

## John Chapter 1

When we open any book for the first time, we automatically turn to the very first page and the opening sentence, hoping that the first few lines will give us some clue as to its contents. The Bible is no exception to this and as we turn to each book, the first few lines are usually very instructive.

The beginning of the gospel by John is quite gripping in its style, and totally different from the start of the other three gospels. In each gospel, we can see how the subject matter at its outset is totally in line with the main purpose of each writer. Hence the gospel of Matthew, written mainly with the Jew in mind, begins with the genealogy of Christ. This was all-important to the Jewish mind. The Jews in fact took this often to extreme hence Paul has to warn Timothy about the dangers of "endless genealogies which gender strife". But Matthew begins with the genealogy of the Christ as this has to be established first in the Jewish mind. Hence chapter 1, verse 1, seeks to establish the Lord's claim to be both the son of Abraham and the son of David. The genealogy starts with Abraham and takes us through the line of David, via Solomon, right on to Joseph, the husband of Mary. Matthew is establishing the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to the throne of David. Mark mentions nothing at all regarding the Lord's genealogy or the circumstances surrounding His birth. Mark is concerned with the Lord as a servant, hence his gospel starts with the beginning of that service only. "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee". Who would wish to know the genealogy of a servant or the details of the birth of a servant?

Luke however makes much of the appearances of Gabriel first to Zacharias and then to Mary. He is preparing the way for the birth of the child Jesus. Luke therefore, who is going to concentrate in his gospel on the humanity of the Lord Jesus, gives us, as one would expect, the fullest account of the birth of the Lord Jesus. He too gives us a genealogy but leaves it until chapter 3. He begins with the Lord and traces His roots back through David and Abraham to Adam, the first man.

But now, in John's gospel, there is no mention of genealogy or His birth, but not for the same reason as Mark. Mark, as we have said, begins with the introduction to the public life of the servant. John takes us back into eternity, for he is going to write the story of the eternal Son of God.

So, how does John begin? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". John, like us, perhaps finds difficulty in explaining the concept of eternity. Indeed while there are almost 50 references to the adjective eternal, there is only one reference to the word "eternity". We find it in Isaiah 57:15. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity". Here in John 1:1 the definite article is omitted in the expression "in the beginning". It is really, "in beginning". It is undefined and indefinable. It does not suggest that there was a "beginning" when the Word began to be, or God began to be. It simply states that the Word was there in beginning. Verse 3 will tell us that the Word was responsible for creation, hence He preceded it. John 1:1 therefore stands in contrast to Genesis 1:1. John 1:1 precedes Gen 1:1. The "beginning" of Genesis is the beginning of time. The "beginning" of John's gospel is eternity. It is worthy of note that in Gen 1:1, the definite article is included. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. It was a definite event that took place, when things began to be.

But what is meant by the title "the Word", for it is surely a divine title here, just as much as the Christ or the Son of God? In John chapter 1, we have no less than 9 titles given to the Lord Jesus within the space of 51 verses. These are :-

- The Word
- The Life
- The Light
- The Son of God
- The Messiah (the Christ)
- The Prophet
- The Lamb of God
- The King of Israel
- The Son of man

But thinking now only of "The Word", we ask ourselves, "What does this title mean?" We have to step backwards first and ask a more basic question. What is a "word"? Whether spoken or written, a word is the outward expression of an inward thought. I might have ever so many precious thoughts in my head but until I express them either orally or in writing, my thoughts will ever remain secret. So, as far back as our finite minds can take us, the Word was. He ever was, and ever will be, the outward expression of all that God is. We shall see in this chapter the various ways in which the Word has revealed God.

Verse 1 goes on to tell us more about "the Word". "The Word was with God". The preposition in our English Bible is "with", but in the Greek original it is PROS which is generally translated as "towards". The Word was towards God. It tells us of the eternal purpose of the One who is the Word. We get the idea behind PROS when we look at the parable of the Pharisee and the publican as recorded in Luke chapter 18. Verse 11 reads, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself". "With" is again PROS. He was, through his self-righteousness and pride, not praying to God but praying to himself. He was telling himself what a fine chap he was. He was self-centred – all his thoughts were towards himself. Now let us take this thought back to John 1:1. The Word was "towards" God – He was unselfish, and all His thoughts and actions and desires had the purpose of God in mind. The desire of the Word was to represent and express God in every thing. But the Word was no angel or archangel – the Word was God.

The verse tells us much about the Person of Christ. His Person and His work have often been called into question by men. Let us take a little time to consider 3 aspects regarding the Lord Jesus.

1. His eternal being
2. His deity
3. His eternal Sonship

Many would deny His deity, including many of the modern day cults. Others would deny that He was the eternal Son, admitting only that He was the eternal Word who became the Son only at His birth. But what is the truth regarding these matters

1. His eternal being

Verse 3 of this chapter tells us the "all things were made by Him". He therefore existed before creation came into existence. Colossians 1:17 tells us that "He is before all things, and by Him all things consist". In John chapter 17:5, the Lord speaks to the Father about "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was". In the same chapter, verse 24, the Lord says, "Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world". The Lord therefore experienced eternal glory and eternal love before the world was.

2. His deity

In Matthew chapter 1:23, we read concerning the child that is to be born, Thou shalt call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us". Matthew is here quoting the words of Isaiah in Ch :14 regarding the virgin who would conceive and

bear a child.

In Hebrews 1:8, the writer quotes the words of God to His Son, "Thy throne o God is for ever and ever" These words were first found in Psalm 45, verses 6 and 7.

Philippians chapter 2:6 also says about the Lord, "Who being in the form of God".

His words and His works in the gospels prove that He has all the attributes of deity. In chapter 1, He says about Nathaniel, "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile". This leads Nathaniel to exclaim. "Whence knowest thou me?". The Lord continues, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". The Lord is therefore not only omniscient ie all-knowing, He is omnipresent.

He is also omnipotent. Romans chapter 1 says that He is "declared Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead". The word for dead here is plural, showing that it is not His own resurrection that is in view but those of Jairus' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and Lazarus.

### 3. His eternal Sonship

Did He become Son only at His birth, or has He always been the Son? We can quote various scriptures.

John 3:17. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved".

I John 4:14. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world".

In the above verses God sent His Son, and the Father sent the Son. The Father did not send Him to become the Son - the Father sent the One who was already the Son to be the saviour of the world.

In John 16:28, the Lord says, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world". If we have an eternal Son, we must also have an eternal Father – one relationship depends on the other. The Son came from the Father, and the Father sent the Son.

Then in Isaiah 9:6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given". Notice the order. The child is born – that is His incarnation. But the Son is not born, the Son is given. The child who was born is the Son who is given to us by God.

Some might see a difficulty in the expression, "Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten Thee". This phrase is found in Hebrews chapter 1 and also in chapter 5. It is also quoted by Paul in his address at Antioch in Pisidia, as recorded for us in Acts chapter 13. The words were first used by David in Psalm 2. The expression has to do with the birth of the Lord Jesus. God is speaking to the One who is His Son, but in His incarnation, God owned Him as a Son upon earth. If the verse had said, "This day have I begotten Thee: Thou art my Son", then indeed we would have said that He only became Son at His birth. As suggested in Isaiah 9 above, however, He was Son before He was a child.

There are also those verses which speak of Him as the "only begotten Son". All 4 occurrences of this phrase are found in the writings of John – four times in the gospel and once in his first epistle. This phrase marks out the Lord Jesus as being God's only Son – He had no other Son.

Note also the order of the titles used in Hebrews 1. God has spoken "in Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds". He was Son, then heir, then creator of all things.

A brief note in passing regarding verse 2. "The same was in the beginning with God". The words "the same" are in fact just one word, "This". It is used for the sake of emphasis. An interesting point in JND's translation is that he includes the definite

article in verse 2 ie "in the beginning". Could verse 2 perhaps refer to the beginning of Gen 1:1 ? Certainly, verse 3 goes on immediately to speak of the things that are made, but beyond this we cannot speculate.

Now in verse 3 of John chapter 1, we read of the Son's work in creation. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made". Genesis 1:1 says that it is God who created the heavens and the earth. There is no contradiction, however, for in Gen 1:1, God is Elohim, the three in one God and the Word was part of the triune deity acting together as one. This is the first way in this chapter that the word has revealed God. Romans chapter 1 tells us that "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse". Creation is the most basic witness that God brings before mankind. The Word has revealed God in the things that are made. There are no exceptions to this – "Apart from Him, there was nothing made that was made".

Verse 4 goes further. "In Him was life and the life was the light of men". The Word is the source not only of inanimate objects such as sun, moon, and stars, but He is also the source of all life. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men".

Men today have believed the two greatest lies ever told. One is the theory of the "Big Bang" – the other is the theory of evolution. The big bang theory suggests that the universe was once a huge mass of substance which blew itself apart and that this explosion formed the universe which we see all around us. But this raises a number of questions. One of the fundamental laws of science is that matter cannot be created or destroyed – in other words, you cannot make something out of nothing. We either believe in the "eternal lump", or we believe in the eternal God. What then is the most likely source of the universe – matter that ever was, or a God who brought it into being.

The other thing that would counter the idea of a "big bang" is the perfect order that we see around us, not only on earth, but as we look up into the stars. The whole system behaves in perfect order. Yet scientists would have us believe that this perfect order has come about through chaos. We know only too well in our generation of the chaos that explosions bring to us. How could the biggest explosion of all bring about such order. Our days, months, seasons, and years all depend upon the consistent movement of the planets around the sun. Comets revolve with perfect timekeeping in our solar system, so much so that we can predict the day, month, and year when they will re-appear in our skies. And why is this so? God is not the author of confusion but of perfect order.

Verse 5 of John 1 speaks of the Word being the source of all life. Again the scientist would have us believe that life came into being purely by chance. A single cell came into being by some sheer chance, and this cell grew and multiplied and so on and so on. Despite all the achievements that men have made in the past two centuries, they have never managed to produce a living cell out of nothing. Yet we are constantly being told about our origins in evolution – that this single cell somehow changed so often that it produced "by chance" the countless millions of species of insects, animals, fish, and birds that we see in our world today. Evolution remains what it has always been – a theory still waiting to be proved.

So when the Lord came into this world, He came also as the Light. The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not lay hold of it. The word "comprehend" here is KATALAMBANO. It is used in Eph 3:18. "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height etc". It has the sense of to grasp or to apprehend.

Verses 6 to 9 give us a brief introduction to John the Baptist. He was not the Light. He

was a burning and a shining lamp. He came to bear witness to the One who is the Light. It is strange the way in which John in his first epistle sums up the life of the Lord Jesus. One might have thought that in a small book of 105 verses in which John mentions love 46 times that John's summary would be "God is love". John in fact does say this but much later in chapter 4. But in chapter 1 he writes, "This then is the message that we have heard of him and declare unto you that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all". This is John's summary of all that he learned during those three and a half years with the Lord – God is Light. If the Word is a divine title of the Lord Jesus then so also is the Light. It is the Light of divine testimony. In Genesis chapter 1, we read of created light. God said, "let there be Light, and Light was". In John chapter 1, Light is the characteristic of Christ. He is not a created light but rather the source of all light. "That was the true Light that lighteth every man, coming into the world. He sheds a light upon every man who comes into the world. But just as men have rejected the testimony of the Creator and the Light, so too they have rejected the Light.

From verses 10 to 12, we have another summary of the life of the Lord Jesus. Three things are said of Him.

Verse 10. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not". Here was the Creator in the world which His own hands had made, yet the creature did not recognise the Creator. Fish were gathered into the nets at His command, winds and waves obeyed His voice, the fig tree withered under His curse, the untamed colt carried Him into Jerusalem. But mankind, the kosmos, the settled state of humanity, knew Him not.

We narrow the thought down in verse 11 to the people of Israel. Though the world did not know Him, surely Israel, the chosen people of God, would recognise their Messiah. In verse 11, He came to His own things ie the things concerning Israel such as Jerusalem and the Temple and the Law and the priesthood, but His own people received Him not. It was not just ignorance on Israel's part. It was outright rejection.

Right from the beginning, the rulers of the Jews are presented with the claims of the Lord as the King of the Jews. The wise men came to Herod's palace to ask, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Immediately, Herod is able to identify this with the coming of the Messiah and he sends for the chief priests and scribes and asks them where the child should be born. When told of the place, what is Herod's reaction? Does he, as he said to the wise men, go down to Bethlehem and worship the child? Rather, he sends his soldiers to kill all the male children from two years of age and under. The chief priests therefore help Herod in an attempt to destroy the Messiah, even as a young child.

Almost 30 years later, the Lord is amongst His own things and His own people. He is in the synagogue in His home-town of Nazareth. As He reads the words of Isaiah, He says, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears". How do the men of Nazareth react? They took Him to the brow of a hill, and would have thrown Him over to His death.

As the Lord began His public ministry, there arose great speculation amongst the people as to whether He was the Messiah. But the rulers of the Jews, knowing this put out a commandment "that if any did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22). Thus they knew of the Lord Jesus, but they rejected Him.

So is all then now lost if the world did not know Him and Israel has rejected Him? Verse 12 however brings us an even narrower sphere than before. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name". Now it comes down to the level of the individual, for we are

introduced to the children of God. John in his writings always writes about the children of God, not about the sons of God. The word "children" suggests relationship, being part of a family. So too does the word son, but this suggests not just relationship but also maturity and responsibility.

To those who received Him, He gave the power to become the children of God. We sometimes hear this verse quoted as the right to become the children and at other times as the might to become the children. Which is correct? Is it the right or the might? Both ideas are correct. We have both the right and the might. We have the might, the power, because we have been given the right ie the authority due to the place that has been given us. The right gives us the might. Paul on his journey to Damascus had letters in his hand to arrest those who were of "that way". The letters were the right, and they also gave him the might. In John chapter 2, men questioned the Lord's right to cleanse the temple. He had the might and the right because He was the Son of God in His Father's house.

These children in verse 13 were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. It was not by descent ie by blood, for it was no longer restricted to the Jews. The will of the flesh, nor the will of man cannot wish it to be so. These children are born of God.

Now in verse 14 we come again to the thought of "the Word". Now, it is not the Word in eternity, but the Word in time and on earth. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us". Elsewhere we read that He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He resembled other men only in His outward appearance. He looked like men in their sinful flesh, but of course He did not have sinful flesh. The Word came and dwelt among us. The word for "dwelt" here is often translated as "tabernacled" or "pitched his tent" amongst us. He journeyed through life as a homeless stranger. As the Son of man, He had nowhere to lay down His head. It was only upon the Cross that we hear Him say "Finished", and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. The word used for "bowed" in John 19 is the same word as that used for "lay down" in the expression "not where to lay down His head". He at last found a resting place but only when His work was finished at Calvary. The Lord is no longer on earth for He is the ascended One, but is it possible that He might yet find a dwelling place on earth, apart from Calvary? The answer is to be found in Ephesians chapter three. There Paul prays for the saints that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". The word now for to dwell is not based upon the word for a tent but the word for a house. It is a permanent dwelling place on earth, and we can prepare it for the Lord. But it is not a given for every saint for Paul is praying that it might be so. So can we go about making this home available to Him. In John 14 the Lord said, "If a man love Me, He will keep my words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him". "Abode" is the same word as "mansion" in verse 2. The Father and the Son, who have their mansions above, desire to make their mansion with us in this world, and we can do it by keeping His words.

John now joins with his fellow disciples in describing what he saw when the Word became flesh. "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". Some have linked this to the Lord's glory which shone on the Holy mount when He was transfigured before His disciples. His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was bright and glistering. Yet how strange it is that John was the only one of those three disciples on that mountain who later wrote a gospel, yet he alone of the four gospel writers does not mention the occasion. It is all in the wisdom of God. That mountain scene was a passing and temporary glimpse of a glory yet to be seen. It will shine forth in all its fullness when the Lord reigns for a thousand years in His kingdom. But John is concerned not with a fleeting glimpse of glory but rather what he and others saw every day that they were with him for three and a half years.

It was the glory of the only begotten Son, doing the Father's will. Every word spoken was a word which the Father gave Him to speak. Every deed done was a work which He saw the Father doing. It was the glory of an only begotten of the Father. In this expression, "of" is the Greek preposition PARA which means "beside", but also has the twofold sense of "beside and proceeding from". He is the only begotten Son who proceeds from beside the Father.

Verse 14 ends with "full of grace and truth". It was not grace at the expense of truth. We often hear of the "gracious" brother who will fall for anything and stand for nothing. Equally we hear of men who are not just contending for the faith but who are contentious for the faith. They exhibit little grace in their hearts towards others.

Grace as we know from our gospel preaching is "the unmerited favour of God" towards men. The Lord in His lifetime was therefore full of the unmerited favour of God towards men. We know of course that He spoke gracious words (Luke 4), and one might say that all His works were works of grace, given man's hatred in general towards Him. But just as in the epistles, grace and law were seen to be at odds with each other, so in the Lord's lifetime we often see works which went beyond the limitations of the Law and were works of purest grace.

We see this for example in John chapter 8. The Jews bring a woman to the Lord and say of her that she had been caught in the act of adultery. What did the Law have to say on this matter. "Moses commanded us that such should be stoned". In this they were correct for Leviticus 20 does say, "The adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death". But here in John 8, only the woman is brought. Where was the man, for he was equally guilty. Immediately we are suspicious of the Jews' motive in all this. Was it not so much the Law that was on trial here, but the Lord Himself. Either way, they thought they had Him. Had He said, "Stone her", they would have said, "Where then is this grace that you speak about ". And had He said, "Release her", they would have accused Him of not observing the Law. The Lord does not take up the issue of where was the man, but simply states, "Let him that is without sin first cast a stone at her". And they went away one by one, from the eldest to the least. Only the Lord had the moral right to condemn her or to spare her. He did not condone her sin, but rather tells her, "Go and sin no more". He was full of grace.

On several occasions, the Lord came face to face with those who were lepers. Under the law, they were unclean. The law pronounced, "He is unclean. He shall dwell apart. He shall dwell without the camp". The Law could only sentence him to a life of exclusion. But the Lord had compassion on the leper, and touched him and made him clean.

The woman with an issue of blood was pronounced unclean by the law. But such a woman came and touched the hem of His garment and was healed.

In the days of Joshua, the commandment of God was to drive out the Canaanite from the land. But during the Lord's stay on earth, the woman of Canaan came with the eventual plea, "Lord, help me". And the Lord her cry, and the daughter was healed.

The miracles of the Lord were above the confines of the law, and those whom the law condemned were helped by the Lord, for He was "full of grace".

But was this grace at the expense of truth? Did He set aside truth because of His words and works of grace. It is interesting to note that in the 28 chapters of Matthew, the Lord personally quotes no less than 28 times directly from the Old Testament. On top of this, He mentions other incidents and other characters from the Old Testament such as David, Solomon, Daniel, Jonah, Elijah, and Moses. Then there were other scriptures which the gospel writers quoted, saying of Him that He fulfilled them. Truly He was full of truth. He knew the law, quoted it often, and indeed magnified the Law

in His lifetime. To Pilate, the Lord said, "To this end was I born and for this cause came I unto this world that I should bear witness to the truth". In John 14, the Lord went further and said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". He alone could say, "I am the truth".

We get a brief glimpse of John the Baptist again in verse 15. John now tells men that this One "is preferred before me, for He was before me". Though born after John in terms of time, the Lord had precedence over him, because He had a pre-incarnate existence.

Verse 16 continues, "Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace". We could not possibly receive His fullness in totality, hence the preposition "of" in this verse is EK, meaning "out of". "Out of His fullness have all we received". We have all received of His fullness – all without exception- but none of us could contain all of His fullness. Of Him only could we read, "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." So what is that fullness that we all share in – it is surely grace and truth. Just as these things marked the life of the Lord Jesus, they should also mark us. We should be full of grace and truth. The end of verse 16 tells us that we have received "grace for grace". The idea is that of grace being replenished by grace. It is grace in a never-ending stream, grace that will never be exhausted. We can see a faint picture of this in the experience of the widow of Zarephath. While Elijah was with her, the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil were never exhausted. They were renewed day by day. It is but a faint picture as we say. The widow's vessels were never empty but the Lord's supply of grace is always full.

In what has become known as "the Lord's prayer" in Matthew 6, The Lord tells them to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread". "This day" and "daily" would at first seem to be a redundant repetition, until we learn that the word "daily" really means "from above". It reminds us of the manna that came from heaven for forty years of Israel's stay in the wilderness. The daily provision never ceased. So it is with Christ. "Out of His fullness have all we received, and grace replenished by grace".

If in Ephesians chapter 1, we have the forgiveness of sins, "according to the riches of His grace", then in a future day, we will enjoy "the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness towards us by Christ Jesus".

Verse 17 contrasts Moses with the Lord, the law with grace. The law was given by Moses, who then passed it on to the people. "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Galatians 3:19). Moses was therefore a mediator of the Law. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. He was not a mediator who simply passed on grace and truth. He was the personification of these qualities – they were seen perfectly expressed in His life. Grace was seen in Him – it was given expression by His words and His deeds. So also was truth. Truth came by Him. He not only upheld the truth of the law, He alone was able to add to it. Thus the law said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", but the Lord gave a new commandment to love one another "as I have loved you". Mr Darby has pointed out in his New Translation that the verb "came" in the expression "grace and truth came by Him" is in the singular. Grace and truth in Christ are not seen as two distinct things but only as one. The two virtues acted together in Him as though they were but one. We see this kind of thing in Gen 1:1. God (Elohim) created (singular) the heavens and the earth. Though God is plural, they all acted together as but One Person. Hence in John chapter 1 as well as Genesis chapter 1, we might say that the Spirit of God overturns the normal rules of grammar in order to emphasise His point.

The Lord came into the world not only to reveal grace and truth but also to reveal God. This is stated in verse 18. "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". Because He



was the only begotten Son in the Father's bosom, the Lord was in a unique position. No one else but He could fully understand the thoughts, the feelings, the desires of the Father. Notice the verse says "which is in the bosom of the Father. It is a place which He never left, whether before or after His incarnation. With such a place of nearness, He came to make the Father known. Thus when men heard Him speak, they were hearing the words which the Father gave Him to speak. When men saw His works, they were seeing the works which the Father gave Him to do. They were seeing the Father being portrayed by His Son.

But does this verse mean, as some have suggested, that we will never see God at all, not even in heaven, but that God will only be seen in the person of His Son? We might perhaps digress slightly by looking again at our phrase, "No man hath seen God at any time", and ask ourselves the question, "Does this mean that we shall never see God? Some would quote, "We shall never see God in essence, but only in the Person of His Son. John 1:18 would of course be cited as proof of this statement.

"No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". This may indeed suggest at first sight that we shall never see God, but surely there is a qualifying statement in the verse – "at any time". No man in the flesh could ever hope to see God and live. But what if we were no longer in the flesh – beyond the limitation of time. Let us look at various facts on both sides of the argument.

### **1.1 God is spirit (John chapter 4)**

Does this mean therefore that God is invisible. Well, in Heb 1, we read there of angels who are ministering spirits, and the Bible is full of angelic appearances when they were seen by men.

### **1.2 The invisible God (Colossians ch 1)**

Col 1 says that Christ is the "image of the invisible God". So is this not conclusive ? God is invisible. Well we look at the Greek word for invisible and discover that it is simply the opposite of the word "seen" ie the unseen God. Christ is the image, not of a God who cannot be seen, but of a God who is unseen.

### **1.3 The form of God**

Does God have a body that we can see ? In Matt 18, we learn of the angels that they do always behold the face of the Father who is in heaven ". In Rev 5, John sees a book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne. Moses saw His back in the cleft of the rock. So, God has a body just like us, and this shouldn't surprise us for we are made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1)

### **1.4 Sightings of God**

There are a number of times when man were able to look upon God though it was not in the flesh but in visions ie not in the realm of time.

In Rev 4 and 5, John looks and sees Him who sat upon the throne and speaks of Him in both chapters. In Daniel Ch 7, the prophet sees the Ancient of Days sitting upon His throne as the Lord, the Son of Man, approaches Him. Job, too, no less than 3 times over speaks of his great hope that one day he would see God – "yet in my flesh shall I see God". "Whom I shall see for myself....mine eyes shall behold Him and not another".

## 1.5 Our nearness to God

In Luke Ch 1, Gabriel says of himself "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God". Gabriel is one of the very few angels named in the Bible. He appears on 3 special occasions. To announce to Daniel the great prophecy of the 70 weeks, to announce to Zacharias the birth of John the Baptist, then to announce to Mary the birth of the Lord Jesus. Gabriel uses a Greek word ENOPION to describe his position - in the presence of God.

But in Eph 1:4, Paul says of us Christians that we are before Him in love. Before is KATENOPION which means "hard up against" or "in His immediate presence." We are nearer to God today than even the highest angels in heaven. What we are positionally today, we shall be in reality in a day to come. This particular Greek preposition is used on only three occasions in the New Testament. Apart from Ephesians 1, it is found only in Colossians chapter 1 and in Jude. In Colossians we read that God is going to present us "holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight". "In his sight" uses katenopion. Then in Jude 24, we read of "in the presence of His glory". Thus the Christian today enjoys a unique position before God.

It is interesting that the expression "No man hath seen God at any time" is repeated by John in I John 4. The lesson there surely is that although the Lord has now gone back to heaven, God can still be seen on earth, not in His Son, but in us. God now is dwelling in us, and is able to express Himself now in His saints.

From verses 19 to 34, we have the testimony of John the Baptist towards the Lord Jesus. John himself was stirring up great expectations. People were beginning to think that John himself could be the Messiah. In verse 19 then, the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who art thou?" John answers the unasked question that was surely in their minds, and straight away he says, "I am not the Christ". He answers also in the negative to questions about Elias or that prophet ie the prophet foretold by Moses in Deut 18:18. All that John will say about himself is found in verse 23. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord". You can't see a voice, you can only hear it, and John had no ambition to be seen. John is quoting the words of Isaiah in chapter 40, verse 3. John was unique in that he himself was the subject of prophecy. The prophet Malachi also writes of John in chapter 3:2. "Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me". Though commended by the Lord as the greatest born among women, and the greatest of all the prophets, John is happy to take the humble place. No less than three times in this chapter, John says of the Lord, He is preferred before me, for He is before me".

Strangely though, John twice confesses in this section, "And I knew Him not". He knew that the Messiah was coming and that, very soon. But it seemed that he did not know that Jesus of Nazareth was to be that Messiah. While the Lord remained in Nazareth in Galilee for those first thirty years, we read of John that he was in the wilderness till the day of his appearing unto Israel. There was no physical contact between them. There was of course a distant relationship between John and the Lord, for their mothers were cousins. But the ties between these two men owed nothing to place or family ties. Hence it proves that natural ties are not enough for divine enlightenment. We need rather divine revelation and that is exactly what John received. John receives a sign, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding... the same is He". This was fulfilled when John baptised the Lord Jesus.

The symbol of the dove is most significant,. The dove is first mentioned in connection with the ark. The dove returned to the ark after its first venture for it found no place, not even for the sole of its foot to rest upon. It demonstrates that God found no pleasure even in a world that had been judged because of its sin. But in Luke's gospel in particular, the Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove and rested upon Him.

All four gospel writers record the baptism of the Lord Jesus, although John does not record the actual event itself but the Baptist's later account of it. In John 1, there is a glaring omission. While the Baptist mentions the dove, he does not mention the voice. Surely a strange omission in the gospel of the Son. It is all the more remarkable insofar as John the apostle would appear to have been one of the two disciples who left John to follow Jesus. Was this voice not an opportunity for God to testify to the deity of His Son? But God is not bound by our rules, and there are plenty of other occasions in the chapter for this. Thus three times over John says "He that cometh after me is preferred before me", and on two of these three occasions, the Baptist adds, "For He was before me". John goes even further in verse 34 when he says, "I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God". But it is to the Lord Himself that we turn in this chapter to see the proofs of His deity. In His dealings with Nathaniel, we shall see proofs of His omniscience and His omnipresence – two of the chief attributes of deity. This incident caused Nathaniel to exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God".

It may seem strange to us that John sometimes would bring before us the glory of the Lord, not from what He includes, but from what he omits. Hence in verse 14, he writes, "We beheld His glory, the glory of an only begotten of a Father." This is not the glory of the mount of transfiguration which again John omits with the Father's voice from heaven, but rather the glory which the disciples witnessed every day they were with Him. Hence in Gethsemane, there is no mention of the prayers, the sweat, the falling to the ground. At Calvary, there is no mention of Simon the Cyrenian, or the two thieves, of the mocking, of the darkness. All these things would add to the shame of the cross, but John wants only to write of His glory, even at the cross.

John bare record that "this is the Son of God". Armed with this knowledge, John is now able to bear testimony to this Jesus of Nazareth. The first witness is recorded in verse 29. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world". This is the One that Abraham spoke of in Genesis 22:8. "God shall prepare Himself a lamb". Isaiah also wrote, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter". John's first testimony was to the work of the Lamb, which taketh away the sin of the world. This removal of sin will be fulfilled only after the end of the millennial kingdom, for even after a thousand years of righteous rule by the Lord Jesus, the devil will be able to raise up a rebellious army to fight against the Lord. But in eternity, righteousness will dwell and every last stain of sin will be removed.

But verse 35 describes a second appearance of the Lord. "And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, behold the Lamb of God". There is no reference now to the work of the Lamb. John is simply pointing to the Person. We get a similar idea in I Samuel 18:1. The women of Israel made much of David's work in slaying Goliath. They sang as they danced, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands". But with regards to Jonathan, we read, "When David had made an end of speaking, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David". Jonathan was therefore impressed by the person, and not just his deeds.

This has an immediate effect upon two of John's disciples – "They followed Jesus". They ask Him, "Where dwellest Thou?", to which He replies, "Come and see". Where was His dwelling place for He surely was the homeless stranger with nowhere to lay down His head. But verse 18 has told us that He dwells in the bosom of the Father, and it is to the Father's bosom that He brings these two disciples. Certainly the beloved John seemed to appreciate this for he describes himself as the disciple who leaned upon Jesus' breast. He leaned upon the bosom of the One who Himself was in the Father's bosom.

There seems to be a definite sequence of events in the call of these disciples. First, they heard John speak of the work of the Christ, then only of His Person, causing them to leave John and follow Jesus to spend some time with Him. But there is a

further call to discipleship in Mark chapter 1. "Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the kingdom of God". In verse 17, the Lord calls Simon and Andrew. "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of me". The sequence then was His work, His Person, His service.

One of these two disciples who left John was Andrew. He found his own brother Simon and said, "We have found the Messiah, which is, the Christ". The only reference in the OT to the Messiah is in Daniel, so this is the One of whom Daniel the prophet wrote.

Andrew found Simon and brought him to the Lord. The Lord changes Simon's name to Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone. I believe the idea behind the name of Simon is that of "hot-headed, or volatile". That was often to be proved to the case in the behaviour of Simon. But Cephas is the Aramaic word for a stone while Petros was the Greek word for a rock. The unstable Simon was to become a rock of stability. It is a common occurrence in the Bible that a change of name signalled a new beginning for a man. Hence Jacob the supplanter became Israel the prince with God. Abram, the exalted Father, became Abraham, the father of a multitude. Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle. It is interesting that whereas we read of Barnabus and Saul, after Saul becomes Paul, we always read of Paul and Barnabus. The name change also brought about a change of status as regards these two men.

But the Lord Himself found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me". Philip in turn found Nathaniel and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph".

Before we proceed further, we should perhaps note the references in this gospel to Andrew and Philip acting together. In chapter 6, there is a problem. The Lord and His disciples are in a wilderness with 5,000 men besides women and children. The Lord asks Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". But why did the Lord pick out Philip to put this question to? The next verse continues, "But this He said to prove him, for He Himself knew what He was about to do". Was the Lord not testing Philip as to the reality of what Philip said about Him in chapter 1. There Philip has said, "This is He of whom Moses has spoken". It is as though the Lord is now saying to Philip, You made great claims about Me then, Philip. So here is a problem. How are we going to resolve it?" But Philip now has forgotten his previous words, and looking only at the size of the multitude, he replies, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient that each one may eat a little". In other words, Philip is saying, "The problem is too big for us. We cannot cope". But before we criticise Philip too much, are we not guilty often of the same? We make great statements about the Lord, but when a problem arises, we say, "The problem is too big for us"

But in chapter 6, we also read of Andrew again. Andrew views the problem differently. He tells the Lord, "There is a lad here with five barley loaves and two small fishes. But what are they amongst so many". He is saying in fact, "Our resources are too small". Yet Andrew had said to his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah, which is to say, the Christ". Both men are put to the test, and both fail.

Andrew and Philip are again mentioned together in John chapter 12. They are faced now with an even greater opportunity. There is an even larger multitude to be reached. It is not now 5,000 men in a wilderness, a company one presumes almost exclusively of Jews, but now Philip is approached by certain Greeks who say, "Sir, we would see Jesus". These were not simply Greek speaking Jews ( Hellenistes) but Greeks (Hellenes). They were Gentiles, no doubt Proselytes who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. They are representative of the Gentiles who would come and find salvation in Christ. So how is Philip going to respond now? He turns to his fellow disciple Andrew and they both come and tell Jesus. They have learned the lesson of chapter 6. If we have a problem, take it to the Lord.

John 12 is in fact a beautiful dispensational lesson. There are three companies represented in the chapter. We begin with the house in Bethany, and here we can see a picture of what the church of God is today. Martha represents service, Lazarus represents communion, and Mary represents worship. These are the three key elements of assembly life today. We move on in the chapter from Bethany to Jerusalem and the triumphal procession of the Lord and His disciples into the city. Is not this just a picture of a future day when Israel will receive her Messiah again. Then last of all we have these Greeks who are seeking Jesus. They are a picture of the Gentile nations who will enter into millennial blessings along with Israel. Jew, Gentile, Church of God are all seen here. But before there can be any fruit, the corn of wheat must first fall into the ground and die.

This is a little aside in verse 44. "Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter". At least 3 of the disciples came from this little town on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Considering that Peter and Andrew were partners with James and John and that all were present when the Lord called them, it would appear in fact that no less than five of the twelve came from this town. These men are an example of those little remnants we find in scripture, like Malachi chapter 3, and Luke chapters 1 and 2.

Returning to John 1:45, Philip finds Nathaniel and says to him, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph". Nathaniel is not mentioned again until John 21 when he is one of the seven disciples who follow Peter when he says, "I go a fishing". He is generally assumed to be the same as Bartholomew mentioned in the lists of the twelve.

The reply of Nathaniel to Philip is well known. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth, it would seem, was a place of poor reputation. Who could ever have imagined that the Messiah would come from such a place? It proves indeed that God is able to bring a root out of a dry ground. The Lord took nothing from Nazareth, yet neither would He have gained anything from Jerusalem the great city of the Jews. Philip, however, gives his friend some sound advice – "Come and see". In verse 47, as Nathaniel comes towards Him, the Lord says, "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile". Far from being embarrassed or flattered by these words, Nathaniel replies, "Whence knowest Thou me?" Here was a true Israel, a prince with God, in whom there was no Jacob, the supplanter. What a lovely introduction to this man. This is the first illustration in this gospel of one of the main attributes of deity. We say of God that He is omniscient ie all-knowing, omnipresent ie everywhere present, and omnipotent ie all powerful. He has displayed His omniscience, now He shows His omnipresence. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee". The fig tree itself would speak of Israel nationally.

Nathaniel responds to these two statements of the Lord with one of the greatest confessions of Christ in the Bible. "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel". These are two of the Lord's titles which were disputed by the Jews at Calvary. They denied that He was Son of God or King of Israel. Perhaps Nathaniel here is a picture of re-gathered Israel, which in a future day will accept the Lord for who He is. Certainly the Lord points forward to that day when He will return to earth in great glory as the Son of man. "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". This is a further development of that vision given to Jacob in Gen 28:12. Then Jacob saw a ladder set up on the earth, whose top reached up to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. A ladder is obviously a means of communication, and the angels are the messengers of God. John chapter 1 takes us a step beyond Gen 28, for now the angels of God ascend and descend upon the Son of man. The Lord Himself is the centre of this future kingdom and the angels of God shall move between heaven and earth to do His bidding.

