

The Gospel of John  
Lesson 2 – John 1:1-18  
**In the Beginning**

These opening eighteen verses of the Gospel of John is the foundation on which the rest of the book is constructed. Without this section the book would make little sense. This section is also dense and complex, so we will simply try to examine the main concepts it contains.

**The Beginning:** Each of the Gospels connects Jesus with a particular history/time. Mark begins his Gospel with the work of John the Baptist. Matthew takes Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham, while Luke takes it back to Adam. John begins with creation itself, using the term "Word" or the "logos." While the logos in Greek was a philosophical term, I would argue that in John, it is directing the readers' attention to God speaking creation into being. I say this because the Word is directly associated with God ("The Word was with God and the Word was God") and with creation ("All things came into being through him", "in him was life", and "...the life was the light of all people..."). In other words, the Word, which is God, and which became flesh (in Jesus), was co-creator with God. Thus, this Gospel begins with an affirmation that Jesus and God are intimately linked through their work (creation) and their being (the Word was God). As a note, light and darkness are opposed to each other, but they are not equal in power. Thus John is not dualistic in design, meaning that there are two opposing powers, light and dark. In John, there is only one power and that is the Word who created...darkness merely implies the inability to know the truth.

**John (the Baptist):** At this initial stage, there has not been the direct link between the Word and Jesus. What there is though is a statement about who is not the Word, and that is John (the Baptist). What is interesting here is that John is not referred to as "the Baptist." In part this is because there is no baptism of Jesus story in this Gospel (though we will discover that John still baptizes others). This is so for two reasons. First, the one baptizing can be seen as being greater than the one being baptized. Second, there was a community that believed that John the Baptist was the messiah. So, it is essential that John does not baptize Jesus and that John be a "witness" to Jesus as the Word/light.

**Problem and Purpose:** Next, we are informed as to the problem and the purpose of the Word/light. The problem was that neither the "world" nor "his own" recognized him for who he was. Here, the "world" refers to humanity in general and "his own" refers to the Jewish people. This would explain why Jesus was crucified and not celebrated. The purpose of the Word/light was to make human beings into children of God. We should note here that in this Gospel, one becomes a child of God not through an accident of birth (being born into a Jewish or Christian household), but through believing in the name of and receiving the Word/light which is an act of God (more on this in chapter 3).

**Jesus Christ:** Finally, at the end of this section the writer makes clear that Jesus is the Word made flesh who brings grace upon grace and is the bearer of truth and grace (as opposed to the Moses who was the bringer of the Law). This contrast between Moses and Jesus continues with the note that only the Son (Jesus) has seen God and can make God known, implying that Moses, though a prophet, could not see God, nor make God fully known. Thus, Jesus is greater than the Baptist and Moses because he is the Word, the light, and the Son.

**Questions:**

1. How do you understand the connection between Jesus and God?
2. Why do you think people did/do not recognize Jesus for who he is?
3. What do you think of the contrast between Jesus and Moses?