

LESSON 2

*January 3-9

Jesus Is *the Best*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1-18.*

Memory Text: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14, NIV*).

Key Thought: At the beginning of his Gospel, John describes Jesus as the Word who was God from eternity yet who became flesh. Thus, He alone is worthy of our worship.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. John 1:1-18 functions as a prologue to the story of Jesus in the Gospel. It tells an amazing story. The King of the universe, the eternal Creator, became a human being. The One who walked this earth, who became sweaty, tired, and hungry, was intimate with God before the world began, because He Himself was one with God. Although He became part of the human race and was subject to human limitations, He was the One who created the human race and the world in which it lived. The Creator came to serve the creation, even to the point of death. The prologue to John, therefore, interprets everything that happens in the Gospel in the light of the larger perspective of eternity.

The Creator Himself came down and walked among us, spoke our language, and showed us in human terms what God is like. Through the Fourth Gospel, we escape from a narrow world of limited perception into the vast universe of ultimate reality, a view that revelation alone can offer.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.*

SUNDAY January 4

The Word as Eternal God *(John 1:1, 2).*

The prologue to the Gospel of John *(John 1:1-18)* is beautifully structured in the style of Hebrew poetry, which often uses parallel words and ideas. The simple, yet majestic, grandeur of the language is a fitting complement to the awesome magnificence of the ideas expressed in this section of the Gospel.

How far back in time does “the Word” go? *John 1:1.* What does the phrase “in the beginning” refer to? Why would John want to link these two concepts? *(See also John 1:3.)*

The concept of “the Word” would have been readily recognizable to the ancient Greeks, whether or not they ever had heard of Jesus. For centuries the Greeks had conceived that a divine figure they called “the Word” (*logos* in Greek) was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Source of reason and intelligence, and the Mediator between the great God and the creation. In applying the term *Logos* to Jesus, John was appealing to the Greeks in terms they could understand.

What kind of relationship did the Word have with the Father? *John 1:1, 2, 18.*

Is the Word fully God or in some sort of subordinate position? *John 1:1.*

The first words of the Gospel combine “in the beginning” (*from the Creation story of Gen. 1:1*) with a verb that expresses continuous existence in past time. At the very beginning, at the point when Creation began, the Word was already in continuous existence. He is, therefore, eternal.

But the eternity of the Word is not based on some kind of pre-creation origin in the Father; Jesus was not created by the Father. Instead, from eternity, Jesus, the Word, was distinct from the Father (called “God” in John 1:1 but “Father” in verse 18) but in no sense inferior. “What God was, the Word was” is the brilliantly accurate translation of The New English Bible. The intimate relationship between the Word and the Father was an intimacy of equals. We are not dealing with “Gods” here; there is full unity in the Godhead at the same time that there is intimate relationship among the personalities of the Godhead. (See quotations in Friday’s section.)

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *John 1:14*

Teachers Aims:

1. To demonstrate how Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God's nature.
2. To understand what it means to say that Jesus was at once fully divine and fully human.
3. To explore the concept of Jesus as the "Word" of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. God the Son (*John 1:1, 2*).

- A. John begins his Gospel by emphasizing Christ's divine origin.
- B. Christ created the human race—and everything else—before He redeemed it.
- C. Christ as Son is fully equal to God the Father.

II. He Dwelt Among Us (*John 1:14*).

- A. In Christ, the eternal and cosmic became historical and earthly.
- B. Christ's humanity in no way detracts from His divinity.
- C. Christ revealed divinity in His humanity.

III. The Word of God (*John 1:1*).

- A. The concept of the Word was familiar to Jesus' and John's contemporaries.
- B. The Word was fully distinct from the Father, although partaking of the same nature.
- C. The Word is eternal.

Summary: John makes it clear that if we are to accept Christ, we must accept His divinity. This Gospel shows us a Jesus who is in every sense equal to God the Father and who has always mediated between Creator and creation.

COMMENTARY.

Nothing in religious literature introduces its chief Person in such grandeur and in so great a mystery as John's introduction of Jesus the Christ (*John 1:1-18*). And rightly so, for who else other than Jesus transcends all that is known and unknown in this universe in both personhood and mission?

Our lesson this week focuses on Jesus the Word, Jesus the Man, and Jesus the Life and Light.

I. Jesus the Word.

John's narrative of the redemptive story begins with the same words as Moses' narrative of Creation (*Gen. 1:1, John 1:1*). Before

MONDAY January 5

Creator and Sustainer (*John 1:3-5*).

How does John make it clear that the preexistent Word was not a created being? *John 1:3*.

This text is so devastatingly clear that one denomination was forced to change the wording of their own Bible translation (adding the word *other*—“all other things were made by him”) in order to maintain their beliefs. The clear intention of this text as it reads is to assert that everyone and everything in all creation was made by “the Word.” He is the Source of everything created. If “not a single thing” was made apart from His action, then He is not the result of an act of creation. As John 1:1 points out, before any creation took place, the Word was already in continuous existence.

This teaching may seem academic or irrelevant, but it is extremely important to Christian faith. It establishes the incredible value that God placed on us at the Cross. The Person who died there was not just another part of God’s creation, such as the sun, the moon, or angels; if He were, the sacrifice would not have the same kind of value it does with Jesus as Creator.

This, then, is no minor sacrifice. At the Cross our value is established in infinite terms: The infinite Son of God died in order to save us; that’s how important we are in the sight of God. This fact is the truest and most stable basis for self-worth.

Read Hebrews 1:2 and Colossians 1:16,17. In what ways do they say the same thing as what John says regarding the role of Christ as our Creator?

“ ‘His name shall be called Immanuel . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

Meditate on what the full deity of Christ means for us, that God Himself died for our sins. Why does that give us so much hope, as compared to a view of the universe in which there is no God or caring Creator?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

anything, God is! Inspiration, not human genius, led John to write that “in the beginning was the Word” (*vs. 1*). We must not understand this to mean that the Word had a beginning. Instead, it means that long before humans could ever conceive of such things as time and space, long before there ever was a beginning as we understand beginnings, there was the Word, and “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*vs. 1, NIV*). God the Son was “with the Father from all eternity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 39. “There never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 615. Two distinct Persons of the Godhead are thus identified: the Word and God. They are one in nature, thought, and function. They were revealed to Moses as the Creator and now through John as the world’s Redeemer.

The apostle uses *Logos* (Word) to communicate the uniqueness of Jesus to his readers who were Jews and Greeks. *Logos* in the Greek Old Testament was used to convey both the creative (*Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; Ps. 33:6*) and the communicative (*Jer. 1:4, Amos 3:1*) attributes of God. For the Jew, the Word was an expression of divine power, character, and will. For the Greeks, *Logos* symbolized the absolute mind, the supreme reason, that was responsible for the order, pattern, plan, and design of all that exists. It was in Ephesus (where the apostle wrote the Gospel) that the philosopher Heraclitus (c. 560 B.C.) first used the word *Logos*. The word later became central to Stoic philosophy. “ ‘The Logos,’ said the Stoics, ‘pervades all things.’ ” —William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977), pp. 34, 35.

John’s usage, however, transcends that of the Stoics. He is not speaking of an absolute mind but of God. This Jesus who walked among us is God. The fact that He was with God the Father makes Him distinct yet equal to the Father. The Word was with God in eternity past, and now in Bethlehem He came to be “God with us” (*Matt. 1:23*). Here lies a mystery beyond human comprehension—except to the mind that submits in faith to the revelation of the Scriptures.

II. Jesus, the Word Made Flesh.

Although every chapter in the Gospel of John refers to the divinity of Jesus, it is Jesus, the “Word made flesh,” that John emphasizes as God’s instrument of salvation to human beings. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth” (*John 1:14*). Divinity without humanity could not have accomplished salvation. The God who created humans must become a human being, live like one, suffer like one, and at last bear the sins of all. Those who deny the divinity of Jesus deny the origin of salvation; those who deny the humanity of Jesus reject the method of salvation. Only He who is God has the power to save; only when He becomes human and dies for the sins of humanity does He have the authority to save.

TUESDAY *January 6*

Rejection and Reception (*John 1:4-13*).

What other function does the Word perform? *John 1:4, 5.*

In the original Creation, the Word was the Author of physical light. He is the One who uses light (the rays of the sun) as part of the process of plant production that sustains physical life on this earth. But the author of our Gospel has more than physical light and life in mind here. He's talking about light in the spiritual sense, as well.

Read John 1:10. Summarize, in your own words, the gist of what that text means.

Without the Word, there would be no rain, no sunshine, no air, no life. The amazing reality is, however, that when the Creator and Sustainer of the universe appeared on earth, He was unknown and unrecognized as such. Even His "very own" rejected the One who gave them life. In light of these verses, the actions of so many people toward Jesus in the Gospel of John, including His disciples (*John 12:16, 14:6-9*), are foolish and tragic.

Yet, the message of this prologue is not all dark.

On what basis is it possible to become children of God? *John 1:12, 13*? How much human effort is involved?

In the original language of John 1:12, it is the one who "received" (a point in past time) Him and who "believes" (continuous action) in His name who gains the right to become a child of God. This language points to two aspects of becoming right with God. There is the initial point of reception, and there is the ongoing relationship of believing. There is no "once saved always saved" here. Being a child of God has a beginning, but it is also a process that continues as long as a Christian lives.

This "new birth," however, is not achieved by human effort; it is as much a miracle as the original act of creation. And just as the original act of creation must be sustained by the continual miracle of the Word's watchcare (*vss. 4, 5*), so the relationship of the child of God with Jesus involves ongoing belief resulting in an ongoing miracle of spiritual life (*vss. 12, 13*).

In verse 12, John says that those who receive Him become sons of God. Why do some receive Him and some do not? What role does free choice have in the answer? What role does free choice have in the continuation of our spiritual life, as well?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Both the power and the authority to save reside in Jesus—God made flesh. Therefore, “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (*Acts 4:12*).

III. Jesus the Light and the Life.

Having introduced the great truth of the Incarnation, the apostle immediately proceeds to tell us its purpose: “In him was life; and

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 53:4; John 1:14, 3-9, 10, 11; 1 John 2:23; Revelation 14:6, 7*

- 1 John 1 describes how Christ, the Eternal Word, participated in Creation. What connection does this participation have to His role as Redeemer?
- John’s references to Christ as the Word relate to a similar ancient Greek concept. Was John influenced by the Greeks, or were the Greeks somehow earlier made aware of an aspect of the truth? Explain your answer.
- We believe that Christ was “begotten,” not created. In human terms, “begotten” usually implies some sort of beginning. In what sense was Christ “begotten” and yet, at the same time, eternally existing?
- Throughout the history of Christianity, the status of Christ as fully equal to God has often been a source of conflict. Why is it important to correctly understand Christ’s status in the Godhead? Is it possible to have a different understanding yet still be considered Christian? Explain.
- John notes that Christ was mostly unrecognized for who He really was during His time on earth. Why do you think this was so? Do you think you would have recognized Him if His first coming would have taken place during your lifetime? Explain your answer.
- The phrase “One and Only” (*John 1:14, NIV*) emphasizes Jesus’ unique role as God’s Son. What does this uniqueness mean to us?
- John the Baptist’s mission was to introduce Jesus to the world as the Light. Why did people who already had the light of God’s law need to have the Light? Why is it particularly important for Seventh-day Adventists to recognize Jesus as the Light?

WEDNESDAY *January 7*

The Humanity of Jesus (*John 1:1, 2, 14*).

Compare John 1:1, 2 with what is said in verse 14. While verses 1-5 focus on the divine preexistence of the Word, verse 14 turns to His nature and status as One who walked on earth as a part of human history. These texts express an incredible paradox. A man of a particular ethnic background, living at a particular time in history, subject to human frailty, turns out to be the divine Word, who created the entire universe.

Eternal (<i>John 1:1</i>)	Earthly (<i>John 1:14</i>)
<p>“was” “was God” “with God”</p>	<p>“among us” “became” “became flesh”</p>

The language here is simple yet profound. In John 1:1 the Word “was.” The Greek tense implies continuous past existence. He always “was.” But verse 14 tells us that at a point in time the Word “became” flesh. The word translated “became” in verse 14 is the same as the one translated “made” in verse 3. When the Word became flesh, it was an act of creation, something added to His ongoing, eternal nature. Though He “was” God, He also “became” flesh. In the process, the Word went from being “with God” to being “with us.” The entire Gospel of John becomes an expression of Jesus’ humanity while He was here on earth. One struggles here to express truth that is simply stated in John 1 yet is so profound that “the whole world would not have room for the books” that could be written about it (*John 21:25, NIV*). In simple language John has articulated the full range of both the Word’s divine and human natures. He is the God-man. He is from heaven yet of earth. He always was, yet He also became. He was eternal, yet He also has a created existence.

Because He is fully God, Jesus could reveal what God is like in the highest sense. Because He became fully human, that revelation is accessible to us at a level we can grasp and follow. “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:9, NIV*). In the Gospel of John, this difficult but glorious truth is revealed in the prologue but also brought home to our hearts by the Spirit (*John 16:13-15*).

If possible, obtain some facts on the size of the visible universe. After reading those figures, dwell on the texts and the study for today. How does this help you begin to understand the incredible love that God has for us?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

the life was the light of men” (*John 1:4*). Jesus is the true Source of life in terms of both Creation and Redemption. “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530. He that created design and order in the universe, and declared, “Let there be light” (*Gen. 1:1-3*), has Himself become the true Light of all humanity and has maintained the character and will of the Father. The Incarnation, itself a work of God’s grace (*John 1:16*), destroyed the darkness of sin, making way for the Light of salvation, so that all who believe and accept that Light may receive “power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (*John 1:12*).

Thus, John’s prologue is a powerful portrait showing us that Jesus is God and Man, Creator and Redeemer.

Witnessing

Some cosmetic surgeons use Botox injections to reduce facial wrinkles caused by aging. Botox is a neurotoxin that causes food poisoning or botulism. Small doses of Botox are injected into the facial muscles, causing them to relax and thus smooth out the wrinkles. Botox injections are costly and most often used for wrinkles on the forehead, around the eyes and neck, and on the bridge of the nose. One treatment lasts for about three to five months, at which time the patient may take another dose (or two or three) to look young again.

Many people spend a great amount of time and expense on cosmetics to look their best. Others are more concerned about being physically fit, spending several hours a week getting and staying in shape. Still others believe that good nutrition is the key to longer, healthier lives.

Although we may look and feel younger longer, there is only one way to live forever, and that is through Jesus Christ our Lord. To those seeking long life, we can say that Jesus is the way. He wants us to look better, to feel better, and to live long, healthy lives here on this earth. But even more important, He wants us to live forever with Him in glory.

“O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth” (*Ps. 8:1*). Excellence denotes superiority or that which is of the highest quality. There is no other name on earth superior to Jesus’ name. There is no other name by which we are saved (*Acts 4:12*). He is not just the best. He is the only Way to everlasting life.

THURSDAY January 8

The Greatest Revelation *(John 1:14-18)*.

What did the Word do in order that His glory might be seen on earth?
John 1:14.

The phrase “made his dwelling” translates from the Greek word for “pitch one’s tent” to mean a reminder of the tabernacle in the wilderness (*Exod. 25:8, 9*). The glory of Jesus that the disciples saw recalls the glory of God’s presence in that tabernacle (*Exod. 40:34, 35*). Things become even more interesting when we discover that in Hebrew the word “to dwell” (*shachan*) and the word for God’s glory in the sanctuary (*shechinah*) come from the same root.

The Old Testament sanctuary was a marvelous source of grace and blessing and continues to instruct us today. But when the Word became flesh, the Old Testament sanctuary was eclipsed by an even greater Source of grace and blessing (*John 1:16*). Jesus is a better revelation of God than even the sanctuary, because in Jesus, God dwelt directly in human flesh, and “we” could behold what was before hidden behind curtains.

What did John the Baptist have to say about the Word? *John 1:15.*
What was he referring to when he said that Jesus came “before” him when, in fact, he had been born before Jesus? *See Luke 1.*

In Jesus’ day the two greatest human figures were John the Baptist and Moses. John was revered by many as a contemporary prophet, Moses as the great deliverer of Israel and giver of the Law.

But the prologue makes clear that Jesus is no ordinary human being. He is greater than the greatest men known to the people of the time. He was the best, because He was God made flesh. In His person it became possible for human beings to know what God was like. He came to reveal a world far beyond the ability of our senses to know and comprehend.

Moses was a man given an incredible revelation of God (*Exod. 33:19-23*), and yet, even he was allowed to see God only briefly and from the back. In contrast, the Word came to earth as One who had been in continual residence “at the Father’s side”—the Greek implies continual close communion with God.

Think of the infinite humiliation the incarnation of Christ required. How does that rebuke, in the most powerful way, human pride and arrogance? In light of the truth about Christ and the Incarnation, why are these such horrendous sins?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “When John Knox preached in the days of the Reformation in Scotland it was said that the voice of that one man put more courage into the hearts of his hearers than ten thousand trumpets braying in their ears. His words did things to people. In the days of the French Revolution, Rouget de Lisle wrote ‘Marsellaise’ and that song sent men marching to revolution. The words did things. In the days of the Second World War, when Britain was bereft alike of allies and of weapons, the words of the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, as he broadcast to the nation, did things to people.”—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: John 1* (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1975), pp. 27, 28.

Thought Questions:

- 1 A word is a powerful thing to the Jewish person. It has dynamic energy and the ability to exist independently. And that is why the Hebrew language uses words sparingly. With this in mind, read John 1:14. What pictures of Jesus is John trying to portray by calling Him “the Word”? How do you think the people of John’s time might have reacted to this kind of description of Jesus?
- 2 God wants more than an ethereal relationship with us, His church. He wants to set up permanent residence in our lives. With this image in mind, study, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, the follies of the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. How can inviting God’s presence to dwell within us act as a safeguard against repeating these same acts?

Application Questions:

- 1 A grasp of the potency of a word in Hebrew helps us better understand the story of Isaac, who was unable to retract his blessing bestowed on the wrong son. It also helps us understand the power of the Creation story—God spoke the earth into creation. Read Psalms 33, 107, and 147. How can the power of God’s Word as described in these psalms translate into a source of strength in your life?
- 2 In the context of God’s words having power, how would you interpret biblical phrases such as “‘I am with you always’” (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*)? Share with the class other passages in the Bible that give you strength and courage. As God’s children, we are commissioned to reflect Him. In what ways can our lives exude the power of God as “the Word”?

FRIDAY *January 9*

Further Study: “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906.

“In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

“The only way in which the fallen race could be restored was through the gift of His Son, equal with Himself, possessing the attributes of God. Though so highly exalted, Christ consented to assume human nature, that He might work in behalf of man and reconcile to God His disloyal subject.”—Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, November 8, 1892.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Why did John begin his Gospel with thoughts about Creation, and even before Creation, when all the other Gospels begin with either the birth of Jesus or His adult ministry? What theological point was he making?

❷ As we saw this week, John uses sanctuary imagery in referring to Christ (*John 1:14*). And though the earthly-sanctuary service was ended after Christ’s death, what role did the sanctuary have that is so important in helping us understand just what Christ did for us when He was in the flesh and also what He is doing for us now as our High Priest?

❸ How would you answer someone who rejects the Deity or pre-existence of Christ on scientific or logical grounds?

Summary: John 1:1-18 tells us that the King of the universe, the eternal Creator, chose to become a human being. In simple yet profound terms, John expresses the full contrast between the divine and human natures of Jesus. No being in the universe is more divine than Jesus, nor is any more human. In His person He combines everything we need to become children of God. The rest of the Gospel will unpack how this can take place in our lives today.