

John 1A

- Leon Morris wrote that John's Gospel is a pool in which both a child can wade in and an elephant can swim in
 - It's a book of simple yet profound truth, relying on metaphor and symbols to reveal Christ to be the only begotten Son of God
 - Chronologically, the Gospel of John was the next to last book of scripture penned at the end of the first century
 - Only the book of Revelation came later
 - And yet it's often the first book we recommended to the person curious to know more about Christ or Christianity
 - John's Gospel is so memorable partly because of its uniqueness among the Gospels and John's distinct purpose in writing it
 - By the time John's Gospel was written, the church had come to recognize that God's timetable for Christ's return was much longer than first anticipated
 - All but one of the apostles had died, and second and third generations of followers were now leading the church
 - The church was being embraced by Gentiles, even as its early Jewish constituencies were dwindling rapidly
 - All this made clear that the promise of a coming Kingdom needed to be understood with a new appreciation and patience
 - Certainly, it remains for a true, physical kingdom to arrive on earth, with Christ as the King reigning from Jerusalem
 - But by the time John wrote, few still expected that the arrival of that kingdom was right around the corner
 - After all, the earth had waited thousands of years for God to reveal Himself in Christ the first time
 - So it might take thousands of years more for His return
 - Therefore, unlike the other gospel writers, John approached his Gospel with the purpose of strengthening the church for the long period that lay ahead

- John was Jewish but wrote for an increasingly Gentile church by taking time to explain Jewish words and customs and geography
- In recognition that the Second Coming would not be soon, he emphasizes the present-day reality of Christ's Kingdom and His ever-present authority in the lives of believers
- He wanted believers to abide in Christ, to depend on His word
- Because of his unique focus on living in the light of Christ (and because his Gospel came last), John chose to skip over many important moments in Jesus' ministry
 - His omits Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism of John, His temptation in the desert, exorcising demons, no parables, the transfiguration, the Lord's Supper, the time in Gethsemane, and His ascension
 - And in their place, he reveals Christ through extended discourses between Jesus and a variety of actors
 - A Pharisee
 - A woman of ill repute
 - A blind man, a lame man
 - A crowd seeking to be fed
 - His earthly brothers
 - And of course, His various disciples
 - These conversations are often comical, resembled two ships passing in the night
 - Jesus will speak in spiritual terms of birth, water, bread, blindness, and so on
 - While his audience usually remains confused, bound by an earthly perspective
 - He frequently employs the verb, belief (*pisteuo*), which appears 98 times in the Gospel
 - But he never uses the noun, faith (*pistis*)

- In other words, John emphasizes the necessity of knowing Christ through an active, continual trust in the Lord, rather than simply resting on our moment of confession
- The content of John's gospel suggests he selected a portfolio of Jesus' best work, carefully selected to illustrate both Jesus' deity and humanity
 - To demonstrate Jesus' deity, John related seven of Jesus' miracles
 - After each of these miracles, John captured a lengthy discourse in which Jesus explains the spiritual significance of His work
 - Through these moments we come to know our Lord as a compassionate Shepherd Who cares for His people
 - And Who has the power to sustain them in the present age as we await His return
 - To remind us of His humanity, John selected other moments when Jesus reacted to life just as we might have
 - Submitting to his mother's authority
 - Weeping at the death of a friend
 - Raging at corrupt and evil men in the Temple
 - Expressing disappointment at the poor choices of His disciples
 - John's Gospel is also known for its seven statements of "I am"
 - Jesus said "I am the bread, the light, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection, the vine and the way, the truth and the life
 - The phrase "I am" evokes the name of God provided to Moses from the burning bush
 - Reminding us that while God has revealed Himself in many portion and many ways through Moses and other prophets, in these last days He has spoken through His Son
 - As Thomas Constable said, the knowledge of who Jesus really is, is the key to the knowledge of who God really is
 - And so John wrote His Gospel to reveal Jesus as the light Who came into the world conquers the darkness

- He's the Provider, the Life Giver, the Good Shepherd
- He's the One Who receives all that Father sends and loses not a one
- Even the start of John's Gospel is wholly unique and reflective of his purposes
 - John begins by affirming Jesus' role in the beginning of all Creation

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 1:3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

John 1:5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

- It doesn't take a seminary professor to notice that the opening words of John's account are familiar
 - In fact, if you were to recite the words "In the beginning..." to a Bible student and asked him to complete the sentence, you would be equally likely to hear them finish with Genesis 1:1 as with John 1:1
 - The first five verses of Genesis and John are strikingly similar
 - And of course, this is no accident
 - Genesis begins this way

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Gen. 1:2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Gen. 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Gen. 1:4 God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

Gen. 1:5 God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

- Like Genesis, John begins with a statement of the beginning of Creation and with light and darkness
- John borrows from the words of Genesis so that we might ponder the connection...and ponder we will

- Who is this God Who created all things?
 - The God with the power to create merely by speaking Creation into existence
 - A God Who made light by His word
 - And separated light from darkness by that same word
- John writes to answer that question
 - That God was Jesus Christ
 - The member of the Godhead Who acted to bring about Creation was the Son
 - And since He spoke the Creation into existence, John calls Jesus the Word
 - And to be sure we understood that Christ is the One and only Creator, John adds verse 3
 - Paul echoes this truth in Colossians, which was written decades earlier

[Col. 1:15](#) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[Col. 1:16](#) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

- So John coined the name “The Word” as a succinct way to explain that Creation of Genesis 1 was the work of Christ
- But then John also points out that there is God and there is the Word, and they distinct
 - And yet they were together in the beginning
 - By definition, if two entities are both present before the start of all Creation, then neither created the other
 - So both are God
- Perhaps John was seeking to clarify Genesis 1:26, where God declares, “Let Us make man in Our image.”

- The references to God in the original Hebrew are written in the plural, something that has perplexed Jewish scholars for millennia
- Now we see that the plural tense was always intended to reflect the Trinity of the Godhead
- Ironically, John is embarking on explaining how God made His Son in the image of man, so to speak
- We could talk all night on the mystery of the Trinity
 - But even after hours of talking, we probably wouldn't understand it any better than we do right now
 - Simply put, our God is One God in Three Persons
- Continuing with the Creation story, John gives Christ yet another name: Light
 - Specifically, John says in Jesus is life and He is Light of the world
 - John is establishing a chain of logic as he moves through his opening (or prologue as some call it)
 - Logically, if Jesus is the Creator and God, then He is also the source of all Life, since God is the Life-giver
 - So since Christ is the Creator, in Him is life for men
 - But Christ gives men life in two ways, which is a central theme in John's Gospel, which he introduces here
 - As Creator, He brings physical life,
 - But Christ is also the source of spiritual, eternal life
 - That's what John means when he says the life in Jesus is the Light of men
 - Once again, John is borrowing from the first day of Creation
- Christ created light and darkness on the first day of creation
 - This design is very different than the one God follows for the New Heavens and Earth we all will occupy one day
 - In that new world, we will know only light...there is no darkness according to Rev 22:5

- So if the new, perfect world will have no darkness, why did God include darkness in His plan for our current world?
- John alludes to the answer when he draws this association between light and spiritual life
 - God uses light as a metaphor in scripture for truth, righteousness and the eternal life that results from the righteousness, which we receive in Christ
 - While dark is a metaphor for the opposite, that is sin and the death it produces
- In our present world, we can experience both the righteousness of God and the darkness of man's sinful heart
 - So God has built our present world with Light and dark to serve as convenient metaphors for the concepts of righteousness and sin
 - Then in the world to come, we will no longer know no sin or death
 - And therefore, He no longer needs to have darkness as a metaphor in the Creation
- In that sense, John is saying Jesus is the solution to the problem of darkness
 - Not only does He bring life to our physical bodies, as our Creator, but Jesus is also the Word, the source of Truth
 - And by the revelation of Christ, come to understand He also brings eternal life to our souls by His righteousness
 - He is the Light and the eternal life of the world
 - The question becomes will the darkness embrace the light of Christ?
- John answers in v.5 that Jesus brought His light into the world, but He was not understood by the darkness
 - John neatly summarizes Jesus' entire earthly ministry in that one verse
 - Jesus is revealing Himself to the world, but the world rejected Him

- Note that the first half of the verse is written in the present tense, while the second half is in the past tense
- The revelation of God in Christ is forever available, and therefore it shines without end
- The revelation was not limited simply to the period of Jesus' first visit to earth, but is everlasting
- The second half of the verse refers to the response Jesus received from Israel in His first coming
 - They rejected Him as Messiah
 - So the unbelieving hearts of men did not comprehend the message of the Gospel in Christ
 - This is another major theme in John's Gospel: explaining the rejection of Christ
- John now begins to explain the completeness of that rejection

John 1:6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.

John 1:7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.

John 1:8 He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

- It might be easy to dismiss the Jews rejection of their Messiah as merely misunderstanding or perhaps a case of mistaken identity
 - But John wants to make clear that the rejection was spiritual and supernatural
 - He begins with a simple observation on the ministry of John the Baptist
 - John was sent from God, which means John was a prophet
 - We often say John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet, in the sense that he was called into ministry before the Messiah was revealed
 - John is the one foretold in Isaiah 40, a man who would come from the wilderness proclaiming the Messiah's arrival
 - Notice that John says John the Baptist was a witness, sent to testify about the Light

- John's ministry was essentially to prepare an audience within Israel to be anticipating the Messiah's arrival
 - Not merely to expect Him "one day" but to expect Him imminently
 - As Isaiah said, John was preparing a way for Christ by stirring up an interest within Israel
 - Those who believed in the promised Messiah followed John into the desert and received his baptism as a sign of repentance in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival
 - Then when Jesus finally appeared, John had prepared a audience of disciples who readily followed Jesus from the very first point in His ministry
- As Jesus came to John for His own baptism, He was announcing to John's disciples that He was the Messiah John had foretold
 - And at that moment, John directed his disciples to begin following the Lord in his place
 - Notice in v.8 John clarifies that John the Baptist was not the Messiah himself
 - But he was a prophet who announced the coming Messiah
- John has more to say about John the Baptist, but for now he returns to his theme of Christ as God and Creator as he paints a contrast between the two men

John 1:9 There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

John 1:11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

John 1:13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- As we seek to understand what John is teaching, we need to keep in mind that John wrote knowing that the other three Gospels were available to his readers
 - And in those Gospels, John the Baptist had been well chronicled

- But for some, there was a lingering question of John's role and importance
- Even in Jesus' day, men questioned John's identity, to which John denied he was the Christ
- And some were still some claiming to be disciples of John the Baptist in the day John wrote this Gospel
- There is still a sect, which is hostile to Christianity, living in present day Iraq that claims to be ancestral followers of John the Baptist
- So John takes pains to distinguish John's importance and purpose from Jesus Christ's
 - While John the Baptist was not the Light, John says there was a true Light that entered the world
 - And that Light came to His own, that being the Jewish people
 - The very people John the Baptist had been attempting to prepare
 - And still they did not receive Jesus as the Christ
- The Jewish rejection of Christ is all the more astounding when we consider John's opening theme of Creation
 - Jesus is the source of spiritual truth for all men
 - And He is also the One Who made the world
 - And then, in the mystery of the incarnation, He became a part of that very world He Himself made!
 - Nevertheless, the Creator, Who condescended to enter into His own creation, was then rejected by that same creation
 - Consider the humility of a God Who would orchestrate the circumstances by which He would suffer humiliation at the hands of the very people He spoke into existence and granted life
- The word world (kosmos) is often used in a negative sense in John's Gospel

- At the end of v.10 we see that emphasis as he uses worlds as a euphemism for all unbelievers living in the darkness of their sinful nature
 - In that fallen state, the darkness of men's hearts leave them incapable of understanding truth, of seeing the light
 - Imagine beams of sunlight falling upon a blind person
 - Despite the brightness of that light, the person will remain in darkness for as long as they are blind
 - Someone must first give them eyes to see before they can
- Paul taught something very similar in an earlier day

[2Cor. 4:3](#) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [2Cor. 4:4](#) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- This is another theme of John's Gospel we'll see repeated many times
 - Men are by nature set against Christ by their spiritual blindness
 - And only those the Lord draws to Christ will see the light and come to know the truth
- As John says in v.12, all was not lost in God's plan, for some received Him
 - And all that received Him were granted the right to become adopted children of God
 - Those who believe in His name, in other words, are those who receive Him
 - This is the first of many expressions of the Gospel itself
 - That to believe in the name of Christ brings eternal life
 - How did these few find the eyes to see the Light and believe in His name?
 - In v.13 John answers the question, and in the process he introduces yet another of his themes

- John says they were born – or as he will clarify in chapter, they were born again
 - And that new birth was not of blood, meaning of natural birth or ancestry
 - Nor was it according to the will of the flesh, meaning it does not come because we earned it by our works
 - Nor did it come by the will of man, meaning we didn't make a choice of our own will to open our eyes and see the Light
 - Our new birth comes exclusively by the will of God who grants to us the knowledge of Christ
- Finally, John ends his prologue introducing his final theme, that the fullness of the Father dwells in the Son

[John 1:14](#) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[John 1:15](#) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"

[John 1:16](#) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

[John 1:17](#) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

[John 1:18](#) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

- The incarnation of Christ is another major theme of John's Gospel
 - Jesus didn't just become a man nor did he merely take on a body
 - Such statements leave room for someone to say God came upon a man or merely took the form of man
 - Truly, the Lord became flesh
- The thought that the Eternal Creator God could occupy a living body is a concept that has captivated human consciousness
 - Even the unbelieving world is fascinated with the idea of God incarnate, though they distort it in ignorance
 - The Greeks and Romans had mythology
 - Hollywood has countless messianic deliverers

- Even comic book writers and sports teams love to borrow from the incarnation to create demigods
 - But only once did the true God take on flesh and dwell among men
- The word for dwell in Greek is similar to the word for tabernacle, reminding us that God once dwelled among the Israelites in the tabernacle
 - But that tabernacling was incomplete and temporary
 - When Christ took on flesh, He dwelt in a fullness never before seen
 - A man or woman could look upon the man Jesus, and he or she was seeing the fullness of God the Father
 - No one has ever seen the Father
 - He is Spirit and not visible to the Creation
- Therefore, the Son has explained the Father, not only in words, but in His physical incarnation and life example
 - Explained in Greek is exegesato, from which we get exegete or exegesis, which means to interpret scripture
 - So we can Jesus explained or interpreted the Father to men
- Under the Law virtually no one ever witnessed the glory of God resting on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies
 - Under those circumstances, how much could any man truly know of the Father?
 - Even the patriarchs and the prophets only received glimpses of God in what was revealed
 - As Hebrews summarizes:

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- Notice the writer also combines the concepts of Jesus providing a full revelation of God to a world He created
- That's John's point in raising the issue of the Law and Moses
 - There was a degree of revelation and light and truth and dwelling experienced in past generations under a lessor covenant and deliverer
 - But now the greater things have arrived in fulfillment of God's promises
 - Law has given way to grace and truth
 - Just as John will record Jesus saying later that men must now worship in light of that grace and truth
- John the Baptist was playing the part of another Old Testament prophet as he too testified to Christ
 - He was the final man to provide a partial revelation of God
 - And his purpose was to reveal who would be the Messiah
 - His revelation told men that the fullness of God was to be found in Christ
 - John's role was not to compete or compliment Jesus, since he himself declared that Jesus existed before John
 - Yet we remember according to Luke that John was born six months before Jesus
 - John knew that Jesus was no mere cousin, but God incarnate
 - Jesus was the complete and final expression of God the Father to His Creation
 - He is the begotten God (later to be called the begotten son)
 - This John's unique description of the Son
 - Begotten (monogenous)
 - The word means the only one to come forth
 - It doesn't suggest birth or creation
 - It speaks to a unique manifestation sent out

- And before He was sent out, Christ was in the Father's bosom, another uniquely Jewish idiom
 - It describes an intimate and close relationship
 - Such were the Father and Son before Christ became flesh
 - In fact, John took to describing himself as reclining in the bosom of Christ later in the Gospel, reflecting his own intimate relationship with Jesus
- John has opened the Gospel presenting Christ as the Creator, eternal and one with the Father in the beginning, the Light, the Truth, the fullness of God and yet flesh living among men
 - These themes will reverberate throughout John's 21 chapters
 - Finally, John concludes his prologue and introduces Jesus' public ministry by explaining the completion of John the Baptist's ministry

John 1:19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

John 1:20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

John 1:21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

John 1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"

John 1:23 He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

John 1:24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

John 1:25 They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

John 1:26 John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know.

John 1:27 "It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

John 1:28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

- This encounter begins what appears to be a single week of events that John records up through the wedding in Cana in chapter 2
 - It's a week for the changing of the guard

- John the Baptist is leaving the scene while Jesus is entering
- John's disciples are leaving to join Jesus
- And Jesus is on the brink of revealing Himself in public ministry through miracles and teaching authority
- John begins by relating a moment toward the end of John the Baptist ministry, when he was confronted by men sent from the Pharisees
 - They were questioning him over his authority and identity
 - John answers each question without hesitation
 - He denied he was the Christ
 - He also denied being Elijah and "the" prophet
- Each of these questions has its root in Jewish understanding of OT prophecies
 - The OT tells Israel to expect a conquering, reigning Messiah, or Christ, who will rule the world with a rod of iron
 - But it also tells Israel that a great prophet will come and suffer on behalf of the sins of Israel
 - In addition, Malachi says that the prophet Elijah will return before the great and terrible day of the Lord
- The Pharisees were the religious authorities of Israel, and they had come to see the Christ and the prophet as different people
 - They had no understanding for how a conquering King and a suffering Prophet could both be the same Messiah
 - So they concluded there must be two Messiahs
 - But of course we know it wasn't to be two Messiahs but rather one Messiah with two comings
 - In the first coming, the Messiah will serve as a prophet and as the Lamb of God, suffering for the sins of the world
 - In the Second Coming, Christ will return to rule over His Kingdom
 - And in before each of these arrivals, a forerunner will come to announce the event

- Before the Second Coming, the Bible says that Elijah will return to prepare Israel for their Lord's return
- Malachi gives us that word
- But before the Messiah's first coming, a different forerunner came, John the Baptist
 - Isaiah said that a forerunner would come to make path straight in the wilderness before the Son's arrival
 - That was John the Baptist
- So when the priests and other Levites came to inquiry of John, they guessed three of the four possibilities, but they overlooked the one correct answer
 - John was the prophet Isaiah said would come before the Messiah
 - John quotes from Isaiah 40 to explain his identity
 - The Pharisees would have undoubtedly recognized the quote
 - So they understood that John was calling himself a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy
 - And that meant he was announcing the arrival of the Messiah
 - Since the Pharisees didn't see John in the right way, they couldn't see Jesus either
 - So when they ask John to explain himself, he focused not on himself, but on his purpose: to announce Christ
 - He says though he baptized in water, the real baptism had come
 - Jesus brings a baptism far greater than the water baptism John performed
 - Water has no spiritual properties
 - It is merely an earthly substance intended to picture something spiritual
 - The water baptism John performed pictured the baptism of the Spirit
 - That's the baptism Jesus brings to those who believe in His name

- Then John boldly declared that these men did not know this Messiah
 - Because they were not willing to submit to the baptism of John, then they were demonstrating that their hearts were not prepared for the Messiah
 - The crooked roads that John prepared for the Messiah's arrival were not literal roads
 - They were metaphors for crooked, sinful hearts
 - As John declared his call for repentance in preparation for the Messiah's arrival, some men responded while others didn't
 - A person who challenged John's authority or refused to submit to His baptism were revealing that their hearts were not prepared
 - They remained crooked
 - They were not going to follow the Messiah when He appeared
 - So John rightly said these men did not know the Messiah
 - Yet that Messiah was so great that John was not even worthy to untie his sandals
 - Do we all know Jesus in this way?
 - Are we aware of His deity and authority?
 - Were our hearts prepared to see His Light and hear His truth?
 - Are we still crooked in our sin or have we humbled ourselves and sought the salvation that only comes through Jesus?
 - If not, you're come to the right study