

# STUDY 1: JOHN 1:1-4 - WHO IS JESUS

The apostle John spends his first eighteen verses introducing Jesus Christ, and preparing us for the highly disturbing and confrontational core truth about Jesus Christ that he is about to put before us, a truth that challenges us at the very roots of our belief system, at the very centre of our concept of God.

Read John 1:1-18 and identify 15 facts about Jesus Christ	
Verse	What it teaches about Jesus Christ
1	
1	
1	
3	
4	
4 & 9	
14	
14	
14	
14	
15	
17	
18	
18	
18	

What do all of these facts about Jesus mean?

## A. JESUS, THE ETERNAL GOD

1:1 'In the beginning ...'

By this simple introductory phrase John throws us right into the debate which permeates his Gospel: Did Jesus Christ have the right to make the claims he made, or did he not? Is he God or is he not?

‘In the beginning ...’ immediately brings to the reader’s mind the ‘in the beginning’ of Genesis 1:1, where God is assumed to exist in unique, independent, absolute, unconditional, eternal self-existence. Here in John 1:1 John repeats this divine ‘in the beginning’, affirming the eternity and the deity of Jesus Christ. He is the One who was there ‘in the beginning’ – before everything else. There was never a time when he did not exist. Later in his Gospel John will make powerful reference to this eternity of Christ.

### 1:1 ‘was the Word’

The term ‘the Word’ – *ho logos* – was a term rich with meaning:

- In Greek thought the *Logos* was perceived to be the always-existent, rational, stabilizing principle of the universe; creative energy; the ultimate reality; the eternal Reason; the ‘supreme principle of the universe’; **‘the force that originated and permeated and directed all things.’** (Leon Morris: *The Gospel According to John*, p116)
- In Jewish thought, it relates to the ‘and God *said*’ of Genesis 1:1; to the ‘by the *word* of the Lord were the heavens made’ of Psalm 33:6. Similarly Isaiah 2:3 and 55:11, Psalm 29, Proverbs 8:22ff; and Micah 4:2. God’s *Word* is divine, yet separate from him.
- In Jewish Targums there is such a sense of awe of God that they avoided using his name, and often substituted ‘the Word’ for his name.
- Philo sometimes spoke of the *Logos* as a ‘second God’, and sometimes as the one God in action. For him the *Logos* concept was a bridge between the transcendent God and this material universe.
- William Temple writes that the *Logos*, ‘alike for Jew and Gentile represents the ruling fact of the universe, and represents that fact as the self-expression of God. The Jew will remember that ‘by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made’; the Greek will think of the rational principle of which all natural laws are particular expressions.

- **John takes hold of the Logos concept and fills it with ultimate meaning.** By it he introduces Jesus as nothing less than God, as we shall see in the rest of the verse. Here he sets the scene for all that he is about to record in his Gospel about the true identity of Jesus. In particular John here introduces a concept that dominates his entire Gospel: that God is a self-revealing God, a God who speaks, a God who makes himself known to us. He is not a distant, remote God, but a God who comes and speaks to us. He is 'the Word'. As John is about to teach us, Jesus Christ, the Word, reveals to God to us. When we see him, we see God. When we know him, we know God. Jesus Christ is God saying 'Here I am. This is who I am. Believe in me.'

In focusing on the Logos concept we must also be careful not to overlook the word 'was' which speaks of continuity of existence. The Word 'was' – the Word was in a state of continual existence, the Word existed continually, in the beginning.

### **1.1 'and the Word was with God'**

Literally, this phrase is 'the Word was *towards* God'; the thought is repeated in verse 2. The expression indicates 'accompaniment and relationship' – 'the whole existence of the Word was oriented towards the Father' [Morris, p76].

This 'with' or 'towards' protects us from three errors.

Firstly, from seeing Jesus, the Word, merely as an expression, emanation or manifestation of God, in any Unitarian sense. Jesus, the Word, existed in intimate relationship *with* God, distinct in himself, yet in such a unity that, as we learn later in this Gospel, what the Father says the Son says, what the Father does the Son does.

Secondly, this 'was with God' prohibits us from seeing no distinction between the Father and Son. This 'with' infers a relationship, an interface, an interaction, between two distinct persons. There *is* a distinction. The Son, the Logos, is distinct from the Father.

Thirdly, though more subtly, this 'with God' [this 'towards' God] also prevents us from setting up any thought of antagonism or difference of purpose between the Father and the Son. In all that the Father intends and wills the Son is 'with' him, in the sense that he is not against him or acting contrary to him or apart from him. **They are together in will, in purpose, in choice of action.**

### 1:1 'and the Word was God'

We need to notice here that John does not say 'and the Word was divine' or 'the Word was like God'. He makes the bold statement '**the Word was God**'. He here leaves no room for anyone to see Jesus Christ as less than God in some way, or to some degree. Having first prevented us from merging the Word and God by the phrase 'the Word was with God' he here prevents us from seeing the Word as a lesser being. The Word was God. The Word was, and is, nothing less than God.

It is here that the Arian controversy of the early church and some contemporary pseudo-Christian cults deviate from the biblical perspective. On the basis of a flawed and inconsistent interpretation of the Greek text this phrase is translated 'the Word was a god', reducing Christ to a being less than and different from God. Any such erroneous redefinition here, right at the beginning of John's Gospel, has the potential to affect our understanding of the claims of Christ made consistently throughout this Gospel.

### 1:2 'He was with God in the beginning'

Again John refers to the eternal existence of the Word, and his close and eternal association and relationship with God, indicating at the one time an essential distinction and a perfect unity. Jesus Christ, the Word, is eternal. He was there 'in the beginning'; his existence did not commence at some point after the beginning. He is not a being that God created, not someone who has a beginning. Rather he was already there, already in a state of eternal existence, 'with God', 'in the beginning'.

It is good for us to remember here that the Old Testament scriptures attribute eternity to God. The very fact that John identifies the Logos as 'in the beginning' indicates that John is affirming the true and complete deity of the Logos, for it is God, and only God, who exists in and from the beginning. It is only God who is eternal.

What do these references teach us about the eternity of God?	
Genesis 21:33	
Deuteronomy 33:27	
Isaiah 40:28	
Jeremiah 10:10	

Psalm 90:2	
Psalm 93:2	
Habakkuk 1:12	
Psalm 100:5	
Psalm 103:17	
Psalm 119:142,144	
Isaiah 54:8	
Jeremiah 31:3	
Isaiah 9:6	
Micah 5:2	
[note: these verses speak of Christ]	
Isaiah 57:15	
Daniel 4:3,34	
Daniel 7:13-14,27	

## B. JESUS, THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

### 1:3 'Through him all things were made'

This verse identifies the Logos, the Word, as the agent of creation, and in doing so again identifies the Word as God. John expresses this truth both positively and negatively:

Positively: that God the Father created all things through the Word – that every individual thing that exists exists as a result of the creative agency of the Word.

Negatively: that there is nothing in existence that owes its existence to any other agency than the Word; there is nothing that exists that exists independently, nothing that came into being apart from the creative action of the Word.

To the mind steeped in the Old Testament John's statement here is just as confrontational and disturbing as his previous statements affirming the eternal existence of the Word. The Old Testament teaches clearly that *God* is the creator

of all things, yet here is John stating boldly, and in such a way that he cannot be misunderstood, that the Word, whom he will soon identify as Jesus Christ, gave existence to everything single thing that exists.

**Who is identified as of the Creator of all things in these scriptures? [List all the names and titles used.]**

Genesis 1:1,2	
Genesis 2:3,4	
Psalms 89:8-13	
Psalms 104	
Psalms 148:5,6	
Isaiah 40:25-28	
Isaiah 42:5	
Isaiah 45:11,12,18	

And here we must stop and ask: is John alone in this perception that the Word, Jesus Christ, is the Creator of all things, upon whom all things depend for their existence? And we must answer 'No'. John is not alone in this perception of Jesus Christ.

**How do these New Testament scriptures affirm that Jesus Christ is the Creator?**

1Corinthians 8:6	
Colossians 1:16-17	
Hebrews 1:2,3	

### 1:4 In him was life

Throughout his Gospel John presents Jesus Christ as the one in whom spiritual, eternal life is to be found. While the spiritual, eternal dimension of life is not absent from this verse, John is here writing primarily of physical life. Here we find the ultimate answer to the question **'Where does life come from?'** – it comes from Jesus Christ, the Word.

It is not simply that life was created by Jesus Christ, but that life exists *in* him. It is not that here is Jesus Christ and there is something which he created as a living thing which can now exist apart from him. Rather it is this: that here is Jesus Christ, and if he did not exist, neither would, neither *could*, anything else

exist. If he withdrew, if he distanced himself from the creature, all life would cease. Life does not exist apart from him. That I have physical life at this moment is completely dependent on this fact: that life exists in Jesus Christ. The relationship between my existence and Jesus Christ is one of absolute dependence, irrespective of whether I am aware of or acknowledge that dependence. This is that same truth that Paul taught in Athens when he said, in reference to God: 'In him we live and move and have our being' [Acts 17:28 ], and in reference to Christ in his letter to the Colossians 'In him all things hold together' [ 1:17 ].

And in this is a miracle and a manifestation of incredible and unexpected grace: that the Word, Jesus Christ, continues to sustain our physical existence, despite the fact that we, from Genesis 3 onwards, have insisted that we exist and live apart from him, independent of him, as autonomous, self-supporting, self-sustaining, self-determining beings. While we deny this utter dependence, and even while we deny *his* existence, the Word, in his overwhelming and compassionate grace, remains the source of our existence, indeed of all existence.

#### **1:4 '... and that life was the light of men'**

This half of 1:4 leads us to realize that John has more than physical existence in mind. This 'life' that is in the Word, is the 'light of men'. Here we move from the 'all things' of verse 3 specifically to 'men', and we understand that this life that is in the Word, has, in respect to human beings, an additional dimension that John calls 'light'. John will mention this further here in his introduction, and he will mention it repeatedly, in various ways, later in his Gospel. John is preparing us here for truths he plans to emphasize.

And here John anticipates a highly important truth: that **'light' – that is, revelation, knowledge of God, knowledge of absolute, objective, spiritual truth**, – is 'in him', in the Word. We do not get 'light' – real spiritual truth – from any other source; we cannot get 'light' – real spiritual truth – from any other source, because it has one source only: the Word, Jesus Christ. Indeed Christ is the life. Christ is the Light.

<b>Read Psalm 36:9. Compare it with John 1:4 How does this verse confirm the deity of Christ?</b>

<b>Make a list of the truths from John 1:1-4 that are significant for you.</b>

