

John 1

1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This sublime preface of John carries us back to the account given in Genesis of the beginning of all things, when, "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth." The passage declares that at that time, before creation, the Word existed, was with God and separate from him, but was God, or divine. What this Word is we learn from [verse 14th](#), where it is stated that it became flesh and dwelt among men in the person of Christ. This deep disquisition upon the divine Word, almost too deep for human understanding, was penned by John on account of certain false philosophies which began to creep into and to trouble the church. Much has been written, very learnedly, upon those heresies and upon the Word and its relation to the Father, but I will pass by all speculation and [26] confine myself to what is the manifest meaning of the Scripture. This passage then affirms: 1. That the person afterwards manifest as the Christ existed before creation began; 2. That he was present with God; 3. That he was divine; 4. That he was the Word; 5. That by or through him were all things made that were made ([verse 3](#)). The [first chapter of Genesis](#) helps us to understand its meaning. God said, "Let there be light," "Let there be a firmament," "Let the earth bring forth," etc., and it was done. God exhibits his creative power through the Word, and also manifests his will through the Word. Every careful reader of the Old Testament is struck with the prominence given to the Word of the Lord, and also with the frequent reference in the Pentateuch to the Angel of Jehovah through whom the Lord manifests himself. When Jesus came he was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," the manifestation of the Father, the "Word made flesh and dwelling among men." There are mysteries belonging to the divine nature and to the relation between the Son and the Father that we have to wait for eternity to solve. They are too deep for human solution, but this is clear: that God creates and speaks to

man through the Word. As we clothe *our* thoughts in words, God reveals his will by the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The same was in the beginning with God. John reiterates a part of his first statement, partly for emphasis, and partly to bring out the thought that there is a real distinction between the Word and the Father. He labors to make clear two thoughts, that the Word was divine, God, and yet had an individuality of its own. From the beginning, that unknown epoch, before creation began, he was with God.

3. And all things were made by him. Having affirmed the divine and uncreated nature of the Word, John next proceeds to tell of his relation to creation. All things, the world and all it contains, and the whole universe, were made by or through him. Paul declares ([Heb. 1:2](#)), "Through him the worlds were made." The account of creation in Genesis helps us to understand. It was God who said, "Let there be light," and there was light. It was when the Word was employed that the sun, moon, and stars took their place in the sky. All things that were made were *spoken* into being, or made through the Word. The Word was not yet named Jesus Christ, for he had not yet been manifested as our Savior, nor is it certain that he was called the Son of God until he appeared upon earth as the Son of Man.

4. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. Here is a grand affirmation. He is a fountain of life from whence life flows like a river. From him life flowed in the beginning. Man can construct the statue, but he cannot breathe it into existence. The Word could create the form and endow it with life. And when the Word became flesh, he became a "fountain of living waters," a well springing up to eternal life. Because he had life in himself, the dead heard his voice [27] and lived, and when he was slain the grave could not hold him, but he came forth and brought to light life and immortality. Hence the sublime utterance, "I am the resurrection and the life." "The life was the light

of men." Man was created in the divine image. In him was fuller life than in the brute creation. Hence he is intelligent, capable of reasoning, of learning, of progress. His life is light, in the sense that it enlightens him. Then, in him can dwell the Word, which is the true light that enlightens the world. As the sun chases away darkness, so Jesus, the light of the mind and soul, chases away error, ignorance and superstition. The Life will overcome death and the Light will fill the redeemed world with his glory.

5. And the light shineth in darkness. Now the apostle comes more plainly to the thought that Christ is the light of the world. He is the light that shineth in the darkness, has shone in it as the Word, and who continues to shine. The sun shines in the heavens, but bats and owls that hate the light hide from his rays. So, too, Christ shines, but men who love darkness rather than light, can reject him and abide in darkness. The darkness comprehended it not. The sun shines upon the darkness and the darkness disappears, but when John wrote the true Light was shining in the earth and the people in darkness understood it not. Christ, the Light of the world, came to his own and his own received him not. They had eyes and saw not, hence were not enlightened. The difficulty was not that there was not light, but they loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. There is a sad tone running through [this and the following verses to verse 14](#).

6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. Having declared the pre-existence of Christ, the apostle now begins the history of the Word being made flesh and dwelling among men as the Light of the World. He first presents the messenger who preceded him and who came to bear witness of the Light. He was a man "sent from God," predicted by Isaiah and Malachi, and by the angel that appeared to Zacharias. Notice that John the apostle calls the great forerunner simply *John*, instead of John the Baptist, as do the other writers, as if the Baptist was the only John entitled to distinction.

7. The same came for a witness to bear witness of the Light. John came, not so much as a reformer, as a witness. His work, as declared by Malachi, was to be a messenger to go before the Lord. In all his preaching he testified of Christ. When he preached repentance he declared the Kingdom was at hand. When he baptized he declared that there was one coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He said, "I am not he that should come, but there cometh one whose shoes I am unworthy to loose." He pointed his disciples to Jesus and declared him the Lamb of God. That through him all men might believe. [28] That John's preparation and testimony should cause men to believe upon the Light. The earliest disciples of Christ, including at least a part of the apostles, were men who had been prepared by John. John bore witness to Christ before he was manifested, The apostles bore witness after, for the same purpose, to cause men to believe. This too is the work of the church and of every preacher of the word.

8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness. An early heretical sect held that John the Baptist was the Messiah. The apostle is explicit in order to correct this error. It is said by the Savior, of the Baptist ([John 5:35](#)), that he was a shining light. It is well to keep in mind that the term here translated light is different. It is a word that means original, self-shining light, like the sun; in [5:35](#) it is one that means a reflected light, like the moon. Christ shines by his own light; John shone by Christ's light.

9. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into world. That was the *real* light who enlightens all men. Christ is the universal light. The Revision reads, "There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." Grammatically, both in the Greek and the English, *coming* may belong to the *light*, or *every* man. We believe that it should agree with light. That was the true or real light who, when he comes into the world, enlightens every man. Jesus says ([John 12:46](#)), "I am come a light into the world." Here John affirms that he came into the world to lighten every man. It

should be kept in mind that the apostle is now about to treat of the personal coming into the world of the Light in the form of the Christ. As the Creator of natural things, as the Word that has been spoken to man from the beginning, and as God manifest in the flesh, he is the source of all the moral and spiritual light the world has ever known.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. John has just spoken of the personal coming of the Light of the world. Lest any one should forget that he was already in the world as the Word, he says that he was in the world and was its Creator, and had been in it from the beginning, though the world did not recognize him. There is a connection between [this and the following verse](#). This declares that (1) he *was* in the world, (2) the world was made by him, (3) it did not recognize him. The [next verse](#) states (1) that he *came*, personally, to his own. He took upon himself a fleshly form and came to the race to which he was united by fleshly ties; (2) his own received him not. The world is humanity in general, which *knew* him not; his own is the Jewish nation, who *received* him not.

11. He came to his own, and his own received him not. It is stated above that he *was* [29] in the world, from the beginning. Here it is stated that he *came*, to his own, when he came to Judea as the son of Mary, and, therefore, of the Jewish race. This passage is full of pathos and is an epitome of the Savior's earthly history. When the kingly babe came there was "no room" found even in the inn; a few days later he was carried to Egypt to save him from the murderous Herod; when he entered upon his ministry he was met by hatred, reviling and conspiracy; at last the Sanhedrim of the nation condemned him to death; and before Pontius Pilate, choosing a robber in his stead, they cried, "Away with him; crucify him!" His own people received him not. Even his townsmen of Nazareth sought to put him to death.

12. To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God. The Revision reads, "Children of God," which is better. While the nation rejected him, some received him. To such as receive him in every age he gives power to become the children of God. The manner in which he is received is given; even to those who believe upon his name. It is not declared that they are made children by believing, but to the believer he gives the "power to *become*" a child. When one believes in Christ, his faith becomes a power to lead him to yield himself to God and to receive the Word into his heart. He can now repent of sin, surrender to the will of the Father, and then, "being baptized into Christ he puts on Christ," is his brother and a child of God by adoption, whereupon, "because he is a son, God sends his Spirit into his heart," enabling him to say: "Abba! Father." Wesley says, "The moment we believe we are sons." The Scriptures do not so teach, but that when we believe, Christ "gives us power to *become* children." Without "belief upon his name" the "power" to become a child is impossible.

13. Who were born, not of blood, nor by the will of the flesh. The Jews prided themselves on being Abraham's children, and trusted in their blood for salvation. John declares that blood, or race, has nothing to do with becoming the children of God; nor has this new birth which makes one a child of God ought to do with natural generation (the will of the flesh), nor earthly adoption (the will of the man). It is not a fleshly birth at all, but the spirit of the subject is born of God. In [John 3:1-8](#) the Savior explains this birth more particularly. Faith, repentance and obedience prepare us for the gift of the Spirit, and we are thus made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

14. And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. The Word assumed a human form and became incarnate as the child of Mary. It did not merely [30] manifest itself, but *dwelt* among us for about thirty-three years. There was already a heretical sect, the Gnostics referred to in [2 John 7](#), who denied that Christ had come in the flesh. The

apostle here makes this positive statement to meet this heresy. And we beheld his glory. Peter, James and John not only beheld the sinless and godlike life of Christ, but they saw the glory of the Mount of Transfiguration, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Full of grace and truth. The Word incarnate, Christ, was full of grace and truth; his mission was one of grace or favor to men, and he was the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life.

15. John testified of him. [Verse 7](#) declares that John came to testify of Christ and here the substance of his testimony is given. When he saw Jesus he cried, "This is he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is preferred before me because he was before me."

16. Out of his fulness have we all received. It is John, the apostle, who speaks. The thought refers to the [two preceding verses](#). John had seen the glory of Christ, who was "full" of grace and truth, and the Baptist declares that Christ existed before he came into the world, and then John declares, "We have all received of his fulness, and favor upon favor."

17. The law was given by Moses. It was not a system of grace, nor could it make men perfect; in contrast with it the system of *grace and truth* (see [verse 14](#)) were given by Jesus Christ.

18. No man hath seen God, with bodily eyes, but he was manifested as the Word and at last the "only begotten Son hath declared him." "He that hath seen me," said Christ, "hath seen the Father. The Father is in me and I in him." Christ came in human form, in order to reveal the Father to a race who knew him not.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.

1. What wonderful condescension that so glorious a being as the Word should take upon himself our nature, dwell among men, suffer and die

for us! "This is the love of God that he hath sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved."

2. How can any one treat lightly the Word of the Lord when he learns that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word [31] was God?" It is said that the Jews refused even to throw upon the earth slips that had printed or written upon them passages of Scripture. We have infinitely more reason for reverencing the Word than the Jews. Every passage of the inspired testimony has come to us through the medium of him who is the Word.

3. *Christ is the light of the World.* Take a map and delineate those countries which are most enlightened in bright colors, then shade others more and more as you approach barbarism and ignorance. Then make another map in which the countries that most truly receive the Bible and Christ are represented in bright colors, shade those lands that have a corrupted Christianity, shading according to the degree of corruption, and put those in darkest colors where nothing is known of Christ. Then compare the two maps. It will be found that there are not two maps, but two copies of one map.

4. *The Word made flesh.* God, the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshipers; a philosopher might admire so noble a conception, but the crowd turned away in disgust from words that presented no image to their minds. It was before Deity, embodied in human form, working among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, bleeding on the cross, that the prejudices of the synagogue, and the doubts of the academy, and the pride of the portico, and the fasces of the lictors, and the swords of thirty legions, were humbled in the dust.--*Macaulay.*

THE WITNESS OF JOHN.

19. And this is the record of John. The history now begins its sweep onward. All before is prefatory. The historian passes by the incidents connected with the birth of John and of Jesus, the early history, and even the account of John's preaching and the baptism of Christ, given in the other Gospels. He wrote at a much later period and these facts are supposed to be well known. The witness here noted was given after the baptism and probably while Christ was in the wilderness at the time of the temptation. When the Jews sent priests and Levites. John uses the term "Jews" as though he was not of that race. He was now an old man and for many years had transferred his allegiance to another nation ([1 Peter 2:9](#)), and for a long time had been dwelling in Asia Minor, among Gentile Christians. That his Jewish feelings had gradually passed away is often shown in his language. Usually "the Jews" means the ruling classes of Judea. In this case it refers to the SANHEDRIM. As this court fills a conspicuous place in the New Testament history it will help the student to have a clear understanding of its nature. The Jewish writers claim that it originated with the seventy elders whom Moses ([Num. 11:16, 17](#)) was directed to associate with himself in the government of Israel, who, with himself, would make a court of seventy-one persons. Hence it was composed of seventy-one members. There is, however, no positive proof of its existence during the period of the Jewish kings, and it only appears in unmistakable form during the later days of the Hebrew commonwealth. Its very name, Sanhedrim, or more correctly, [32] Sanhedrin, is Greek, and this fact points to a period after the Macedonian conquest of the East, when it assumed shape. According to the Jews themselves (*Jerusalem Gemara*), forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem the right to inflict capital punishment was taken away from it, which agrees with the answer of the Jews to Pilate ([John 19:31](#)). It was a supreme court to which belonged the trial of a tribe fallen into idolatry, false prophets, and accused priests. As an administrative council its jurisdiction was still more extensive. Jesus was arraigned before this body as a false prophet ([John 11:47](#))

and condemned as a blasphemer ([Matt. 26:65](#)). Peter, John, Stephen and Paul were arraigned by it as false teachers and deceivers of the people. It was entirely in harmony with its prerogatives that it should send an official deputation to ascertain the character of John. He had produced a profound sensation and stirred the whole land, and it was the duty of the Sanhedrim, from its standpoint, to examine into his claims. There is nothing in the language to show whether this deputation was hostile or friendly, and it is probable that it was neither, but only one of inquiry. Its members were all of the sacerdotal tribe.

20. I am not the Christ. The idea had already begun to receive currency that John might be the expected Christ. In his preaching recorded by Matthew he denied this with great emphasis and explained his relation to the Coming One. Here he is equally emphatic. The stress which the apostle here lays on this denial shows that he had in mind that later class of the disciples of John, who in the latter half of the first century, asserted that he was the Christ.

21. They asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? Malachi ([4:5](#)) had declared that Elias would precede the Messiah. Hence when John denied that he was the Christ, the next question was whether he was Elias. He said that he was not; he was not the literal Elias whom they expected; nor is it certain that God had revealed to John that he was the spiritual Elias. He was greater than he himself knew. He was, in many respects, in mission, manner of life, fearlessness and ruggedness, an Elias, and was the Elias foretold by the prophet ([Matt. 17:12](#)), though Elias did literally come on the mount of transfiguration. Art thou that prophet? They ask still another question. Moses had predicted a prophet like himself ([Deut. 18:15](#)), but John denies that he is the fulfillment. It was later ([Acts 3:22; 7:37](#)) when the apostles understood that Jesus was he of whom Moses did speak.

22. Who art thou? The conjectures are exhausted and they demand an explicit answer, that they may carry the information to "them that sent them," or to the Sanhedrim. [33]

23. I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. John answers this question by quoting [Isaiah 40:3](#), where the prophet describes his mission. The passage is applied to John, [Matt. 3:3](#); [Mark 1:2](#), and [Luke 3:4](#). He sinks his own personality, and is simply the "voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." His work was that of preparation for the Lord.

24. Of the Pharisees. The messengers were not only of the religious tribe, but of the strictest of Jewish sects. The Pharisees were far more attentive to external rites than any other class, and as the next question is concerning such a rite, the fact that they were Pharisees is noted.

25. Why baptizest thou then? This question shows that John's baptism was, to them, a new rite. They could understand that Christ, or Elias, or "that prophet" might establish a new ordinance by the divine authority, but if John is none of these, why does he do so? Their perplexity shows that, in some way, the baptismal rite was new to them. It is claimed that Gentile proselytes to the Jewish faith were baptized (*immersed* according to all the Jewish authorities) before this time, but the only proof offered is the testimony of the Talmud, written two or three centuries later. Even if proselyte baptism had been instituted, John's rite presented the new feature of baptizing *Jews*, those who considered themselves God's people. In that it called the chosen people to baptism it was a new rite.

26. I baptize with water. The correct rendering is *in* water, and the preposition *en* is thus rendered by the American Committee of the Revisers, as well as by Canon Westcott of the Church of England and the most judicious scholars. Even in the Common Version, out of 2,660 times that *en* occurs in the Greek of the New Testament, it is rendered

by "*in*" 2,060 times. There is no good reason why it should not be so rendered every time it occurs in connection with baptism. The translators of the Catholic Bible in English, the Douay Version, were more honest than King James' revisers, and have always so rendered it. John does not answer the question of the Pharisees directly, but points to one already standing among them. The baptism of water connects itself with that pre-eminent being. Standeth among you. This points out that the Christ was already on the earth, in Judea, though unknown and unrecognized by the people. [34]

27. Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. The latchet was the thong by which the sandal was bound on the foot. To loose or fasten it was the work of a menial. The dignity of Christ was so exalted, that John counted himself unworthy even to attend to this office.

28. These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The Revision substitutes Bethany for Bethabara. Both terms are found in the manuscripts, but Bethany has the better authority. The Bethany named was not the one near Jerusalem, but a village, whose site is not now known, on the east bank of the Jordan. Bethany is said to mean "the house of the boat," and Bethabara "the house of the ford," both alike pointing to a ferry or ford of the Jordan. We have three allusions to the localities of John's baptismal rite, all showing that abundance of water was an essential; [Matt. 3:5, 6 and 13](#); [John 3:23](#), and the present passage.

The sending of this deputation is a proof of the great stir caused throughout Judea by the teaching of John. That he exerted a profound influence upon the nation and was accounted a prophet are evident from Jewish writers. Josephus, a Jewish priest and general, a contemporary of John and Christ, says (*Antiquities*, book 18, chap. 5): "Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did

against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and one who commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness toward one another, and piety toward God, and so to come to him for baptism; for that the washing with water would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away (or the remission) of some sins (only), but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when (many) others came into crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence which John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he might advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not to bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him to repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Machærus, the castle I have before mentioned, and put to death there."

CHRIST'S MINISTRY BEGINS.

At this point Jesus breaks suddenly in upon the narrative. The Fourth Gospel passes by all the details contained in the other three concerning the early life of the Savior; the miraculous conception, the birth at Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt, the return to Nazareth, the visit to the temple when Jesus was twelve [35] years old, and even his baptism a short time before in the Jordan. This is referred to, and a familiarity with it implied, but its history is not given. In these facts we have additional evidence that John wrote many years after the other evangelists and supposed his readers to be acquainted with the facts that they narrated.

Jesus was at this time thirty years old, had lived a singularly blameless life with his home at Nazareth, where he had worked at the trade of Joseph, and hence is spoken of as "the carpenter" and "the carpenter's son." He had never attended the great schools of the Jewish law in which all the Rabbins obtained their education, but went from the carpenter's bench to John's baptism, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, retired to the desert for forty days of lonely preparation, and then reappears at this point, to begin his ministry.

29. The next day John seeth Jesus. The next day after the visit of the deputation of the Sanhedrim. It was not the first visit of Jesus to John. About forty days before he had presented himself and demanded baptism. He doubtless knew Jesus personally before this, for he testifies to the blameless purity of his life, but it had not then been revealed to him that Jesus was the Christ; only that the One upon whom he should see the Spirit descending was the King of whom he bore witness. After this baptism Jesus had retired to the wilderness to meet the tempter alone. It is at the period of his return that John points him out as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The lamb was a very familiar object of sacrifice to the Jews. It was slain by every Jewish family at the passover, was commonly used for a sin offering ([Lev. 4:32](#)); in the cleansing of the leper ([Lev. 14:10](#)); at both the morning and the evening sacrifice ([Exod. 29:38](#)); at all the great feasts, and on special occasions. When John pointed out Jesus, not as *a*, but *the* Lamb of God, it can only mean that God had provided him as a sacrificial offering. Every lamb offered on Jewish altars pointed to him; [Isaiah, in chapter LIII](#), points out that he was "lead as a lamb to the slaughter." In [Revelation](#) he is declared to be the Lamb, "as it were slain." There is no escape from the idea that Jesus became a sacrificial offering for the world. This is entirely in harmony with the class of passages which affirm that "his blood cleanseth from all sin." We may not be able to fathom all the mysteries of the atonement, but it is the part of faith to accept and trust fully, what is so clearly taught.

It will be seen, also, that John, by inspiration, is enabled to grasp the magnitude of the Savior's work. He is to take away the sin, not of Jews only, but of the *world*.

The reader should not fail to note, at the beginning of the Savior's ministry, that the idea that he is more than a Jewish deliverer comes into prominence. He is the Lamb of God who taketh away sin, not the sin of Israel only, but *the sin of the world*. John, by inspiration, is enabled to rise above the idea of a Jewish Messiah, the sphere of whose blessings would be confined to the narrow limits of the race of Abraham, and at once points his followers to Jesus as the Messiah of man, the Redeemer of the world who taketh away the sin thereof. [36] Here, at the outset, is a divergence from the Messianic ideas of the Jews, and the germ of that disappointment of their hopes by seeing in Jesus the founder of a universal spiritual kingdom, rather than a worldly national empire, which led to their rejection of the Christ.

30. This is he of whom I said. In [verse 27](#) the words he refers to are given. The One who will come after him in point of time, precedes him in eminence, for he was before him in existence. John might be first known on earth and older by human birth, but Christ had existed from eternity.

31. I knew him not. Knew not whom God had chosen as the Christ. He knew Jesus personally, but did not know he was the Christ until God pointed him out. Therefore am I come baptizing with (in) water. His whole mission of preaching and baptizing was to prepare for and reveal the Christ. In his baptizing the Christ became manifest in the way stated in the [following verses](#).

32. John bare record. Gave witness to the fact, either at this or some subsequent time. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove. See [Matt. 3:16](#). At this time, as Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit was seen descending in the form of a dove, and the voice of God was heard declaring, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well

pleased." Thus Jesus was anointed with the Spirit, and was thenceforward the Christ, the Anointed. It is significant that this took place at the time of baptism. Why should any Christian disparage a rite the Lord has so honored?

33. And I knew him not. Knew not who was the Messiah. The Lord had however, given him a sign by which he could recognize him. Upon whomsoever the Spirit visibly descended and abode, the same would baptize in the Holy Spirit. The only one baptizing in the Holy Spirit is the Christ. The Spirit in its fulness abode with him, and hence he was able to impart its fulness in the baptism of the spirits of his disciples. Christ did not baptize in the Holy Spirit until after he had ascended, the first instance being recorded in [Acts 2:1-4](#).

34. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God. While the apostle does not give the history of the Savior's baptism, his allusions to it are very full and [37] can only be understood by comparing them with the accounts given in the other Gospels. John "saw" all that is recorded by Matthew ([3:13-17](#)) and heard the Divine voice. Hence he "bare record that this is the Son of God." This language was spoken the "next day" after the deputation of the Sanhedrim had waited upon him, and that event is thus located after the baptism and temptation of Christ. The order of events, in the gospel history, up to this date, is about as follows: 1. The Annunciation to Mary; 2. The Birth of John the Baptist; 3. The Birth of Jesus; 4. Jesus in the Temple with the Doctors; 5. The Preaching of John; 6. The Baptism of Jesus; 7. The Temptation in the Wilderness; 8. The Deputation of the Sanhedrim to John; 9. The Return of Jesus to John.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES.

35. Again the the next day after, Jesus stood, and two of his disciples. In [verses 19-28](#), the account is given of the visit of the priests and

Levites, sent by the Sanhedrim to John. "The next day" after this John sees Jesus and points him out as the Lamb of God, giving a discourse of which, in [verses 29-34](#), we have a synopsis. On the "next day" after this, the third day after the deputation of the Sanhedrim, and the second after the return of Jesus from the wilderness, John stood with two of his disciples. One of these two, we learn from [verse 40](#), was Andrew; the other, we have reason to believe, was John, the apostle. The statement that they were John's disciples, shows that they had accepted his message and been baptized by him. All the earlier disciples of Christ had been prepared for him by the Forerunner. At first glance it might seem as if John was merely repeating the testimony that he had given in [verse 29](#), but there the testimony is general; it is not stated to whom it was spoken; here it is specific, and spoken to two disciples who were afterwards, almost certainly, apostles of Jesus.

36. Behold the Lamb of God! On the preceding day John had recognized Jesus in a public discourse as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." Now he personally points the disciples to him. The lamb, throughout Old Testament times, was commonly used as a sin-offering ([Lev. 4:32](#)), at the morning and evening sacrifice ([Ex. 12:21-27](#)), at the great feasts ([Num. 28:11](#)), and on special occasions ([1 Chron. 29:21](#)). The paschal lamb was offered by every family in Israel at every passover. In pointing out Jesus as the Lamb of God, John declares that he is the great sin-offering of which all the lambs slain on Jewish altars were the types. "He taketh away the sins of the world;" he is the great sin-bearer, not for a single generation, but for all time; not for a single family or race, but for the world. These words teach a sacrifice and an atonement, but were not understood by John himself, as we learn by turning to [Matt. 11:2-6](#). "Under the Old Testament were provided by the sinner, lambs, whose sacrifice took sins away from the individual or the nation, but for the time only, and therefore the sacrifice had to be continually repeated;

under the New [38] Testament one Lamb is provided, the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice takes away the sin of the whole world, and therefore needs never to be repeated."--*Abbott*.

37. And they followed Jesus. As John intended, the two disciples at once left him and followed the footsteps of Jesus. They did not become *followers* in the religious sense, but literally followed him, possibly from curiosity, possibly from a yearning desire to know more of the Lamb of God.

38. Jesus turned . . . and saith, What seek ye? Jesus does not ask this in order that he may know their object, but to open a conversation and to draw them out. Such was his custom; for example, see the conversation with the woman at Sychar ([Chap. 4:10-16](#)). The Christian teacher may find a valuable hint in the example of the Master. His teaching was almost all by conversation and his methods are incomparable. Rabbi. A term of very ancient origin, signifying teacher, or master. Ahasuerus set a *Rab*, or master, over the tables of his feast ([Esther 1:8](#)). Among the Jews there are three degrees--Rabban, Rab, and Rabbi--the last being the lowest. It is by the highest that Mary addresses the Lord at the tomb after his resurrection. Where dwellest thou? The disciples dared not probably, from their timidity, to express fully their motives in following Jesus, but asked for his temporary abiding place and where he might be found. This question, which some might have regarded impertinent curiosity to be met by a rebuff, was met by a kind invitation that attached the disciples to Jesus for life. Here again we should note the effect of gentleness and hospitality. Note, too, that Jesus is not sought in vain. "They that seek shall find."

39. They abode with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. The Jew commenced the hours with 6 A. M. and hence the tenth hour would be 4 P. M. As it was near the close of the day the disciples remained over night. The conversation of that evening is unrecorded, but the impression that it made upon the minds of the two guests is

seen in their conduct the next day. All doubts had passed away and they were ready to seek their friends with the joyful message: We have found the Messiah.

40. One of the two . . . was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew and his brother Simon were sons of Jonas, of the town of Bethsaida in Galilee, and were fishermen by trade. The description of Andrew as Peter's brother shows the importance assigned by John to the apostle who was to open the doors of the kingdom. Andrew was afterwards one of the Twelve. The other "one of the [39] two" is supposed to be John, the apostle, for the reason that he never mentions his own name, but invariably those of other disciples.

41. He first findeth his own brother Simon. Andrew sought and found Simon, before he sought anyone else. This is the true spirit. Unless one is ready to tell the joyful story to his own relatives and neighbors, we have a poor opinion of his zeal for the conversion of the Zulus or Congo negroes. Christ and the apostles began their work at home and extended it in an ever widening circle. We have found the Messiah. The Anointed, the Hebrew term which corresponds to the word Christ. It was with the utmost joy that Andrew told this joyful story. It was the fruition of the long delayed hope of Israel. Andrew's exclamation of delight on finding the Messiah is the same attributed to Archimedes when he made his discovery of the amount of adulteration in Hiero's crown. The cry of each was *Eureka*, "I have found." The grandest discovery ever made, greater than that of a continent, was the finding of Christ, the hope of the world.

42. Thou art Simon . . . thou shalt be called Cephas. There was no hesitation on the part of Peter to go at once to see him of whom Andrew spoke. He, also, as one of John's disciples, was waiting for the King. To his name Simon, Christ added another by which afterwards he was known. Cephas is Hebrew, and means a stone; Peter means the same in Greek; not *rock*, as some have urged. The word for that in the

Greek is *petra*, while the word anglicised as Peter is *petros*. In [Matt. 16:18](#), Christ says, in response to Peter's confession, "Thou art *Petros* (a stone), and upon this *petra* (a solid rock) I will build my church." The Rock was the "Stone cut out without hands." Peter was a fragment of rock built upon the Stone by the great confession. Christ is the Rock; Peter was a *rockman*.

43. The day following. The next day after Andrew brought Peter to Jesus. According to Meyer, the order of this interesting week is as follows: First day, John's conference with the priests and Levites ([verses 19-28](#)); second day, John's testimony of Jesus ([29-34](#)); third day, the two disciples pointed to Jesus ([35-39](#)); fourth day, Peter brought to Jesus ([40-42](#)); fifth day, Nathanael brought to Jesus ([43-51](#)); seventh day, (one day intervening,) the marriage at Cana, ([chap. 2](#)). Findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. This is the first recorded instance of the Savior calling a disciple to follow him. Philip, it must be borne in mind, is [40] not Philip, "one of the seven," but "one of the Twelve," a citizen of Bethsaida, of Galilee, and a fellow-townsmen of Andrew and Peter.

45. Philip findeth Nathanael. As we learn from [John 21:2](#), Nathanael, like Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Philip, was a Galilean, his home being at "Cana of Galilee." His name only occurs in these two places. He is supposed to have been one of the Twelve, the same one mentioned in the other Gospels as Bartholomew, which is a patronymic, meaning son of Tolmai. The use of the name in [John 21:2](#) favors this hypothesis. We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write. There was only one to whom this could refer, "The prophet like unto Moses," the Messiah; and when Philip names Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael is at once skeptical whether the Messiah could come out of Nazareth. Note, 1. That although Cana was not far from Nazareth, so quiet had been the life of Jesus, thus far, Nathanael does not seem to have heard of him; 2. As soon as Philip becomes a disciple he at once begins to seek others, an excellent

example for all young Christians. For references in the books of Moses to the Messiah, see [Gen. 3:15; 17:7; and Deut. 18:15-19.](#)

46. Nathanael said . . . can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? The Jews of Jerusalem despised Galilee and scornfully rejected the Galilean teacher, while the rest of Galilee seems to have despised Nazareth. From the manner in which the mob thrust Jesus out of the synagogue and tried to kill him, its population could not have been of high moral type. The Jews were wont to associate all moral and religious good with Jerusalem, and could hardly conceive that the King would come from elsewhere than the capital of David. Come and see. That is the best answer to the skeptic. Bring him to Christ, let him consider him, and what he has done for mankind. The strongest proof that Jesus is the Christ is Jesus himself. The unbelieving John Stuart Mill said that no one could find a better rule of virtue than "to endeavor to live so that Christ would approve his life." Renan pronounces him "the greatest and purest of the sons of men."

47. Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! The Savior salutes Nathanael with a tribute to his honest, guileless character. He was a true Israelite, without hypocrisy, worshiping God with sincere soul, according to the light he had received. [41]

48. Whence knowest thou me? Nathanael, who had never met Jesus before, was surprised to hear himself spoken of as one known. When thou wast under the fig tree. There was Something about this answer that filled Nathanael with astonishment. Under the shade and shelter of the fig tree he had had some rare experience that is not recorded, and that he supposed unknown to man. That Jesus knew of it and read his soul startled him and dissipated his unbelief.

49. Thou art the Son of God; the King of Israel. Philip had said, "Jesus, the Son of Joseph," as he supposed, but Nathanael, convinced, declared him the Son of God. This is the first confession of the divinity of Jesus, and is the spirit, rather than the letter of Old Testament

prophecy of the Messiah. Nathanael, devout, a devoted student of prophecy, living in the great hope, rises to the heights of the Messianic prophecies.

50. Thou shalt see greater things than these. Nathanael, as a follower of Christ, did see greater things than the revelation of hidden knowledge that convinced him. So, too, if all believers faithfully use their present opportunities they shall have greater. There is a growth in grace and knowledge.

51. Ye shall see the heavens open, and the angels of God ascending. Jacob, old Israel, in his dream at Bethel, saw the ladder that reached to heaven with the angels upon it ([Gen. 28:12](#)). Christ is that ladder, the way from earth to heaven, the way heaven sends messages to the world and the way we must go to reach it. Nathanael would be permitted to see that Jesus was the Mediator, that through him the Father speaks to man; that through him there is intercommunication between earth and heaven. Nathanael sees heaven *open*, not opened. It still stands open, and has been since the vail of the temple was rent.