

## JOHN

## The Word Became Flesh

**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>a</sup> it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — <sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup>Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and<sup>b</sup> is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

## John the Baptist Denies Being the Messiah

<sup>19</sup>Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders<sup>c</sup> in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup>He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup>They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

<sup>22</sup>Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

<sup>23</sup>John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"<sup>d</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Now the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup>questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

<sup>26</sup>"I baptize with<sup>e</sup> water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. <sup>27</sup>He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

<sup>28</sup>This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

## John Testifies About Jesus

<sup>29</sup>The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was

<sup>a</sup> *Or understood* <sup>b</sup> *18 Some manuscripts but the only Son, who* <sup>c</sup> *19 The Greek term traditionally translated the Jews (hoi Ioudaioi) refers here and elsewhere in John's Gospel to those Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus; also in 5:30, 35, 36; 7:1, 11, 13; 9:22; 18:14, 28, 36; 19:7, 12, 31, 38; 20:10.* <sup>d</sup> *23 Isaiah 40:3* <sup>e</sup> *26 Or in; also in verses 31 and 33 (twice)*

## BAPTISM

In Acts 22, Paul recounts his conversion, which is first told in Acts 9. Both accounts mention his baptism. Paul's baptism is in keeping with the role baptism plays elsewhere in Acts (see note on "Baptism" on Acts 10–11). Paul recounts how he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and was blinded; he was then led into Damascus by his followers. He fasted and waited for instructions for three days. God sent Ananias to him so that he would regain his sight and receive the Holy Spirit (Ac 22:12–16; cf. 9:17–18). Saul's sight was restored, and immediately Ananias baptized him. From then on, Paul began to proclaim and serve Jesus Christ.

Ananias explained baptism to Paul (22:16), and associated it with two things: (1) washing away of sins and (2) calling on the name of the Lord. That is, baptism is connected to conversion. It is an objective event in which a person calls upon the Lord, asking him to wash them clean.

Acts consistently presents a "conversion package" that includes these elements: belief, repentance, baptism, the coming of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness. Throughout the book of Acts, those elements are shown to all happen on the same day, but the order varies occasionally. That's why it's best to describe it as a conversion package rather than a conversion sequence.

During this time, when a person believed in Jesus, they were baptized right away, usually on the same day. This is why the authors of the New Testament letters assume that all believers have been baptized, and they describe baptism in language associated with conversion, just as Ananias did in his explanation to Paul.

It's not that baptism achieves anything of itself. As an expression of faith and repentance by which we call on the name of Jesus, baptism takes on rich significance. It embodies in a concrete, tangible way our conversion to Christ. Just as Paul was set apart for the Lord's purposes from his baptism onward, so are we.

# SCIENCE

## LOCATION OF EDEN

According to Genesis 2:10–14, Eden had flowing from it an unnamed river that branched into four named rivers in three different regions. We can confidently identify two of the rivers (Tigris and Euphrates), and the three regions are identified elsewhere (Assyria with Mesopotamia; Havilah with the Arabian Peninsula [Ge 25:18; 1Sa 15:7]; and Cush (usually) with the region south of Egypt [Ps 68:31; Isa 20:3–5; 43:3,14; Eze 30:4–9; Na 3:9]). The difficulty with locating Eden is that the text's details do not easily map onto modern topography—missing rivers, convergence of rivers, specific locations and waterflow direction.

Assuming Eden is not a mythical or completely mysterious place, there are two main options for its location. Most commentators place Eden somewhere in Mesopotamia, usually leaving the exact location uncertain. This means identifying the region of Cush as different than the place in Africa. Topographical changes due to the flood could explain remaining inconsistencies or problems. Another option, which has an ancient pedigree, is to locate Eden in Canaan, the promised land. This view recognizes that some of the details (like a massive waterflow system) cannot be taken literally, but advocates claim that it best accounts for the evidence in Genesis and later Biblical reflections and symbolism, including the well-known parallels between Eden and Israel's temple (see below). The promised land is often described in Edenic terms (e.g., Ge 13:10; Dt 8:7–10; 11:9–12; Ps 36:8; 46:4; 65:9; Joel 2:3).

Whatever the physical location of Eden, the text is more interested in theology than geography; whether we can locate exact rivers is not the point of this passage. Modern scholars largely agree that the account Eden is infused with temple imagery, with Adam and Eve depicted as priests in sacred space (cf. Nu 3:7–8; Isa 51:3; Eze 28:12–17; 31:1–9; 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2). Eden represents "Paradise lost" in one sense, but it also points to divine purposes for humanity now, such as being in God's presence and caring for his good creation. The Garden of Eden, then, is a beautiful portrait of God's passion to be in an intimate relationship with humanity—a relationship that will come to full expression in the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21–22.

## ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

Most agree that the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2–3 represents truths about all of us—God's original design, sex differentiation, marriage, and the nature of sin and its consequences. There is less agreement on how literal/historical the story is to be understood in its details about how humanity originated. Did God really create a man instantaneously, place him in a garden and then form a woman from his side? Are they then the sole progenitors of every human being who has ever lived? While varying views existed before the rise of modern science, evolutionary theory has certainly complicated the situation.

Some read the text purely mythically or symbolically; they believe that the text teaches broad truths about God, humanity and the world, but it does not intend to describe something that actually happened in the past. Most, however, think the Bible elsewhere does claim that Adam and Eve were real historical people, whose rebellion brought sin into the world (e.g., Adam's appearance in the genealogies in Ge 5:1; 1Chr 1:1; Lk 3:38; Adam's role in Ro 5:12–18; 1Co 15:21–22,45–49). Within this group, there is disagreement on how exactly to read Genesis 2–3 and often what to think about evolution. Those who consider the text as a straightforward historical narrative see Adam and Eve as sole progenitors of the human race, which runs counter to human evolution.

Others within this group affirm a historical Adam, including an original state of innocence followed by rebellion, but take some of the details more symbolically or metaphorically rather than literally (e.g., God forming, breathing, planting and walking). Viewing the text as having a historical core wrapped in figurative garb allows for the idea that Adam and Eve might not be the first and only two original humans, but could be representative of a larger original human population (either as a pair chosen out of the population or as the two themselves representing the whole; note the possible existence of other people outside Adam's family in Genesis 4). This view, then, allows the possibility of accepting at least some aspects of human evolution while taking the Biblical account seriously.

A proper Christian worldview calls for patient engagement with all the data and interpretations. Christians would do well to research the various Christian viewpoints and ongoing discussions. Even when we are convinced of a specific interpretation, it is helpful to see that others can arrive at different conclusions honestly and faithfully. This does not mean anything goes, but dialogue is often more valuable than division when it comes to Christian witness. If we can agree on the who and the why, perhaps we can continue to debate charitably the how and the when.

## BAPTISM

JEREMIAH 4:3-4

Jeremiah 4:3-4 is a call to wholehearted repentance for the people of Jerusalem and Judah. The Lord uses two images to describe this repentance. The first is breaking up unplowed ground and removing the weeds so the soil is ready for planting. This is a metaphor for softening the people's hearts to hear and heed God.

The second image is circumcision, but God makes it clear that he is not talking about physical circumcision. Rather, he calls the people to circumcise their hearts. Moses made this same appeal to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 10:16 and commanded them to stop being "stiff-necked," that is, to quit being stubborn and resistant to God and his Word. To have a circumcised heart means one's heart is receptive and responsive to God and his Word. Both Moses (Dt 30:6) and Jeremiah (Jer 31:33) say that God himself will accomplish this circumcision by writing his law on people's hearts when he makes a new covenant.

## BAPTISM

ACT 10:11

Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his apostles to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). As we read through the book of Acts, we see the disciples following Jesus' instructions. Baptism becomes the objective marker of being in Christ.

When the first Jews believed in Jesus, Peter called them to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of [their]

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before me.'<sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

<sup>32</sup>Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. <sup>33</sup>And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."<sup>34</sup>

## John's Disciples Follow Jesus

<sup>35</sup>The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup>When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

<sup>37</sup>When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

<sup>39</sup>"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

<sup>40</sup>Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup>The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup>And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter<sup>b</sup>).

## Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

<sup>44</sup>Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

<sup>46</sup>"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

<sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said to him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

<sup>48</sup>"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

<sup>49</sup>Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said, "You believe<sup>c</sup> because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." <sup>51</sup>He then added, "Very truly I tell you,<sup>d</sup> you<sup>e</sup> will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on<sup>f</sup> the Son of Man."

## Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

**2** On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

<sup>4</sup>"Woman,<sup>f</sup> why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup>Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> 34 See Isaiah 42:1; many manuscripts is the Son of God. <sup>b</sup> 42 Cephas (Aramaic) and Peter (Greek) both mean rock. <sup>c</sup> 50 Or Do you believe...? <sup>d</sup> 51 The Greek is plural.

<sup>e</sup> 51 Gen. 28:12 <sup>f</sup> 4 The Greek for Woman does not denote any disrespect. <sup>g</sup> 6 Or from about 75 to about 115 liters

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup>Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup>and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

<sup>11</sup>What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

<sup>12</sup>After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

## Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

<sup>13</sup>When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup>So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."<sup>a</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

<sup>20</sup>They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But the temple he had spoken of was his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

<sup>23</sup>Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.<sup>b</sup> <sup>24</sup>But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. <sup>25</sup>He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

## Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

**3** Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup>He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

<sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."<sup>c</sup>

<sup>4</sup>"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

<sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit<sup>d</sup> gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup>You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You<sup>e</sup> must be born again.' <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."<sup>f</sup>

<sup>9</sup>"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

<sup>10</sup>"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>I have

<sup>a</sup> 17 Psalm 69:9 <sup>b</sup> 23 Or in him <sup>c</sup> 3 The Greek for again also means from above; also in verse 7. <sup>d</sup> 6 Or but spirit <sup>e</sup> 7 The Greek is plural. <sup>f</sup> 8 The Greek for Spirit is the same as that for wind.

(Baptism continued)

sins." Then he added, that they would "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). This is the call to respond to the gospel, identify with Jesus the Messiah and receive the blessings of forgiveness and the Spirit.

This pattern of immediately responding to the gospel with baptism continues throughout the book of Acts: the Samaritans (8:12), the eunuch (8:38) and Saul (9:18). In Acts 10-11, the first Gentiles become believers in Jesus. This is a huge cross-cultural move, and God uses an angel, a vision and a dramatic outpouring of his Spirit to convince the apostles that God wants the Gentiles to be part of his family. So Peter concludes that no one should prevent them from being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we [Jews] have" (10:47), and they were baptized immediately. In Acts, baptism is the immediate, observable response to the gospel that identifies believers with Jesus.

## 1 JOHN

This letter is anonymous; however, early tradition identifies the author as John, the son of Zebedee, who was one of Jesus' apostles and the author of the fourth Gospel. First John has several themes in common with the Gospel of John—light, darkness, love, life, truth and many more. Additionally, the letter highlights the concept of eyewitness testimony that features in the Gospel. These shared traits point toward a common source, someone who walked with Jesus, the apostle John.

In this letter, John makes strong and sometimes seemingly contradictory statements—many of which raise questions for readers. For example, John writes, "Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble" (2:10). However, he also says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8). These two strong statements (and many others) stand in tension with one another. How are we beyond stumbling (2:10) but still in need of confession for sins (1:9)? Interpreting John's strong statements well alleviates some of the difficulty, and yet the message remains: God's children walk in the light; darkness has no place with them (1:5–7). John presents the people of God as a family, and he addresses his implied audience as "children"—those loved but in need of instruction. Some have literally read this book as a sort of tract sent to a community of house churches struggling to stay united.

In this letter, John says things that make the Christian life seem impossible. Statements like "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil" (1Jn 3:8) and "Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child" (3:10) make it sound like Christians must live a perfect life—or something close to it. But John's way of describing the genuine Christian life is typically Jewish (see the book of Proverbs, for instance), where spiritual truths are expressed in binaries that appear, at times, to be hyperbolic. Light and darkness, righteousness and sin, love and hate. The point is that Christians belong to the former categories, not the latter. And our general pattern of life is one of righteousness, not evil. But this doesn't mean we don't sometimes act in ways that reflect darkness, which is why genuine Christians confess their sin, rather than deny that they sin. We are children of the light. This does not mean we are perfect. It means that light/righteousness/love are the patterns of life that genuine Christians follow. John's first epistle is like an extended meditation on James's famous line that "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas 2:17).