

John's Gospel : a study for fellowship groups

Further copies from: Adrian H Reed - Email: ahr@blueyonder.co.uk

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(1) The Word and the Witness (John 1:1-34)

John's gospel is a quite different book from the other three gospels, which give an as-it-happened record of events during the ministry of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote to show Jesus as King, as the Suffering Servant and as the Perfect Human Being respectively. John wrote much later to reflect on the ministry of Jesus as the Son of God. The writing is much more direct. There are no parables, but instead a clear statement of who Jesus is, why he came and what he achieved. Many of the foundational beliefs of Christianity are to be found here. It is both a good place to start in the Bible as a new Christian and an excellent place to study in depth for those more familiar with God's word.

Read John 1:1-5, 10-14

Have you ever noticed that in most translations the first three words of John's Gospel are the same as the first three of the whole Bible, Gen 1:1 ('in the beginning')? The situation described here, however, predates the Genesis account. Genesis tells us about the beginning of the world – creation. John tells about the beginning of everything. He is really talking of before time began.

John introduces us to **the Word**. He uses a Greek expression, *o logos*, which was common in religious circles at the time, but here he is talking about Jesus as the Son of God as verse 14 makes clear. Notice each of these things as the thoughts develop:

- Jesus is eternal, being alive before the worlds were fashioned, and was present with God (1:1-2)
- Jesus is God. The text does not say 'Jesus is divine', that is, God-like. It says 'The Word was God'. He is God. One of the fundamental differences between genuine Christianity and most of the false cults is in belief that Jesus is God himself, and belief in the Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here is a stumbling block, for example, for the Jehovah's Witnesses who so not accept Jesus as God. Their translation (New World 1970) wrongly puts it: 'The Word was a god'. But we have it all here in this chapter. The Word (the Son (1:34)) was with God (the Father) and the Word was God (1:1), became flesh and the Holy Spirit came to rest upon him (1:32; Lk 3:21-22).
- Jesus became man. He lived among men and women like you and me (1:14) and showed all the fullness of God (Col 2:9). He was God-with-us, Immanuel (Is 7:14).

Q 1 How important do you see these statements about Jesus being God as underpinning your own faith? Can you compromise with those who hold a different view?

Q 2 Do these verses help us to grasp the power and majesty of God?

Read John 1:6-9; 19-34

John (the Baptist) was sent by God as a witness to Jesus (Lk 3:4-6). He had a specific role to play in revealing Jesus while baptising in the River Jordan and in revealing Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). This was a very special anointing which was upon John the Baptist. He leapt in the womb of his mother (Lk 1:41) when in the presence of Mary and the unborn Jesus.

Q 3 This is a big question to which we should all in the group be able to supply some sort of answer: why does Jesus need someone like John to be his messenger, to prepare for his ministry and to act as witness? Does God really need people like you and me to do his bidding and to be witnesses today?

Next study: Called to Follow (John 1:35-51)