

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John **(SB_JN1 – The Prologue)**

The Witness of John the Baptist (1:6-8, 15)

In these verses, the apostle John introduces John the Baptist, but he introduces him in a way that implies that the readers were already familiar with him. So, rather than focus upon John's origin and character as did Luke (see Lk 1:5-24, 57-80), John focuses upon his subordinate status and role when compared to Jesus (see also Jn 3:22-30).

It is possible that John structured his Gospel in this manner in response to the sect that survived John the Baptist and perpetuated his teaching, but who had no knowledge of the completion of the work of Christ (see Acts 18:24-25; 19:1-7).¹ This sect was discovered by Paul some twenty years after Jesus' resurrection. A Mandaean sect still exists south of Baghdad which claims a link to John the Baptist, but is hostile to Christianity.²

John's function or role was only that of a witness to Jesus, the Light (v. 5). Jesus was the "Word." John was the messenger. John, the apostle, makes extensive use of the word "witness" or "testify" as reflected in the chart below:³

Usage	Gospel	Epistles	Revelation	Total	Total in NT	% in John vs. NT
Noun	14	7	9	30	60	50%
Verb	33	10	4	47	76	62%
Total	47	17	13	77	136	57%

John uses this word in his Gospel as a pointer for the reader. The reason why this word was important to John is that John's goal was that all might come to trust in Christ and place their focus upon him and no other person who pointed to Jesus.

- John the Baptist points to Jesus (1:15, 34; 3:26)
- The descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove testifies regarding Jesus (1:32)
- Jesus regarding John's witness or testimony regarding Jesus Himself (5:31-37)
- Jesus testifies to the truth (18:37)
- John himself testifies regarding Jesus' death (19:35).

In verse 15, John uses the present tense for the Greek words "testified" and "cried out" which emphasizes the continuous nature of John's testimony. Some interesting points of observation regarding John the Baptizer:

- John was selected by God for the mission of being a forerunner of Jesus (Jn 1:6).
- This selection was not apart from John's free will choice to execute God's will for his life, but John's free will choice was known to the omniscience of God in eternity past.

¹ Frank E. Gaebelien and J.D. Douglas, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992).

² John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983-85), xx. See also any number of websites to include <http://www.geocities.com/usamandaeen/mandaeenworld1.html> or www.mandaeans.org for more information.

³ Walvoord and Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, xx.

- ❑ John's spiritual life was no doubt encouraged, nurtured and strengthened (to the point that he was able to endure hardship and ostracism) as a result of his parent's dynamic spiritual life (see Luke 1:6, 46-55).⁴
- ❑ A spiritual heritage is the most important thing that parents can give their children.
- ❑ A spiritual heritage provided by parents can strengthen a child's faith, provide stability, and encourage the child with principles that will be a spiritual influence and a source of strength that helps him endure opposition and not turn to the wrong sources to find approbation. In other words, the spiritual heritage of a parent can help a child overcome peer pressure that can be detrimental to one's spiritual life.

In verse 7, John emphasizes the role that volition plays in the process of becoming a believer. The words "might believe" are translated from the 3rd person plural, aorist, active, subjunctive of *pisteuo* (πιστευετε). Another way of translating this word in this particular Greek construction is "at a point in time, they may believe." This is important to note because John indicates that "all" have this capability. John's statement in this verse is one argument against the idea of unconditional election, i.e. the "U" in TULIP.

The Coming of the Light (1:9-13)

John uses the Greek word "light" – *phos* (φως) – extensively in his Gospel and the epistle of 1 John. John makes no distinction between the light and the Revealer – they are synonymous. In other words, there is no coming into the light (i.e. illumination) apart from the Revealer of that light.

In verse 9, the verse reads – "that was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." This verse may alternatively be translated – "that was the true light which, coming into the world, gives light to every man." The distinction is subtle, but given the context and theme of John's Gospel the latter translation focuses more clearly upon the incarnation of the 2nd member of the Godhead versus the birth of every man. This verse does not mean universal salvation or general revelation or even inner illumination, but it refers to the fact that Christ as the Light exposes man's sin and need for a savior.

- ❑ 3:18-21 – those who practice evil hate the light and do not come to the light, whereas those who do the truth come to the light.
- ❑ 9:39-41 – for judgment
- ❑ 16:8-11 – the Holy Spirit's convicting (convincing) work in regard to man's sin, the need for righteousness, and judgment.

In verse 10, John notes that even though Jesus created the world (*kosmos* – κόσμος), the world did not recognize Him. "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" (Matt 13:55) Depending upon context, the word *kosmos* can mean either the universe, the earth, humanity, or a system of thought opposed to God's plan. The failure of man to recognize Jesus as the creator was due to the blinding spiritual darkness that was cast over God's original creation when Adam and Eve fell in the garden. Satan gained dominion over the world and the world was subject to his

⁴ Both Elizabeth and Zecharias are said to be righteous before God (1:6). This is a reference to their spiritual practice as believers in the Age of Israel in that they fulfilled the requirements of the Mosaic Law as testimony to their faith in the God of Israel. They are said to have "walked in "all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (1:6). As such, Zecharias was fully aware of the special purpose of his nation and people in a world of Gentiles. He was aware of God's purpose for giving the Jews and Israel the Law. He was very aware of the promise of a servant (e.g. Ps 22; Isa 53) and king (2 Sam 7:12-13) Messiah Who would deliver Israel. Yet, as we shall see, even experientially righteous believers (regardless of dispensation) find themselves awed to the point of temporary disbelief as they come to grips with the reality of that in which they have placed their faith. For more information on this point, see the notes for our study of the Gospel of Luke 1.

deceptive plan, i.e. a plan to promote a good apart from Jesus Christ and become like the Most High Himself (Isa 14:13-14).

In verse 11, John starts His Gospel where the other Gospel writers finish, i.e. Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Verse 11 more accurately translated would read – “He came to His own domain [i.e. the world], and His own [people – the Jews, the nation Israel], did not receive Him.”

In verse 12, we see another clear indication that the volition of man plays a determining role in the eternal salvation of that individual. Those who become children of God are those who believe in Him. To “become” a child of God (v. 13) refers to a status that was not present in that person's life prior to belief. Therefore, this “becoming” is a re-birth, not of blood (i.e. physical birth), nor of the will of the flesh (i.e. personal good works). It is of God. This verse reminds us of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:5ff.