

The Gospel of John
Lesson 3 – John 1:19-51
First Contact

We now leave the Prologue of John and move into the first narrative section, though as we will observe, all narrative sections of the Gospel of John are carefully theologically crafted. They are all intended to witness to Jesus as the one sent from God to save the world.

Before we discuss the three contacts that make up this section, we need to reflect on the term “the Jews.” We read this term here for the first, but certainly not last time, in the Gospel. This term is used throughout the Gospel and has been seen by many as being a pejorative for all Jews in all times and places. The assumption is that the Gospel shows that all Jews were “bad” while all followers of Jesus were “good.” This is not the case. The term “the Jews” is used in a variety of places to describe a variety of different people. Here it refers to the Temple leadership who sent Temple functionaries, the priests, and Levites to question John. Please remember that the one writing this letter was a Jew, as were all the disciples. Now on to the three contacts.

Contact One: The first contact is with the priests and Levites. These Temple workers question John the Baptist because he is baptizing in a manner that evokes end times images rather than following Jewish traditions. Within Judaism a person baptized (ritually washed themselves...even when going through conversion to Judaism) rather than having someone do the baptizing. Thus, the Temple leaders wanted to know who John thought he was. Was he Elijah or the prophet like Moses, both of whom were rumored to possibly return before the messiah arrived? Or was he the messiah himself? His response is telling in that he only identifies himself by his function; to prepare the way for the one who was coming after him. He also makes it clear that his baptism is only a foreshadowing of the true spiritual baptism that is to come. (The focus is on preparing others to see Jesus)

Contact Two: This second contact focuses on John seeing Jesus and stating plainly that Jesus is the one who is to come, whose way John is preparing. The language John uses, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, has caused much ink to be spilled. Rather than look at all possible options I would link this imagery to Isaiah 53:6-10 where we read of the Suffering Servant who is “*like a lamb who is led to the slaughter*” to be an offering for sin. John then reiterates his relationship with Jesus (Jesus is superior) and his role (helping to reveal Jesus). John can reveal Jesus because he has seen the Spirit come down on Jesus, thus showing that Jesus is the Son of God. (The focus is on proclaiming Jesus’ identity)

Contact Three: The third contact is an extended series of contacts intended to demonstrate the process of becoming a disciple. First, someone, in this case John, points to Jesus and witnesses to his identity (Lamb of God). Those hearing this witness (the two disciples), leave the way they are going and seek to “stay” with Jesus. Those who “stay” with Jesus then invite others (Andrew invites Simon). Those who respond to the invitation get a new identity (Simon becomes Peter). This pattern expands with Jesus doing the inviting of Phillip who then invites Nathanael, both of whom go “stay” with Jesus on the road. Along the way we find out that Jesus is the Messiah, the prophet, the Son of God, and the King of Israel. Jesus then adds one more title, Son of Man, referencing a saving figure in Daniel. The chapter then concludes with Jesus declaring that there are more amazing things to come.

Questions:

1. How have you understood/thought about John’s use of the term “the Jews”?
2. Which of the three contacts is the most meaningful to you?
3. What does it mean to you to believe in/follow Jesus?