and the world came into being<sup>32</sup> (viad) through him, but the world did not acknowledge (know, recognize by study, observation and experience)<sup>33</sup> (viaa) him.

**The different meanings of the word 'world'<sup>34</sup> (1:9-10).**

The word 'the world' has seven different meanings in the Gospel of John.

(1) The world is *the orderly-created universe* (1:10a,b; 17:5,24) or the earth (21:25). Jesus had glory in the presence of God the Father before the world began. And the world was made through Jesus Christ (1:3).

(2) The world is *the theatre of human history*, the kingdom of man, humanity, the people on earth (1:9,10c; 3:19; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 14:31; 16:21,28; 17:18; 18:36-37).

(3) The world is *the general public* (7:4; 14:22). The brothers of Jesus say that he must show himself to the world.

(4) The world is *the realm of sinful and lost mankind, alienated from the life of God, exposed to God's judgement, in need of salvation* (3:19). It can pass over into the sixth meaning: *not recognising (acknowledging) the Word* (1:10c).

(5) The world is *the sinful and lost people from every tribe, nation and language on earth, without implying that it refers to every single individual*. It is the same as the fourth meaning above plus the added idea that no distinction is made with respect to race, or nationality (1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 4:42; 6:33,51; 8:12; 9:5; 11:52; 12:32)<sup>35</sup>. John says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). Here the world does not and cannot mean every individual person who has ever lived in the world, because the Bible does not teach that all people will be saved. Also in John 3:16 it has this meaning and says that God loves people from every tribe, nation and language in the world, without implying that it refers to every single individual<sup>36</sup>.

(6) The evil world is *the realm of evil that is hostile to God, Christ and Christians* (7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:17,30,31; 15:18; 17:9,14-16,25)<sup>37</sup>. It is the same as the fourth meaning above plus the added idea of hostility.

(7) The world is *God's chosen people* from all the nations on earth (4:42)<sup>38</sup>.

**John the Baptist and his mission (1:6-8).** The name 'John' means 'the Lord is gracious'. This John was John the Baptist. The other John was the apostle John, who also was a witness of Jesus Christ and the writer of this Gospel (21:24)<sup>39</sup>.

John the Baptist was sent by God<sup>40</sup>. He was the final prophet of the Old Testament period<sup>41</sup>. The perfect tense emphasises that his commission had lasting results.

He was sent as the forerunner of Jesus<sup>42</sup>: to witness about Jesus Christ and to prepare people for the first coming of Jesus Christ<sup>43</sup>, so that people would believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Greatest Prophet<sup>44</sup>, the Son of God<sup>45</sup> and God with us<sup>46</sup>.

The verb 'to believe' occurs nearly one hundred times in the Gospel of John. Parallel expressions for 'believing' in Jesus Christ are: receiving or accepting Jesus (1:12)<sup>47</sup>, confessing Jesus<sup>48</sup> and coming to Jesus<sup>49</sup>.

**Jesus Christ enlightens every man (1:9-10).** The phrase 'coming into the world' is used only of Jesus (3:19; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37). The world is here the theatre of human history (the second meaning of the word in verse 10). Jesus Christ stood on the point of beginning his public ministry in the world.

Christ is the real, genuine, authentic light in whose radiance all other lights seem dim and shadowy. Christ enlightens every man. Only he can make clear to every individual the meaning and purpose of his life. The present tense indicates that this function exists only in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> G: phótizó

<sup>32</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>33</sup> G: ginóskó

<sup>34</sup> G: kosmos

<sup>35</sup> 1 John 2:2; 4:14-15

<sup>36</sup> Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5; Luke 14:26; Romans 1:18; 9:13; James 4:4

<sup>37</sup> 1 John 5:19

<sup>38</sup> 1 John 4:14

<sup>39</sup> cf. Revelation 1:9

<sup>40</sup> Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 11:10

<sup>42</sup> Malachi 3:1-2

<sup>43</sup> Mark 1:1-3

<sup>44</sup> Acts 3:18-26

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 3:17

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 1:13

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 10:40

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 10:32

<sup>49</sup> Matthew 11:28

God has given the light of knowledge about himself (his existence and his power) to every man in creation<sup>50</sup>. God has revealed the light of knowledge about his moral laws (his truth and value system) in every man's heart<sup>51</sup>. No one can hide behind the excuse of ignorance and say "I did not know God or God's will"<sup>52</sup>. And the light of knowledge is given to everyone who hears the gospel about Jesus Christ.

This means that Jesus Christ, the Mediator of creation and revelation, has given all people a degree of understanding concerning spiritual matters. A person may realise through observing creation that God really exists. Or he may realise through listening to the moral laws in his heart and conscience that he himself is a sinner living in darkness and in need of salvation. Or he may realise through hearing the gospel that God has provided a way of salvation for everyone who believes.

But such enlightenment, knowledge and understanding *does not necessarily lead to salvation*. The context of John chapter 1 teaches that not everyone is saved. Verse 5 says that not everyone *took possession of* (or grasped) the Light. Verse 10 says that not everyone *acknowledged* (or recognised) the Light. And verse 11 says that not everyone *welcomed* (or received) the Light. Many people who study science in creation, who meditate about moral and spiritual matters and who hear the gospel *still prefer* to live in darkness. Thus *there exists an 'enlightenment' that not necessarily leads to salvation, but leads to judgement*<sup>53</sup>!

However, the enlightenment that leads to the acknowledgement and acceptance of the Light, Jesus Christ, is pure grace of God<sup>54</sup>! By God's sovereign grace, many people receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are definitely saved. *John 1:9 does not teach universal enlightenment or universal salvation, just as John 1:29 does not teach universal atonement of sins*. The Gospel of John teaches *a limited atonement* (6:44; 10:11)<sup>55</sup>, which results in the fact that not everyone in the world is saved. But the Gospel of John also teaches the assurance of salvation, which means that everyone who is saved, remains saved (5:24; 6:37,39; 10:28)!

Jesus Christ created the world (the orderly created universe)(cf. 17:5) and he entered his creation and the history of this world. Yet the world (the realm of sinful and lost mankind, alienated from God, exposed to God's judgement and in need of salvation)(cf. 3:19) did not recognise (acknowledge) Jesus Christ. Here the world is represented by the nation of Israel. When Jesus Christ came, Israel did not acknowledge him as the Messiah, but rejected him<sup>56</sup>. A time will certainly come when Jesus Christ will not acknowledge this world<sup>57</sup>.

#### **c. Jesus Christ makes believers children of God (1:11-13).**

1:11. To his own home he came (viaa), but his own people did not welcome (receive, take his side)<sup>58</sup> (viaa) him.

1:12. But as many as did accept (receive, welcome)<sup>59</sup> (viaa) him, to them he gave (viaa) the right<sup>60</sup> to become (vnad) the children of God, to those who *continue to trust* (vppa) in his name (i.e. who trust in him as he revealed himself together with all his claims).

1:13. who were born (viap) not of blood (natural descent) nor of the will of the flesh (sexual urge) nor of the will of man (the free will or decision of man), but of God (by regeneration).

**The people who did not welcome Jesus (1:11).** The first people to belong to him were the believers during the Old Testament period. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was prophesied many times during the Old Testament period. He was the 'the coming king David' of Israel<sup>61</sup>. Nevertheless, many Jews did not receive or welcome him. This is an ironical understatement: expressing something with its negative or contrary (litotes): 'they did not receive him' means 'they rejected him'.

Although Jesus Christ created the world and all people of all nations, even came into the world and lived among the people, many people (Jews and Gentiles) did not welcome him.

**The people who welcome Jesus (1:12).** But there are also many people (Jews and Gentiles) who welcomed him. He fulfilled the prophecy spoken in Luke 2:34, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many", not only in Israel, but according to 1 Peter 2:6-8 also in the world. "He will be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

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<sup>50</sup> Romans 1:19-20

<sup>51</sup> Romans 2:14-15

<sup>52</sup> Romans 3:19-20

<sup>53</sup> Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31

<sup>54</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>55</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 1:2-4

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 7:23; 10:33; 2 Timothy 2:12

<sup>58</sup> G: paralambanó

<sup>59</sup> G: lambanó

<sup>60</sup> G: exousia

<sup>61</sup> Ezekiel 37:24

**Everyone who hears the gospel can become a child of God.** When John says *to all* who received him, then he means *whosoever* of any nation in the world. Jesus Christ did not only come to save Jews, but also to save people from every nation and language in the whole world. He came to save you and me!

**Only those people, who believe in Jesus Christ, become children of God.** To believe in the name of Jesus Christ means to believe in him as he has revealed himself in the Bible, together with all his claims. Faith in any other religion or philosophy is completely worthless. A person, who *believes* this truth in his heart, will *accept* Jesus Christ into his heart and life. *To accept* means to *welcome* Jesus Christ into his heart and life, *to acknowledge* openly that he is the Saviour and *to take possession* of him in his inner and outer life. The verb ‘to believe’ stands in the present continuous tense. It does not mean that this person made a confession of faith at some time in the past of his life. It means that this person persists and perseveres in believing in Jesus Christ throughout his whole life.

**Jesus gives them the right to become children of God.** While Jews *called* themselves ‘the children of Abraham’, they meant that they were the descendants of Abraham *by natural birth* (8:33). *But Jesus gives every believer in Jesus Christ, whether a Jew or a non-Jew, the right to actually be ‘a child of God’, that is, to become part of the family of God by spiritual rebirth!* Note, not simply a child of Abraham, but a child of God!

This right is ‘given’, which means that salvation is always by grace<sup>62</sup>. This ‘right’ or ‘authority’ does not originate from any human institution (e.g. a particular religion or church denomination) or any human being (e.g. a particular spiritual or political leader), from which many people derive their claim (cf. 19:10), but originates from the God of the Bible (5:27; 10:18; 17:2; 19:11)<sup>63</sup>.

**Salvation is a position and a process.** Salvation (becoming a child of God) is an event at the beginning of a believer’s new life, which gives him *a position* in Christ. And it continues as *a process* throughout his whole life until the complete perfection of his salvation at the second coming of Christ.

- **Salvation as a position (symbolised by ‘a point’ here on earth) is called *justification*.** ‘To become’ children of God does not mean that believers only become children of God in the future after they die. It means that believers *already now are* children of God through the instantaneous act of God, which is called ‘regeneration’ in the Bible. They are justified, forgiven and possess eternal life. Their position is that they are children of God. Their lives on earth are already now hidden with Christ in God<sup>64</sup>. They are already now in the hands of God and no one can snatch them away (10:28-29). Because the two verbs ‘receive’ and ‘give’ are in the same tense (aorist) a believer becomes a child of God the moment he receives Jesus Christ into his heart and life. The apostle John never uses the word ‘son’<sup>65</sup> to indicate believers as the apostle Paul does, but only the word ‘child’<sup>66</sup>. A person becomes a son by adoption<sup>67</sup> and a child by rebirth (transformation, renewal) (1:12-13)<sup>68</sup>. This transformation begins with an act of God, called regeneration and this makes the person immediately a child of God (1:13).
- **Salvation as a process (symbolised by ‘a line’ here on earth) is called *sanctification*.** John uses the word ‘become’ in becoming a child of God (1:12), because after a believer’s regeneration he is continually being transformed in a process, called ‘sanctification’. In this continuing process of sanctification the believer becomes more and more what God intended him to be: a person conformed to Jesus Christ<sup>69</sup>. As believers grow spiritually, they begin to look and behave more and more like Jesus Christ.
- **Salvation as complete perfection is called *glorification*.** The highest realisation of becoming a child of God is when in the future at his second coming believers in Jesus Christ will see Jesus Christ as he is. Then they will be like Jesus Christ in spirit and body<sup>70</sup>. They will appear with Christ in glory<sup>71</sup>.

**Becoming a child of God is a sovereign act of God.** A believer never becomes a child of God due to his natural descent or nationality (blood relationship, e.g. from Abraham (8:31-59)<sup>72</sup>. He does not become a child of God due to the sexual urge of a man. He does not become a child of God due to his own free will or personal decision or the decision of his religious community<sup>73</sup>. He only becomes a child of God by God’s sovereign will (decision) and act (execution of that decision)(17:2)<sup>74</sup>. Only by God’s sovereign decision and grace does a person hear the gospel<sup>75</sup>, does the Holy Spirit convince him of sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-10) and does the Holy Spirit regenerate and thereafter continually transform him (3:3-8).

#### d. Jesus Christ brings grace and truth (1:14-18).

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<sup>62</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>63</sup> Romans 13:1

<sup>64</sup> Colossians 3:3

<sup>65</sup> G: huios

<sup>66</sup> G: teknos

<sup>67</sup> Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:14-15

<sup>68</sup> Romans 8:16; 1 John 3:9-10

<sup>69</sup> Romans 8:29

<sup>70</sup> 1 John 3:1-3, Philippians 3:21

<sup>71</sup> Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:14

<sup>72</sup> Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:11,28

<sup>73</sup> Romans 8:7-8; 9:11,16

<sup>74</sup> Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-5

<sup>75</sup> Romans 10:14-17

1:14. And the Word *once for all in history* became (viad) flesh (a human being)<sup>76</sup> and *once in history* dwelt among us (temporarily as in a tent)<sup>77</sup> (viaa) and we beheld (watched as in a theatre, viewed and contemplated)<sup>78</sup> (viad) his glory as of the only begotten (unique, One and Only)<sup>79</sup> (proceeding) from<sup>80</sup> the Father, full of grace and truth.

1:15. John testifies (vipa) concerning him, and he cried out (vira)(i.e. with the loud voice of a prophet) saying (vppa). “This (as defined in the whole passage above) was (viia) the One of whom I said (viaa): he who is coming (vppn) behind me has gotten<sup>81</sup> (vira) ahead of me, for he was (existed) (viia) before me.

1:16. For out of his fullness (his limitless supply) we have all received (viaa):

- grace upon<sup>82</sup> grace (in the sense of replacement: one grace comes in the place of another grace).
- (or) grace upon grace upon grace (in the sense of accumulation: one grace after the other, the whole life is one of continual grace).

1:17. For while the law was *once for all in history* given (viap) through Moses, grace and truth came (became a reality)<sup>83</sup> (viad) through Jesus Christ.

1:18. No-one has ever seen (vira) God himself. The only begotten God, who *constantly* is (vppa) at the Father’s breast<sup>84</sup>, it is he who has *once for all* made him (God) known (explained him)<sup>85</sup> (viad).

**God took on the human nature in Jesus Christ (1:14).** The word ‘flesh’<sup>86</sup> also has several different meanings in the Gospel of John.

(1) *The flesh is the human nature* together with its sexual urge, but without any negative ethical value connected to it (1:14). A believer is born of God and not of the flesh (1:13). Regeneration is from beginning to end the work of God and not the work of man!

(2) *The flesh refers to a human being*, that is, a human being with a weak human nature, without any negative ethical value. John says that Jesus was God that took on the human nature: he became *flesh* (1:14). Before his resurrection from the dead, he was subject to the weak human nature, to weariness (4:6), thirst (4:7; 19:28), pain, grief, temptations, misery and death (8:40). He became upset (12:27; 13:21) and cried (11:33,35). Yet, he remained sinless. The curse of sin rested upon all human beings and on him until the ransom for sin had been paid. But after his resurrection from the dead he possessed the glorified human nature<sup>87</sup>.

The relationship between the human nature and divine nature of Jesus Christ will remain a mystery to the limited mind of man<sup>88</sup>. When Lot’s wife ‘became’ a salt pillar, she stopped being Lot’s wife, but when Lot ‘became’ the father of Moab and Ammon, he did not stop being Lot. Likewise, when the Word (Jesus) ‘became’ a human being, he did not stop being God! *The human being of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God’s presence on earth*<sup>89</sup>. *Jesus Christ is the replacement of the Old Testament sanctuary*<sup>90</sup>.

(3) *The flesh expresses the fallen human nature: the seat and vehicle of sinful desires*<sup>91</sup>. Jesus says *flesh* gives birth to *flesh*, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (3:6). Natural man is carnal and possesses a sinful disposition. The apostle Paul often uses the word *flesh* in this sense.

(4) *The flesh and blood refer in a figurative sense to the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus on the cross*. Jesus says “unless you eat the *flesh* of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (6:51-56). A believer must *eat it*, that is, must *accept the sacrifice by faith*, in order to have eternal life (6:40). A comparison between John 6:54 and John 6:40 makes it clear that the *flesh* and *blood* are used in a figurative sense.

(5) *The flesh refers to the human standards or outward appearance*. Jesus says that the Pharisees judge by *the flesh* (8:15).

**Jesus manifests God’s glory (1:14).** The apostles of Jesus Christ saw (beheld) his glory. The word ‘glory’ is depicted as a brilliant shining light within which God dwells<sup>92</sup>. ‘*Glory*’ signifies the visible revelation of all the divine attributes, as God’s presence, holiness, righteousness, mercy, grace, love, faithfulness, truth and power.

His glory is his divine nature that shines through the veil of his human nature. The word ‘behold’ means that his disciples had stared at Jesus Christ and had studied his glory in order to explain it (1:32; 4:35; 11:45). His glory was that of the One and Only Son of God, who came from the Father in heaven to this earth.

<sup>76</sup> G: sarx

<sup>77</sup> G: skénoó

<sup>78</sup> G: theaomai

<sup>79</sup> G: monogenos

<sup>80</sup> G: para

<sup>81</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>82</sup> G: anti

<sup>83</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>84</sup> a Hebrew idiom expressing the intimate relationship of a child and its parents

<sup>85</sup> G: exégeomai

<sup>86</sup> G: sarx

<sup>87</sup> Philippians 3:21; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44,49

<sup>88</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 1:23

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 40:34; John 2:19-21

<sup>91</sup> Job 14:4; 15:14; Psalm 51:5

<sup>92</sup> cf. Exodus 3:2; 13:21; 14:19-20; 19:16-19; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Ezekiel 10:4

Before Jesus Christ took on the human nature he shared the glory of God in heaven (17:5,24)<sup>93</sup>. The Old Testament prophets saw something of his glory and prophesied about it (12:41)<sup>94</sup>. God's glory shines through everything Jesus Christ is, says and does on earth (1:14). His miracles reveal his glory (2:11). His completed work of salvation glorified God (17:4). God reveals the glory of Jesus Christ by speaking from heaven<sup>95</sup>. After his ascension into heaven Jesus Christ once more shares fully in God's glory (17:5)<sup>96</sup>.

**God the Son proceeded from God the Father (1:14).** The word 'para' together with the Genitive case almost always, as in classical Greek, indicates that something 'proceeds from' this person. "Power to heal proceeded (went out) from Jesus Christ"<sup>97</sup>. "God the Son (Jesus Christ) proceeded from (originated, went out from the very presence of, from the very divine being of) God the Father" (1:14; 16:27; 17:8). "God the Spirit proceeds from (goes out from the very presence of, from the very divine being of) God the Father" (15:26).

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<sup>93</sup> Philippians 2:5-6

<sup>94</sup> 1 Peter 1:10-12

<sup>95</sup> Matthew 17:5-6

<sup>96</sup> Philippians 2:9-11

<sup>97</sup> Luke 6:19

**Jesus is in his divine nature full of grace and truth (1:14).** ‘Full of grace and truth’ is the Old Testament description of God, related to his loyalty and faithfulness to his covenant people: he is the compassionate<sup>98</sup>, and gracious God<sup>99</sup>, slow to anger (patient)<sup>100</sup>, abounding in love (loving-kindness, goodness)<sup>101</sup> and truth (faithfulness)<sup>102</sup>. What God was during the Old Testament period, Jesus Christ is during the New Testament period.

God’s glory is full of grace: it is his undeserved favour and gifts to guilty people. God’s glory is also full of truth: *in comparison to the shadows and copies of the Old Testament revelation, Jesus Christ is the perfect reality of what those shadows or copies pointed forward to*<sup>103</sup>!

**Jesus outranks John the Baptist (1:15).** With regard to birth, Jesus came behind John<sup>104</sup>. And with regard to public ministry Jesus also came behind John<sup>105</sup>. Nevertheless, he who was behind had gotten ahead. With regard to power and glory Jesus outranks John. And with regard to their nature Jesus Christ completely outranks John the Baptist. Their difference is as between the Infinite and the finite, the Eternal and the temporal, the Original Light of the sun and the reflected light of the moon, because Jesus existed from eternity, while John was created. The evangelist John agrees with John the Baptist, when he says that ‘the Word’ was God, but ‘John the Baptist’ was only a man (1:1,6).

**He brought new and never-ending grace at his first coming (1:16).** From the absolute perfect and unlimited supply of grace believers receive New Testament grace in the place of Old Testament grace. This may mean that believers in Jesus Christ receive grace of the New Testament revelation in the place of the grace of the Old Testament revelation. The New Testament covenant replaced the Old Testament covenant. *The reality of the New Testament revelation has replaced the shadows and copies of the Old Testament revelation (see the book of Hebrews).*

From the absolute perfect and unlimited supply of grace believers receive grace upon grace upon grace. Believers constantly (without stopping) experience God’s grace in their lives. One grace is not yet passed before the next grace comes rolling towards them, just like the waves of the sea rolling towards the beach!

**He brought grace and truth, something the law could not do (1:17).** The law in the Old Testament was mediated to people via Moses and consisted of the moral law, the ceremonial (ritual) law and the social (civil) law. There was nothing wrong with God’s law. It did not stand in opposition to God’s grace or God’s truth that was mediated via Jesus Christ. The purpose of the law was to prepare people to receive the Messiah, Jesus Christ<sup>106</sup>. The law revealed to people their lost condition and it also foreshadowed God’s salvation.

While the law in the Old Testament consisted of the shadows and copies of the future realities<sup>107</sup>, Jesus Christ and his work of salvation are the perfect realities (truth) themselves! For example: the law required animal sacrifices, but Jesus Christ is the final perfect sacrifice that made atonement for sins<sup>108</sup>. The law required physical circumcision, but Jesus Christ circumcises the hearts<sup>109</sup>. The law required worship in a special temple building, but grace allows people to worship God anywhere in spirit and in truth (4:24)<sup>110</sup>.

God’s law demanded righteousness, but could not give it! There were two things that the law could not do:

- The law did not supply grace to forgive people their sins or to help them in their needs.
- The law did not supply truth in the sense of the reality of the illustrations (types) it pointed to. For example, the law did not reveal the real nature of the Old Testament temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc., which were *illustrations* or *types* of the New Testament realities! The law did not reveal that Israel and its prophets, priests and kings were types of the New Testament reality of Christ and his people in every nation<sup>111</sup>.

Only Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection could supply both grace that forgives sin and supply truth that reveals the real nature of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus Christ revealed truth by fulfilling the illustrations (types) of the Old Testament law<sup>112</sup> and merited grace that saves people by his death on the cross.

**Jesus is God and reveals God to man (1:18).** The term ‘only begotten son’ does not refer to anything akin to the human world. The term does not refer to the birth of the human nature of Jesus from the virgin Mary<sup>113</sup>. It does not refer to any physical sonship or to any beginning somewhere in the past. John 3:16 proves that Jesus Christ was the only

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<sup>98</sup> Hebrew = H: El rachum

<sup>99</sup> H: El chanun

<sup>100</sup> H: erech apajim

<sup>101</sup> H: rav chesed

<sup>102</sup> H: rav emet. Exodus 34:6.

<sup>103</sup> Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1

<sup>104</sup> Luke 1:36

<sup>105</sup> Mark 1:4-9

<sup>106</sup> Galatians 3:24

<sup>107</sup> Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1

<sup>108</sup> Hebrews 9:11-14

<sup>109</sup> Romans 2:28-29

<sup>110</sup> Ephesians 2:20-22

<sup>111</sup> cf. Isaiah 49:3,6

<sup>112</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>113</sup> Luke 1:30-35

begotten Son of God the Father *before he took on the human nature*. Therefore it is a term that describes the eternal relationship of God the Son to God the Father and God the Spirit before he also became a human being at his first coming.

With respect to humans the word ‘only-begotten’ means ‘the only’ (child)<sup>114</sup>.

But *with respect to Jesus Christ the word ‘only-begotten’ means ‘the unique (in kind), ‘the only example of its category’, ‘the One and Only’*. The best and oldest manuscripts of the Bible say: “the only begotten God” or “an only-begotten one, God (according to his real being)” instead of “the only begotten Son”. And because God is eternal, the term ‘only begotten’ must refer to Christ’s eternal Trinitarian Sonship. It means that Christ is the Son of God from all eternity.

From all eternity God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit exist in a unique relationship to one another. There is but one divine being<sup>115</sup>, one name of God<sup>116</sup>. And God’s being is Spirit (4:24)<sup>117</sup>. And yet this one God reveals himself as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit<sup>118</sup>. Like God the Father and God the Spirit, also Jesus Christ is not born, made or created, but from all eternity proceeded (went forth) from the divine being of the Triune God (cf. 1:14b). God reveals to us that *there exists an inner distinction in the divine being that completely surpasses all human understanding or definition*<sup>119</sup>, but to which we must submit our minds and lives.

**The historical visible Jesus revealed and explained the eternal invisible God (1:18).** No one in any religion knows God, except Jesus Christ and the people to whom he reveals God (10:15; 17:25-26)<sup>120</sup>. That is why the text says: “Jesus explained him, Jesus made him known.” The eternal invisible God the Father was revealed and explained by the historical visible God the Son. The Word, Jesus Christ, revealed (made known) the existence of God, the being and nature of God, the thoughts and words of God and the works of God to man.

## APPLICATIONS

- 1:12. Merely knowledge of Jesus Christ is not enough. Welcome and receive him into your heart and life. “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test”<sup>121</sup>.
- 1:13. A person who welcomes and receives Jesus Christ into his heart and life is born-again. “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”<sup>122</sup>.
- 1:16. Continue to live from the fullness of Christ’s grace. What God was during the Old Testament period, Jesus Christ is during the New Testament period: he is the compassionate, and gracious God, slow to anger (patient), abounding in love (loving-kindness, goodness) and truth (faithfulness)<sup>123</sup>.
- 1:17. The real meaning of the Old Testament illustrations (types), like temple, blood sacrifices and Sabbath is only revealed through Jesus Christ in the New Testament period. *No one can understand the Old Testament revelation apart from the New Testament revelation! The Old Testament must therefore always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament!*
- 1:18. Jesus Christ makes the invisible God fully known to us. *No religion and no individual can understand God apart from Jesus Christ!* Therefore what one believes and confesses about God must always be in terms of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the visible radiance of God’s invisible glory<sup>124</sup> (14:9) and the exact representation (visible impress)<sup>125</sup> of God’s invisible being (essential and real nature)<sup>126</sup>.

## QUESTIONS

- 1:1. What are the characteristics of the Word?
- 1:1-3. Who is ‘the Word’ and what did he do?
- 1:4-5. What does it mean that Jesus is ‘the life’ and ‘the light’?
- 1:5. What does it mean that “the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not appropriated it”?
- 1:9. In what way does Jesus Christ give light to (illumine) every man?
- 1:10. What is meant by ‘the world’?
- 1:12-13. How do you become a child of God?
- 1:14a. What is the meaning of the word ‘flesh’?

<sup>114</sup> Judges 11:34; Hebrews 11:17; Luke 7:12; 9:38

<sup>115</sup> Mark 12:29

<sup>116</sup> Matthew 28:19a

<sup>117</sup> Romans 8:9-10

<sup>118</sup> Matthew 28:19b

<sup>119</sup> cf. Job 11:7-8

<sup>120</sup> Matthew 11:25-27

<sup>121</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5

<sup>122</sup> 1 John 5:11-13

<sup>123</sup> Exodus 34:6

<sup>124</sup> G: doxa

<sup>125</sup> G: charaktér

<sup>126</sup> G: hupostasis. Hebrews 1:3

- 1:14b. What is the meaning of the word 'glory'?
- 1:17. What is the difference between the law and grace.
- 1:18. How should we understand the phrase 'the only begotten Son of God'?