

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: In the Beginning

TEXT: John 1:1-14

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Introduce: Who would share with the group about the city where you were born. Is there something unique about your birth that you could share with the group? Was there something unique about the name you were given?

We usually think of Bethlehem when we talk about Christ's birth. We have images Mary and Joseph's trek to Bethlehem, the stable where Jesus was born, or other events surrounding His birth. We might cherish the message of the angel to Mary, Joseph, or the Shepherds. But there is so much more that took place on that day in the little town of Bethlehem.

We must remember that Jesus' birth was one very pivotal event in God's gospel story that reaches back to the very beginning of time itself and even further. We must travel back through time eternal to fully grasp the significance of Jesus' birth and Jesus' life.

God gave John, the beloved disciple, the job of helping us understand more fully the significance of Jesus' birth and who Jesus was and is. John begins his Gospel by declaring that Jesus is God, rather than beginning with an account of His birth. But one must ask, "Why is this so important?" This is the question we will answer in this session as we begin a study of the Gospel of John.

Sometime between A.D. 85-95, God directed John to write the Gospel of John. John was one of Jesus' most beloved apostles. He wrote the gospel while living in Ephesus, a Greek city and culture, but he grew up in a Jewish background and culture in the areas of Galilee and Judea. It is through this gospel that God reveals Himself to us through His Son. He teaches us that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, is God, and is the One who reveals God.

Action: Write the following heading on the markerboard – "Jesus is God because..." Prepare to add each outline point as you guide the session.

John begins the gospel by giving a very unique name to Jesus: "Word" or *logos*. But being the "Word" means so much more than we can ever imagine. Listen to how John describes the "Word."

LOOK IN: UPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Jesus (The Word) is God because He is eternal – John 1:1-2

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

Action: Write "He is eternal" below the heading on the markerboard.

Discuss: Why did John say, "in the beginning was the Word" instead of "in the beginning was Jesus"?

John refers to Jesus as the Word (Greek Logos) four times in the Prologue, three of them in reference to His preincarnate state (all in v. 1) and the fourth in reference to the incarnation (v. 14). One must ask why John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, chose "Word" (Greek logos) as a designation for God's Son?

Action: Write the following on the markerboard before explaining – "FROM: Logos (written, spoken); TO: Logos (personified); TO: Logos (Person)"

In the Old Testament, God often revealed Himself and His personality through His word. The Old Testament contains hundreds of references to God's word ("the word of the LORD") and God speaking ("this is what the LORD says").

The word was also personified in many Old Testament passages such as:

- Isaiah 7:3, "The Lord said to Isaiah."
- Psalm 107:20, "He sent his word and healed them; he rescued them from their traps."
- Isaiah 55:11, "So my word that comes from my mouth will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do."

John took this idea one step further—from logos personified to logos as a Person, indicating that the Word is God’s final Spokesman. Notice also that John refers to the beginning in verse 1 and ends with the beginning in verses 1-2.

Guide:

- Imagine this as a loop. John begins with the beginning and ends with the beginning as he describes Jesus as the Word.
- What does this communicate to you regarding Jesus? What do you think of when you think of the word “beginning”?
- Genesis 1:1 tells us that, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Is this the beginning John is referring to when describing Jesus as the Word?

The Word Was in The Beginning

Genesis 1:1 refers to the starting point for time, space, and matter, whereas John 1:1 refers to the Word’s existence before time, space, and matter existed. This becomes clear when, in Genesis 1:26, God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.” The word “us” points not only to the Word but to the entire Trinity being in existence before time began as we understand it.

The imperfect tense of John’s use of the word “beginning” indicates that the Word always existed. It’s evident by this passage that the beginning transcends what we can understand as a beginning. Jesus Christ is the only human who existed prior to conception and birth. There has never been a moment when the Word was not.

The Word was with God.

The Greek preposition translated “with” denotes an intimate relationship. This second statement reveals that the Word existed in an intimate relationship with God the Father, indicating He was not the Father but was eternally with Him.

The Word was God.

The absence here of the Greek definite article before God indicates that the Word has the essence, nature, and attributes of God. Everything true about God—omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, love, grace, and so on—is also true about the Word. The Word is God—co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. Both are deity: God (the Father) and the Word.

Many people want to relegate Jesus to the status of a great teacher, a great prophet, or that He somehow became God’s Son through His actions, but these views are woefully inadequate and are nothing short of blasphemy.

Action: Write “He is Creator” below the heading on the markerboard.

Jesus (The Word) is God because He is Creator – John 1:3-5

³ *All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.*

Discuss: How do verses 2-3 explain that Jesus was not a created being?

Jesus (the Word) was *with* God in the beginning. All things were created through Him. Apart from Him, not one thing was created. The ETB Leader guide emphatically states it this way, “The phrase *all things* leaves nothing out. Every aspect of existence came into being as a result of Christ’s deliberate action.”

Discuss: Since God created everything, yet “apart from Him (the Word) not one thing was created,” what does this mean about God and Jesus?

One must go back again to the word “Us” in Genesis 1:26. Jesus and God are one. They were both present at creation. Jesus didn’t show up later after God created everything, nor was He one of God’s created beings. He was and is the Creator.

Action: Write “He is Life” below the heading on the markerboard.

Jesus (The Word) is God because He IS life – John 1:4-5

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

John used a Greek term for life (zoe, pronounced: ZOH ee) to refer to both physical and spiritual life. John took advantage of both usages throughout his Gospel. The theme of eternal life is one of the most important themes in John, paralleling the significance in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke on the theme of the Kingdom of God (Heaven). The term "life" occurs twice in this verse and more than 40 times throughout John's Gospel. The reader is alerted to keep both the physical and the spiritual usages of the term "life" in mind when reading John's Gospel.

When John wrote in 1:4 that life was in Jesus, he meant physical life, tying the statement to the previous verse on creation. He also meant spiritual life, as the rest of John's Gospel will spell out for us. The spiritual sense of life seems to be in view in the statement that life was the light of all humanity. Notice that John tells us that darkness can't overcome the light.

Guide: How would you explain this to someone today using what we understand about the science behind light and darkness. Why can't darkness overcome light?

When John spoke of the light shining in the darkness, he used the present tense, meaning the light "continually shines." Jesus the Light is shining continuously and is as bright today as He was when John wrote in the first century. The term darkness portrays that, in His incarnation, Jesus came into a sin-cursed world where the darkness, symbolizing moral evil, opposes the light, God's righteousness. When Jesus came into this world, He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah who said those living in darkness would see a great light in the Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-2).

When the Light appears, darkness must vanish, much like a light in a completely dark cave disperses the darkness. Spiritually speaking, darkness can never overcome the light of Christ. While evil may appear to be making advancements or overcoming the light, Christ will always prevail.

Action: Write "Not just a messenger" below the heading on the markerboard.

Jesus is God and not just a messenger – John 1:6-8

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

John briefly interrupted his presentation of Jesus to introduce John the Baptist. All the New Testament Gospels introduce Jesus' ministry with a reference to the work and ministry of John the Baptist. By referring to John the Baptist as a man sent from God, the Gospel writer sought to show him due respect and to clarify his role.

Discuss: How is the "Word" different from John the Baptist

John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus the Light. He was not God, nor was he a god. He was a messenger. If Jesus was just a man who became God, then John the Baptist could have become God, too. John uses this contrast to emphasize that Jesus was fully divine --Deity wasn't something He became; He came because He was Deity.

Believers are also messengers sent to tell others about the Light. This is our mission as believers and we should realize that the message of John the Baptist is one we should be boldly proclaiming today. Like John the Baptist, we might encounter times when we feel unworthy to be proclaiming the message as John did when Jesus asked to be baptized. Or we might assume that rejection is an indication of failure. However, we must remember that we AREN'T the light but only reflectors of THE LIGHT. Therefore, when we have doubts or failures, or are persecuted for our faith, we must remember that Jesus is still the Light that will overcome the darkness.

Action: Write "He is not just a messenger" below the heading on the markerboard.

Jesus (The Word) is God because He Alone Offers Salvation – John 1:9-14

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Discuss: What was the purpose of this true light coming to everyone? How do these verses refute any notion that all will go to Heaven – the doctrine of universal salvation?

The reference to everyone indicates the scope of God's love, but sadly not to the scope of people's acceptance of Jesus. God loves all people and sends Jesus to enlighten everyone, but not everyone believes in Jesus. The true light, Jesus, provides light to everyone (see John 1:4). In this context, to give light refers to giving spiritual enlightenment. Jesus is uniquely qualified to open our eyes to the reality of God and our need for a Savior. Our minds are empowered through Him to see spiritual things, notably our sin and God's love. Many people reject Him. For this reason, no doctrine of universal salvation can be found here. Not everyone will go to Heaven just because Jesus came.

Ask: Based on these verses, how would you describe what believing in Jesus' name means?

John explains that, to believe in Jesus' name means to totally "buy into" what Jesus revealed in His ministry. True believers make a lifelong surrender to live according to God's Word and under the direction of His Spirit. Such a relationship results in Jesus giving us the authority, or power, to be children of God. Only God can give us the right to be His children.

Ask: How does verse 13 refute the idea that there are many roads to God?

John emphasized that salvation is not a result of biological action. Being born as a child of Christian parents doesn't automatically make the child a believer. Nor is salvation a matter of fulfilling natural human desires. Finally, salvation is not a matter of the human will. Only God can give salvation.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

John ends this passage with an incredible description of the Word, *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* John penned these words 60-70 years after Jesus' resurrection. He was one of three apostles in Jesus' inner circle.

Respond:

- Imagine being John as he penned verse 14 to conclude all he had previously said about Jesus. What images and feelings might have surfaced as you wrote these words?
- Have you ever considered why God would/should reveal Himself to you? What are your thoughts on this, based on John's description of Jesus?
- In what ways might this passage help you explain who Jesus is to someone else?

The impact of John's statement in verse 14 in common language might be something like this: "the Word became a living, breathing Person, and He moved in next door to us." The Living Word came near enough to view so that you and I would have the opportunity to draw near to Him. He became what He had never been. God became Jesus of Nazareth! He is fully human, yet fully divine. He reconciles humanity and God in His Person, providing redemption for a lost world.