



# “In the Beginning Was the Word”

John 1-4

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## Introduction

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Like all the gospels, the author of the book of John is unnamed in the text itself, though he positions himself prominently as an eyewitness in the story he tells. Traditionally, he is John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles, and John the Revelator as he is known later. In the gospel, he was merely known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2, 8; 21:7, 20). He was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow him and was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ ministry. He was a fisherman by trade, with his father and his brother James, and his business partners Peter and Andrew. Like the other eyewitness account ascribed to Matthew, John’s gospel receives the title “The **Testimony** of John” in the Joseph Smith Translation.

The date of John is difficult to determine, and many scholars place it between A.D. 80 and 110. It cannot be later than about A.D. 125 because of P<sup>52</sup>, a papyrus fragment about the size of a credit card, in the John Rylands collection that contains part of John 8, and dates to that time. It is the oldest New Testament manuscript found. P<sup>52</sup> is a copy and not the original John, therefore the writing must have been long enough before that for copies to be in circulation in Egypt. But parts of it may be even earlier, such as John 1, which appears to be John the Baptist’s testimony (John the apostle was one of the Baptist’s disciples)—in other words, the version we have is edited and is no later than about 110.

That date provides the author the “ideal opportunity to present Jesus as the Messiah who superseded the Jerusalem temple.”<sup>1</sup>

The Greek of the book is not as refined as Luke, using simple language and a small vocabulary. But it is well-written and often thought to be the work of a non-Greek speaker who nevertheless knew the language well. In some cases, he supplies synonyms in proximate phrases to provide a slight variation in meaning. These nuances are particularly noticeable with regards to love—the Father for the Son, the Son for us. He also employs words with multiple meanings to play off their richer symbolism.

Some early leaders in the second-century church rejected the book of John as authentic (Eusebius 3:28; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1; Dionysius, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 6:82), mainly because the Gnostics liked it so much. But today many details of John’s work have been verified by modern scholarship and the book is considered genuine. These details include:

- 1) The discovery of the pool of Bethesda ('house of mercy' or 'grace') in Jerusalem with its five porches (5:1-2).
- 2) John’s use of light and darkness in the (older) Dead Sea Scrolls (1:5; 3:19; 12:35-36), originally thought to be a late Gnostic doctrine only.
- 3) His knowledge of Samaritan beliefs, worship on Mt. Gerizim, and the site of Jacob’s well.

Clement of Alexandria said that John, “aware that the external details had been recorded in the Gospels, was urged by his disciples, and divinely moved by the Spirit, to compose a spiritual gospel” (Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.14.7; see also Muratorian Canon, 9-16).

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<sup>1</sup> Harris, *John*, 5.

## Audience

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John appears to be writing to Gentile members of the Church in Greece and Asia (Turkey) who already had a testimony of Jesus Christ. He was probably very familiar with the other gospels and set as his goal to bring Saints to a “profound understanding of and appreciation for the redeeming mission of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

As an example of this, turning the water into wine at the Cana wedding, the loaves and fishes feeding 5,000 men, and the Bread of Life sermon all enhance our understanding of the sacrament but do not teach the basic principles of it. In fact, John does not give an account of the Sacrament at the Last Supper like Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

A secondary audience may have been Jewish Christians who were facing expulsion from the synagogue as a result of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah. They would need reassurance that their choice to follow Jesus was correct, that he really was the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord. Hearing the voices of Thomas, the blind man healed, and the other powerful testimonies in this work would help sustain them in their faith, even though they had never seen or heard Jesus personally.

## Themes

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John’s gospel is the most unique of the four; estimates are that 90% to 92% of his information is exclusive. While he includes some stories also in the Synoptics (the feeding of the 5,000, the triumphal entry, cleansing the temple, and the Last Supper), it tells stories not found in the others, expands greatly the Last Supper account, and organizes Jesus’ ministry into signs, private teachings, and public passion. He offers the only accounts of Jesus teaching individuals one-on-one (Nicodemus and the woman at the well). He excludes other events recorded in the Synoptics—Gethsemane for example. His style of writing and his “high Christology” (portraying Jesus as divine from the beginning) also set this book apart. Jesus is progressively revealed to the reader as the Son of God, God himself, and the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In the prologue in chapter 1, we are first introduced to this concept of Jesus’ pre-existence, and the work is full of such symbolism teaching us about Jesus not found in other writings.

It is from John that we get the idea that Jesus had a three-year ministry; he alone portrays Jesus visiting the city of Jerusalem three times for three different Passover feasts, while the Synoptics only speak of the Galilean ministry until he goes to Jerusalem for his last Passover. In John, Jesus gives long sermons that reveal who he is, in contrast to the generally shorter sayings of Jesus in the other gospels. Giving the timing of John’s gospel—after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple—he presents Jesus as superseding the temple in worship and the Jewish feasts in ritual.

At least three themes feature prominently in the book, all supporting the central stated purpose of helping readers “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31):

1. Jesus is the **Word of God**. Introduced in John 1, this theme is carried through in several conversations (Mary, 2:1-4; Nicodemus, 3:1-13; the Samaritan woman, 4:7-25; the Pharisees, 8:12-59), where he teaches mortals who he is and how he speaks and acts the words and deeds of the Father (8:40; 14:10, 24; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). D&C 93:8, 19 teach that the Word is the messenger of salvation because he reveals the Father to us (see also John 6:40).
2. John contrasts **light and darkness**, starting in 1:4-5. Jesus is the light (and the life) while Satan is darkness and death. When Nicodemus comes by night (3:2; 7:50), it says something about Nicodemus at that time (later he is a disciple and supporter). When Judas goes out to betray Jesus, he goes out into the night (19:39). See also 3:19. In contrast, Jesus is the light of the world (8:12; 12:35-36, 46). With this contrast comes conflict—light versus darkness, starting with 1:5, which should be translated, ‘And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it’ (KJV “comprehend” is *katalambanō*, meaning overcome or seize).
3. John portrays Jesus not only in pre-existent terms as the Word, but in Old Testament terms, such as **“I am.”** He told the Jews that “Before Abraham was, I am” [*egō eimi*] (8:39-58). This is the same name God shared

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<sup>2</sup> C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Testimony of John,” in Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Volume Five, The Gospels.*, 111.

with Moses in Exodus 3:11-14, so Jesus was claiming to be the same God. He said this at other times, too, but the KJV translation doesn't make it obvious. To the Samaritan woman at the well, the *egō eimi* is hidden in the English text but not the Greek (4:26). When he walked on the water, he also said it (6:20). He also says "I am" with other things, such as the bread of life (6:35); the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the door (10:7, 9); the good shepherd (10:11); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way and the truth and the life (14:5); and the true vine (15:1). Unlike Mark, there is no messianic secret in John.

## Outline of John

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An overall outline for the book of John is as follows, with the section(s) covered in this lesson, in whole or in part, in bold:

- **Prologue (1:1-18)**
- **The Book of Signs—Public Ministry (1:19 – 12:50)**
  - **Early Disciples (1:19-51)**
  - **First through Third Signs: Wedding, Nicodemus, Samaria, and Healing (2:1 – 4:54)**
  - Fourth through Sixth Signs: At the Feasts (5:1 – 10:42)
  - Seventh Sign: Lazarus and Public Ministry Climax (11:1 – 12:50)
- The Last Supper—Private Ministry (13:1 – 17:26)
  - Washing Feet (13:1-30)
  - Farewell Discourse (13:31 – 16:33)
  - High Priestly Prayer (17:1-26)
- Death and Resurrection (18:1 – 21:25)
  - Arrest and Trial (18:1 – 19:16a)
  - Crucifixion and Burial (19:16b-42)
  - Resurrection Appearances (20:1 – 21:25)

Note: In each lesson on the gospels, where there are overlapping or parallel texts, those will be noted in the heading. References in bold are the preferred reading(s) and will be the principal section of analysis, though some unique points in the current gospel will be noted, as well as helpful JST changes.<sup>3</sup>

## Prologue (1:1-18)

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John's introduction is radically different from the other three gospels. His purpose is to summarize in a few phrases the eternal plan of man's progress from creation to eternal life, through Christ, so that we may remember this as the key theme throughout his gospel. Following the pattern of Genesis 1, John highlights familiar themes: light and darkness; God's "Word"—the Only Begotten—is the method of creation (because *logos* is a spoken word but also has purpose and power and is the manifestation of the Father's nature); life comes through God and Light, which is "even the Son of God" (JST John 1:10); Jesus has glory and truth and is the only begotten Son.

D&C 93 is very Johannine in its language, especially verses 2-23, and are worth careful comparison.

Typically, John 1:1-18 is a translation exercise for beginning Greek students. Accordingly, here is an alternate translation to consider.

*John 1:1-18 (AT)*

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<sup>3</sup> Not all JST changes are noted, only those of textual or doctrinal interest. Interested readers are encouraged to see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* or the manuscripts themselves on the Joseph Smith Papers website ([josephsmithpapers.org](http://josephsmithpapers.org)).

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was at the side of the God, and God was the Word. 2 He was in the beginning near to the God. 3 Everything was made by him, and apart from him was not even one thing made which came into being.

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. 5 And the light shone in the obscurity, and the obscurity did not overcome it.

6 There came into being a man sent out from beside God, whose name was John. 7 He [John] came as a testator in order to testify with respect to the light, so that all might have faith through him. 8 He was not that light, but [came] to be a testator of the light.

9 He [Jesus] was the true light which lights every human that comes into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being by him, and the world did not recognize him.

11 He came unto his own, and his own did not accept him. 12 But as many as accepted him, to them he granted the authority to become the children of God, to them that have faith in his authority, 13 who were born, not from blood, nor from the desires of the flesh, nor from the desires of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh, and encamped by us, and we perceived his glory as the only born from the Father, filled with grace and truth.

15 John testified of him, and exclaimed, saying, "This is the one of whom I spoke, he who comes after me—he was preferred before me. 16 And out of his fullness we have been wholly removed [from the world], and grace upon grace. 17 For through Moses the rules were given; [but] grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ."

18 No man hath experienced God at any time; [but] the only born son, who is in the bosom of the Father; he has revealed him.

**1:1 In the beginning.** John immediately takes us to Genesis, for he begins with the same words. He leads us as far back as he can, to show that Jesus was always there. The first five verses were likely an early Christian hymn, which John brought into his account but broke up starting at verse 6, though the hymn could have continued again down to verse 14 or perhaps 18.

**1:1 the Word.** The Greek logos is used 330 times in the NT with a variety of meanings, including "thought," "reason," "word," "message," or "teaching."<sup>4</sup> All of these apply to Jesus' role in the time before his birth. This strengthens the tie to Genesis 1 where God speaks and creation obeys.

**1:1 the Word was with God.** "God" (Greek *theos*) refers to the Father, so the Word was with God from the beginning.

**1:1 the Word was God.** Not only was the Word with the Father, but the Word was also God with him; they have godhood in common. Jesus is called "God" three times in John's work: this verse, 20:28, and 20:31, but "the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse."<sup>5</sup>

#### 1:1 JST

John 1:1 KJV	JST
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.	In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the Word, and the Word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, *John*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel*, 31.

The JST instructs that not only was Jesus there from the beginning, but so was his gospel, and that he is of God. In this verse, “the Word” is the gospel; in JST John 1:14-15, the Son is also the Word. Indeed, the gospel is the good news of Jesus and his Atonement, thus making the gospel the word about the Word. Isaiah 55:11 portrays the word coming down to fulfill God’s will, then returning to him, having accomplished its mission. So Jesus as the Word comes down to earth and fully does the will of the Father.

**1:3 All things were made by him.** Jesus’ role in the creation of the universe is made clear. As the Word of God, he executes on the Father’s plan, which includes the creation of “worlds without number” by “the word of my power . . . which is mine Only Begotten son” (Moses 1:32-33).

#### 1:4 JST

John 1:4 KJV	JST
In him was life; and the life was the light of men.	In him was <b>the gospel</b> ; and <b>the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men</b> .

The good news (gospel) mentioned at the beginning came from Christ; it brings life and light to mankind. Compare 3 Nephi 9:15, 18.

**1:5 the light shineth in the darkness.** As in the creation in Genesis, there is darkness until God speaks and the light exists. So with the Word, who is light, as he shines in the darkness of the world, and the darkness could not overcome the light. Light versus darkness is an important theme throughout John’s gospel.

#### 1:5 JST

John 1:5 KJV	JST
And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.	And the light shineth in <b>the world</b> ; and the <b>world perceiveth</b> it not.

The darkness of the KJV becomes “the world” in the JST, perhaps equating the two but certainly showing that the light and the message of salvation that Jesus brought was not recognized by many in the world. “Comprehended” is also changed to “perceiveth,” a valid translation of the Greek *katalambanō*. Compare D&C 88:49; 6:21; 10:57-58; 11:11; 34:1-3; 39:2; 45:7.

**1:6 a man sent from God.** During the prologue of verses 1-18, there are two insertions that prefigure the rest of the chapter (the other is at v. 15). The story of John the Baptist features prominently in all four gospels.

#### 1:7 JST

John 1:7 KJV	JST
The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, <b>that all men</b> through him might believe.	The same came <b>into the world</b> for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, <b>to bear record of the gospel through the Son, unto all, that</b> through him <b>men</b> might believe.

John’s mission was to bear witness of the Light of the world but also testify of the good news that Jesus brought of his sacrifice, atonement, and resurrection.

**1:10 the world knew him not.** Echoing back to vv. 3 and 5, the Word came into the world (Greek *kosmos*, which can also mean the universe, orderliness, and humanity) which he had made, but which did not recognize him or know who he was.

**1:11 received him not.** “Received” is Greek *paralambanō*, meaning to take to oneself, bring along, accept, or receive. The sense is that “his own” people did not even embrace him.

**1:12 power to become the sons of God.** Those who do receive him receive power from him, to be adopted into the family of the God and become his children (the noun used encompasses both male and female). The word

translated “become” here is the same used in conversation with Nicodemus in chapter 3 about being “born again,” which ties into the concepts of v. 13.

**1:14 *the Word was made flesh.*** It is hard to read John 1 and not think of 1 Nephi 11:16-33 where Nephi's angelic guide asks if he knows the condescension of God, and in response is shown a vision of the mortal Messiah's life, finally ending in crucifixion. John says that the word became "flesh" (*sarx*, meaning 'flesh', 'meat', 'body', and by extension, 'human nature'), which flesh is subject to all the pains of the world (compare Isaiah 53:3-11).

**1:14 *and dwelt among us.*** "Dwelt" is *skēnoō*, meaning 'to tent', 'encamp', or 'reside' (only used in this book and Revelation in all of the New Testament). It is reminiscent of the Tabernacle of the Old Testament where God dwelt among his people. Now the divine presence takes on flesh and temporarily lives among his people again, but in a form that the world (in darkness) did not know.

**1:14 *full of grace and truth.*** Many verses in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants use phrasing from v. 14; see 1 Nephi 15:13; 2 Nephi 2:6; 25:12-14; Mosiah 3:5; Alma 5:48; 9:26; Doctrine and Covenants 66:12; 76:23; 93:11.

#### 1:15 JST

John 1:15 KJV	JST
John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This <b>was</b> he of whom I spake, He <b>that</b> cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.	John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This <b>is</b> he of whom I spake, He <b>who</b> cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. <b>For in the beginning was the Word, even the Son, who is made flesh, and sent unto us by the will of the Father.</b>

Revisiting the theme of verse 1, in the JST “the Word” is declared to also be “the Son” (he is named in KJV v. 17), as well as the good news about the Son that is the gospel.

#### 1:16 JST

John 1:16 KJV	JST
And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.	And <b>as many as believe on his name shall receive of his fulness. And of his fullness</b> have all we received, <b>even immortality and eternal life through his grace.</b>

The JST’s definition of the “fullness” of the gospel of Christ is the combination of both immortality (living forever) and eternal life (living with God). See D&C 93:12.

**1:17 *the law was given by Moses.*** John doesn't leave us merely pondering the mortality of Christ. Instead, he takes us back to the beginning again, summarizes the points already made, and contrasts the promises of Jesus' gospel with the Mosaic Law that it fulfilled.

**1:18 *the only begotten Son.*** Many of the best manuscripts read “the only begotten God” here, equating in title God the Father, who is not seen by man, and God the Son, who declares him.

#### 1:18 JST

John 1:18 KJV	JST
No man hath seen God at any time; <b>the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.</b>	<b>And no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son, for except it is through him no man can be saved.</b>

Christ is the mediator between God and man to bring us to God, and Joseph Smith knew personally that the Father's direct interactions with man consist of bearing record of the Son (see Joseph Smith-History 1:17).

# The Book of Signs—Public Ministry (1:19 – 12:50)

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In these chapters, John gives seven specific signs of Jesus' identity, each of which shows something about the nature of the Messiah. In between are other stories that recount something about Jesus' mission and teachings. The seven signs are:

1. Changing water into wine (2:1-11)
2. Cleansing the temple (2:13-22)
3. Healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54)
4. Healing a lame man (5:1-15)
5. Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-15)
6. Healing the blind man (9:1-41)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

## Early disciples (1:19-51)

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The calls of the early disciples in the Synoptics take place as they are working, with no insight into how they first met or heard of Jesus, though such a meeting is implied in their immediate acceptance of his invitation to follow him. John supplies first meeting stories for several of the earliest disciples, many of whom became apostles.

### John Testifies of Jesus – John 1:19-34

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What day was Jesus baptized? To try and determine this, we have to work through several verses in John 1 and 2.

- Day 1: John testifies about Jesus (1:19-28)
- Day 2: John sees Jesus (the day of the baptism?) "the next day" (1:29-34)
- Day 3: Two of John's disciples follow Jesus home "the next day" (1:35-39)
- Day 4: Simon meets Jesus the next day, since the encounter with the two disciples was late ("the tenth hour" or about 4:00 pm) the previous day (1:40-42)
- Day 5: Philip and Nathanael meet Jesus "the day following" (1:43-51)
- Day 6: [no information]
- Day 7: The marriage at Cana "the third day"—counting starts the first day, so two days after the last mentioned item (2:1-2)

Thus we have a pretty detailed view from John of the first week of Jesus' public ministry—seven days of action that follow the verses of Jesus as the Creator, the Word of God. However, pinning those to days presents a challenge. If we suppose that Jesus and the disciples were in Cana at the beginning of the wedding (which would have started on a Wednesday) and that day 6 was a travel day to get to Cana from the Jordan River area, then Jesus was baptized on a Friday (Day 2). It is also possible (though I think less likely) that Day 6, for which there is no information, was the Sabbath, and that they joined the marriage, already in progress since the previous Wednesday, on Sunday (Day 7). That would mean that Jesus was perhaps baptized on Tuesday (Day 2). A third possibility comes from the JST of John 2:1, which reads, "And **on** the third day **of the week** there was a marriage..." The third day of the week would be Tuesday, meaning Jesus was baptized on the previous Thursday.

**1:19 this is the record of John.** A record within a record—these verses in the gospel of John are the testimony of John the Baptist.

**1:19 Who art thou?** The "priests and Levites from Jerusalem" were sent to ask John. John was one of them, a priest, given that his father was Zacharias (Luke 1). But as they heard the stories about him, they came to query him about his identity—or at least, who he claimed to be.

**1:20 I am not the Christ.** John was clear from the beginning that he was not the Messiah but was the forerunner.

### 1:20 JST

John 1:20 KJV	JST
And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.	And he confessed, and denied not <b>that he was Elias</b> ; but confessed, <b>saying</b> , I am not the Christ.

The KJV is not clear what John did not deny. The JST fills that in, explaining that he did not deny his role as an Elijah (Elias) or preparer of the way, but did speak clearly and deny being the Messiah.

1:21 **Elias**. Or, Elijah, the great prophet whose return was anticipated as preceding the Messiah.

1:21 **JST**

John 1:21 KJV	JST
And they asked him, <b>What</b> then? art thou Elias? And he <b>saith</b> , I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.	And they asked him, <b>saying</b> How then art thou Elias? And he <b>said</b> , I am not <b>that Elias who was to restore all things</b> . <b>And they asked him, saying</b> , Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Elias/Elijah (the office) has both the forerunner and restorer function; John indicated that he was not acting in the role of a restorer, meaning that he was the forerunner type of Elias.

1:21 **that prophet**. Referring to Deuteronomy 18:15-18, this prophecy of Moses is commonly seen today as a prediction of Jesus Christ, though in John's day the Jews interpreted this as a third figure coming at the end times—the Messiah, Elijah, and the unnamed prophet (see also v. 25).

1:22 **that we may give an answer to them that sent us**. The priests and Levites sent to John were also Pharisees (v. 24), so they could have been sent by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, or by Pharisees and scribal leaders. So far, John had only given them negative answers—who he was not. They could not go back with a list of what he claimed not to be, so they asked him again who he was.

1:23 **the voice of one crying in the wilderness**. John portrayed himself in terms of Isaiah 40:3, the one who clears the road and straightens out the path for the king to follow. He was a forerunner, there to prepare the way.

1:25 **JST**

John 1:25 KJV	JST
And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not <b>that</b> Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?	And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not <b>that the</b> Christ, nor Elias <b>who was to restore all things</b> , neither that prophet?

The JST clarifies that John's audience agreed with his assessment that he was not an Elijah-restorer. But if he was merely the forerunner, why was he baptizing?

1:26 **there standeth one among you, whom ye know not**. Returning to a point of the first 18 verses, the Baptist declared that the Messiah was already among them, though they did not recognize him. In other words, the king for whom John prepared the way was not coming in some far-off distant day, but was already present. This prepares us for his declaration the very next day.

1:27 **JST**

John 1:27 KJV	JST
He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.	He it is <b>of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias</b> , who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, <b>or whose place I am not able to fill: for he shall baptize, not only with water, but with fire, and with the Holy Ghost</b> .

John declared that Jesus was the prophet of Deuteronomy 18 and also the Elijah-restorer of all things that John was not. This is how he explained that he baptized in water in a preparatory way, while the Eilas-restorer coming next would immerse them in fire and the Holy Spirit of God.

1:28 **Bethabara beyond Jordan.** The accepted Greek text today has *Bethania*, or Bethany, and so read many modern translations. Though many of the oldest manuscripts say *Bethania*, not all of them do, so it could be that the correct reading is indeed Bethany; the KJV says Bethabara because that reading was preferred by many post-apostolic, early Church leaders, mostly because the only Bethany they knew was the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, near Jerusalem. However, it is just as likely that John 1:28 originally read Bethabara (or perhaps Bethabarah, a town attested in the Old Testament as near the place where the Israelites forded the Jordan River—see Joshua 15:5-6, 61; 18:21; also Judges 7:24), and was later changed to Bethany by scribes unacquainted with Palestinian geography. This is interesting because The Book of Mormon says that John was baptizing “in Bethabara, beyond Jordan” (1 Nephi 10:9). If Bethany were the correct reading, The Book of Mormon could be challenged as simply be a copy of the King James Version, but since the matter cannot be easily settled, The Book of Mormon naming could be the correct one and thus add weight to the arguments in favor of Bethabara. As it is, the matter remains unsettled.<sup>6</sup>

1:29 **the next day.** Meaning, the day after John spoke to the visiting Jewish leaders.

1:29 **the Lamb of God.** John is the only New Testament author to use this name for the Savior (John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:6; 7:17; 14:4, 10; 15:3; 19:9; 21:22-23; 22:1, 3). It hearkens back to Genesis 22:8, where Abraham promised his perplexed son, Isaac, that “God will provide himself a lamb” for their offering, and reflects the Passover offering of a lamb as a symbol for Christ.

1:30 **This is he of whom I said.** John told everyone, ‘Remember the person I talked about yesterday and said he was already among you? Here he is!’

1:32 **I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove.** John’s gospel doesn’t record anything about Jesus being baptized but does capture this event that happened with that baptism. Verse 31 implies that the whole reason John was there was to baptize the Messiah and bear witness of him.

1:33 **he that sent me.** Who sent John? God himself did so, commanding him to watch for and bear testimony of the one on whom he saw “the Spirit descending,” for this was the one who would baptize “with the Holy Ghost.” In other words, John was given a divine sign by which he might be certain of the Messiah when he baptized him.

1:34 **this is the Son of God.** Though Matthew, Mark, and Luke also use this phrase, John uses it most often. In his gospel, Jesus holds the full authority of the Father and as His Son can fully speak for him.

### Early disciples called – John 1:35-51

While the Synoptic gospels have accounts of Jesus calling his first disciples (Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11), the settings are entirely different. John portrays this happening in conjunction with Jesus’ baptism and John’s preaching, away from Galilee and the activities of fishing.

1:35 **the next day.** The day after John declared Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.

1:36 **Behold the Lamb of God.** For the second day in a row, John declared his testimony of Jesus, but this time instead of very publicly, he was directing it at two of his disciples who were standing with him (v. 35).

1:37 **they followed Jesus.** Though “followed” could mean they became his disciples, the story indicates otherwise, giving this the more generic meaning of simply following him where he went. They didn’t say anything to him at first seeming to simply want to observe what he did.

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<sup>6</sup> Craig J. Ostler, “The Lands of the Gospel of John,” in Judd, Ostler, and Draper, *The Testimony*, 213-214.

1:38 ***Jesus turned, and saw them following.*** Seeing these two trailing him for some time, Jesus confronted them, asking, "What seek ye?"

1:39 ***Come and see.*** The men had asked Jesus where he lived (v. 38) and his answer was to come and see for themselves. This is a great missionary answer: when people ask about the Church, just invite them to "come and see."

1:39 ***tenth hour.*** Or, about 4:00 pm, a time when people began to make plans and settle in for the evening.

1:40 ***Andrew.*** Named as one of the two disciples who first followed Jesus. The other is not named, so the inference is that it was John, the storyteller. Andrew's family and John's family were partners in fishing, so it makes sense for them to be together.

1:41 ***his own brother Simon.*** This is the first mention of Simon in John's gospel, and he will continue to feature in the story until the very last chapter.

1:41 ***We have found the Messias.*** The Hebrew word is *mashiach*, meaning 'the anointed one.' The Greek equivalent is *christos*, from which we get Christ.

1:42 ***he brought him to Jesus.*** Andrew brought Simon to Jesus to meet him. We don't hear much about Andrew in the Synoptics, but this role in John's work is intriguing. John seems to be saying that what Andrew did was bring people to Jesus.

1:42 ***thou shalt be called Cephas.*** "Cephas" (probably written Kefas) is an Aramaic term meaning, 'rock' or 'stone.' The Greek equivalent is *petros*, from which we get Peter. Jesus renamed the man who would become his chief apostle, not an unusual experience for rabbis of the day. On several occasions, Jesus seems to call him 'Peter' when he was doing well and 'Simon' when there was some need for rebuke or teaching, as if he was saying, 'Today you're being the old man, Peter,' or 'Today you are being the rock that I need to build up this kingdom.'

1:43 ***The day following.*** The day after meeting Simon and giving him his new name, Jesus seemed to be ready to head back to Galilee, but was delayed after finding Philip and calling him to "Follow me," which is clearly used in the sense of being a disciple, not just following Jesus around.

1:44 ***Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.*** This is the only reference to them being from Bethsaida; other references only point to Capernaum as their current home. John seems to be saying that the three of them grew up together in Bethsaida.

1:45 ***Nathanael.*** His name means 'God has given'; this name is not mentioned in the other gospels, but he may be the same one called Bartholomew (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; and Acts 1:13), an Aramaic term meaning 'son of Tholomaios,' making Nathanael his given name. Some scholars disagree with this connection, making him either a disciple not of the Twelve or perhaps someone who died or fell away later.

1:46 ***Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*** When Philip told Nathanael about Jesus, the latter was incredulous, citing the belief that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, not Nazareth. Philip's answer echoed Jesus': "Come and see."

1:47 ***Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*** Or, 'Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no deception,' which could be a quote from Psalm 32:2.

1:48 ***When knowest thou me?*** Or, 'have we met? How do you know me'

1:48 ***when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.*** It was common for people to leave their hot houses and go outside to read or perform other activities. A fig tree was an especially good place because of the good shade provided by the large leaves. It also had the tradition of being a good place to study the scriptures and to pray. It's likely that Nathanael was reading the scriptures about the Messiah and praying for understanding when Jesus 'saw' him there, thus heightening his amazement at Jesus knowing about it.

1:49 **Rabbi, thou art the Son of God.** Nathanael's strong reaction to Jesus' simple statement hints that there was more going on here. Besides the potential that he was reading about the Messiah under the tree (v. 48), he may have been in a different town or something and so realized that Jesus could only have known about his being under the fig tree by divine knowledge.

1:50 **thou shalt see greater things than these.** Nathanael's ability to quickly recognize Jesus and show faith in him, in spite of his first reaction of incredulity to Philip's invitation led to Jesus' promise of greater things to come. As Jesus' disciple, he certainly would have seen many other greater things than Jesus telling him about his location; in John's gospel, seven specific signs that would point to the identity that Nathanael just declared.

1:51 **ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God.** Jesus quoted Genesis 28:12, referring to Jacob's experience seeing angels ascending and descending a ladder leading up to heaven. But in this case, instead of a ladder, Nathanael was promised to see the angels ascending and descending "upon the Son of man," a reference to Jesus being the bridge between earth and heaven.

## First through Third Signs: Wedding, Nicodemus, Samaria, and Healing (2:1 – 4:54)

### First Sign: Wedding at Cana – John 2:1-11

Weddings lasted several days—often a week (see Judges 14:12), with wine needed for all the guests during the whole period. The host here seems to have underestimated the need, perhaps because there were many late arrivals, which is what Jesus and his new disciples may have been. Though he has already begun to call people to follow him as disciples, the wedding also indicates that he was not quite ready for a larger, public ministry.

2:1 **the third day.** Meaning two days after the last event, the encounter with Nathanael.

2:1 **in Cana of Galilee.** The location of this town is unknown, though two possible locations present themselves. The more likely seems to be the Beit Netofa valley about five miles north of the modern town named Cana. The meaning of the name is 'a place of reeds,' which matches this location nicely.<sup>7</sup>

2:2 **to the marriage.** The inclusion of Jesus and his mother, as well as close disciples, suggests the wedding of a close relative. Some have speculated this was Jesus' wedding but there is basis in the text for that conclusion.

2:3 **They have no wine.** Mary, Jesus' mother, came to him when the wedding party ran out of wine, bringing this to his attention. While her role is unknown, she was in a position to tell the servants what to do (v. 5).

2:4 **Woman.** This was more respectful than it appears in English—in fact, some think it a bit too respectful for a mother-son exchange, while others see him paying honor to her by this title. A better (not literal) translation might be 'Dear woman' or even 'My lady.'<sup>8</sup>

### 2:4 JST

John 2:4 KJV	JST
Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.	Jesus said unto her, Woman, what wilt thou have me to do for thee? That will I do, for mine hour is not yet come.

Other translations change the wording to be more indifferent than pushy: "what does this have to do with me?" (ESV) or "why do you involve me?" (NIV). The JST softens Jesus' tone in his reply to his mother into a question about what she would like done, and instead of sounding dismissive to her, has him freely offer his support.

<sup>7</sup> Ostler, "The Lands," 216.

<sup>8</sup> Robert E. Lund, "Women in the Writings of John," in Judd, Ostler, and Draper, *The Testimony*, 127.

**2:4 mine hour is not yet come.** Jesus had already started preaching and was gathering disciples, so the "hour" did not refer to the beginning of his ministry, but perhaps to a transition to a more public element as he performed miracles. Jesus may also be saying that he is prepared to help but at a time of his own choosing, not hers.

**2:5 Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.** Mary understood Jesus' words and simply instructed the servants (not slaves but *diakonos*, deacons, meaning those who wait on tables) to stand ready to do whatever Jesus required. This indicates that Mary had an official role at the wedding, perhaps over the food and drink.

**2:6 six waterpots of stone.** The vessels were made of stone because under Mosaic law stone could not become unclean. These large stone vessels were not to hold drinking water but water for ritual cleansing.

**2:6 two or three firkins.** The Greek reads "two or three *metrētēs*"; one *metrētēs* equals about ten gallons, so with six of them, that was a total of 120-180 gallons, indicating a large crowd at the wedding feast.

**2:6 purifying.** Because the water was used for ritual cleansing of utensils and the guests, the water was 'living water,' meaning it was pure, flowing water. Wine was commonly associated with blood because of its color. The symbolism in John of Jesus changing the living water into wine is thus seen as a symbol of his own future sacrifice where the Living Water gives his blood in our behalf.

**2:8 Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.** Imagine the servants concern, having filled the pots with water, in the next moment being asked to give that to the man in charge of the entire affair ("chief steward" (NRSV) or "master of the banquet" (NIV)). The surprise in their eyes when it was clearly no longer water must have been fun to watch!

**2:9 but the servants which drew the water knew.** No one told the man in charge, but the servants must have been waiting anxiously to hear his pronouncement. What if it was terrible wine that tasted like vinegar? They could lose their jobs, or worse.

**2:10 thou hast kept the good wine until now.** The best wine would be served at the beginning of the feast, gradually serving lesser quality wine as the week went on. The wine Jesus made not only filled the need but was of excellent quality.

**2:11 This beginning of miracles.** As mentioned above, this was the first of Jesus' signs of his identity and mission.

**2:11 (JST)** "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and **the faith of** his disciples ~~believed on~~ **was strengthened in him.**" The miracle of turning water into wine did not make any converts but it did bolster the faith of some who had already begun to believe in him from his teachings of the first week.

## First Passover; Second Sign: cleansing the temple – John 2:12-25

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John shows Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of his ministry, while the other gospels have it at the end. Some scholars think this indicates a mistake on someone's part, but it seems more likely that the event simply worked better in John's account at the beginning, to set the stage for the animosity between Jesus and the Jewish leaders from the beginning. John's account provides unique elements of the experience with the animals named, the making of a whip, and the image of the coins scattering across the ground.

**2:12 went down to Capernaum.** John doesn't say that Jesus moved to that city and a short visit is indicated by the phrase "they continued there not many days." John is also uniquely pointing out that Jesus' mother, brothers, and other disciples went there.

**2:13 Passover.** William Tyndale coined this phrase in English (though not when he translated the New Testament, but later, when he translated the Old; in the New Testament he called it "ester" [Easter] or sometimes "the Iewes ester" [the Jew's Easter]). The name of the holiday in Hebrew is *pesach*, meaning 'exemption,' 'placate,' or 'soothe.' In Greek, a transliteration is used, *pascha*, from which we get 'the Pascal feast.'

**2:13 Jesus went up to Jerusalem.** John marked three Passovers in Jesus' ministry (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), with potentially two years between one of them (or a fourth Passover in 5:1), thus making his ministry three full years. If we only had the Synoptic gospels, we believe his entire ministry was only a few weeks in Galilee before he went to Jerusalem to be killed.

**2:14 the changers of money sitting.** People had to exchange common coins of the Roman type for temple coins to be used to purchase things within the temple courtyard. These money changers charged customers for the exchange, making quite a bit of money from those who had no choice but to use their services.

**2:15 a scourge of small cords.** Or, a whip. This was not an act of sudden anger; Jesus was in control as he did this. One Seminary teacher I know demonstrated the deliberate nature of this act by having two girls come forward while he read this passage; one with long hair and the other who braided it (you could also do it with three small ropes).

**2:15 drove them all out of the temple.** Cleansing the house of leaven (yeast) was and still is an important part of the Passover tradition. The family would go through and search out every crumb that might have leaven in it so the house was ritually ready for the feast. Likewise, Jesus cleansed his Father's house of uncleanness at this first Passover of his ministry to restore the proper worship of God.

**2:16 Take these things hence.** The birds would be in cages, so Jesus could not drive them out like animals and people. He forcefully told the people selling them to pick up and get out, though.

**2:16 make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.** Probably a reference to Zechariah 14:21 (the KJV says "Canaanite" but the better translation is 'traders').

**2:17 The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.** The scripture the disciples remembered was Psalm 69:9.

**2:18 What sign shewest thou unto us.** Having cleansed the temple, the Jewish leaders demanded to know what Jesus' authority was to do such a thing, requesting that he demonstrate his authority by a sign from heaven. He gave them no such sign but rather predicted his death in a cryptic but relevant way, based on what he had just accomplished: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19, 21).

**2:20 Forty and six years was this temple in building.** In Jesus' day, the work on the temple was still going on. It was finished only several years after his crucifixion; all his life it was a construction project in some way. Interestingly, the temple was started in 19 BC, the 18th year of Herod the Great's rule. While most of the work was done in ten years, work on the other buildings and such continued for many years. If this was the forty-sixth year of construction, that makes the date AD 27-28, giving us a good fix on the time of Jesus' ministry.

**2:22 his disciples remembered.** John's editorial comment was that they didn't understand at the time he said it, but later Jesus' disciples remembered this saying about tearing down the temple and realized the interpretation was about his death and resurrection.

**2:23 many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles.** John doesn't mention any of these miracles or signs but does remark that he created many disciples as a result of them.

**2:24 Jesus did not commit himself unto them.** Though many believed on him, Jesus held back. What did he hold back? "Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them" (NRSV). Knowing the hearts of men, he was yet reluctant to trust his own safety to but very few.

**2:25 he knew what was in man.** A mark of God's power was knowing the hearts of men. John asserts that Jesus had this power, then gives us two examples in the next two chapters: Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

## Nicodemus – John 3:1-21

**3:1 Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.** Nicodemus was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish counsel (see also v. 10).

**3:2 came to Jesus by night.** John uses the contrast of light and darkness often in his book. Nicodemus came at night, perhaps to protect his reputation or perhaps to avoid the crowds, or even waiting until the Sabbath had ended. But the symbolism could be that he, a ruler of the Jews, was in darkness (reflected in Jesus' words to him; see v. 10) and came to Jesus for greater light (vv. 19-21).

**3:2 thou art a teacher come from God.** Nicodemus plays the honor-shame game, offering Jesus a complement that he expected Jesus would reciprocate, especially since, in his view, he was higher on the social scale. Jesus never goes along with this type of interaction.

**3:2 no man can do these miracles.** John has only recorded one miracle, the water into wine at Cana, which was likely known to very few. This is another hint that Jesus performed many more miracles while at Jerusalem which remain unrecorded (see also 2:23).

**3:3 Except a man be born again.** This phrase is alternately translated "born from above" (NRSV, NJB) or "born a newe" (TNT). The concept is a new birth that comes from heaven.

**3:3, 5 see the kingdom of God . . . enter into the kingdom of God.** To see the kingdom is to have a testimony; to enter is to be perfectly obedient and justified. Jesus' use of the word "see" also foreshadows the healing of the blind man in chapter 9.

**3:4 How can a man be born when he is old?** It's not clear if Nicodemus was intentionally ignoring the obvious symbolic meaning of Jesus' statement or if he was probing to get Jesus to be explicit about the symbol.

**3:5 born of water and of the Spirit.** Going back to John's language in chapter 1, Jesus proclaims that baptism by water and baptism (immersion) of the Spirit are both essential to being part of God's kingdom.

**3:8 the wind bloweth where it listeth.** "Wind" and "spirit" are the same word in Greek, *pneuma*, so it is a clever metaphor to teach the working of the Spirit. Just as the wind blows and you cannot see it coming, so the Spirit moves (or using John's language, 'breathes,' which is the same word as "bloweth") among people as it pleases, touching the lives and hearts of those who are receptive.

**3:9 How can these things be?** Nicodemus declared that he didn't understand. The sense is that he is dismissing what appears to be an odd teaching, to him.

**3:10 knowest not these things?** Jesus offered a pointed rebuke—how can you claim a position as a teacher and leader and not understand something as basic as the workings of the Spirit or the need to be born into God's family and kingdom?

**3:11 ye receive not our witness.** The "ye" is plural; Jesus was declaring that those with Nicodemus (he implied he was representing a group in v. 2) did not accept Jesus' testimony and teachings, even though Jesus knew them to be true.

**3:12 earthly things . . . heavenly things.** Perhaps Jesus was alluding to what he did in the temple, declaring that the earthly temple should be cleansed. Whatever it was, his point is that how would Nicodemus believe him about important spiritual matters if he could not accept Jesus' teaching about simpler, less important things.

**3:13 he that came down from heaven.** "[Jesus] has not had to go up to heaven to acquire [divine wisdom], but he has come down from heaven to impart it."<sup>9</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 30:12.

**3:13 which is in heaven.** This phrase is not in the best manuscripts and is deleted from modern translations. It likewise doesn't make a lot of sense, because Jesus is on the earth at this time, not in heaven.

**3:14 as Moses lifted up the serpent.** See Numbers 21:8-9, where a brass serpent is put on a pole and people could look on it and live, if bitten by the poisonous snakes. Also Helaman 8:14-15.

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel*, 87.

**3:14 must the Son of man be lifted up.** In John's gospel, Jesus declared at the beginning of his ministry what his fate would be; "lifted up" is *hupsoō*, meaning both to be raised or lifted up (as on the cross) and honored or exalted on high (as Jesus experienced after his resurrection).

**3:15 not perish, but have eternal life.** As with the serpent example, those who look to the lifted up Christ will not perish but will instead enjoy eternal life. This is the first of many uses of that term in John's gospel, which means more than living forever: "In the Gospel of John that meaning is certainly present, but eternal life here is the very life of God which resides in the eternal Word."<sup>10</sup>

**3:16 God so loved the world.** Perhaps the most quoted scripture in John, verse 15 starts the concept and verse 16 expands on it. Jesus came to earth because God loved his children, and those who believe in him as the Son of God (not just as a teacher, as Nicodemus had declared) will enjoy life everlasting. Note that though 15 and 16 use different words in English in their last phrase, both use the same words in Greek, *aiōnios zōē*, meaning life that has no beginning or end.

**3:17 God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.** Jesus has a role as our judge, to be sure. But that is not the primary purpose of his existence. Rather, he came to earth and continues to minister, as he did before his birth, in order to save us—which is *sōzō*, meaning to bring to safety, preserve from harm, rescue, or deliver.

**3:18 he that believeth not is condemned.** This may have been directed at Nicodemus himself, since the pronouns are singular in this verse, not plural as in many of the preceding ones.

**3:18 JST**

John 3:18 KJV	JST
He <del>that</del> believeth on him is not condemned: but he <del>that</del> believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed <del>in</del> the name of the only begotten Son of God.	He <b>who</b> believeth on him is not condemned: but he <b>who</b> believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed <b>on</b> the name of the only begotten Son of God, <b>which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testified of me.</b>

The JST brings the scriptures into the discussion with Nicodemus, declaring that the words of the prophets all testify of Christ's mission.

**3:19 men loved darkness rather than light.** If people rejected Jesus' message, it was because they had chosen evil and sin over truth and good deeds, bringing darkness upon them. Once their deeds are cloaked in darkness, they do not want to step back into the light of truth, "lest [their] deeds should be reproved" (v. 20). Compare D&C 10:21 and 29:45.

**3:21 he that doeth truth cometh to the light.** Those who come to Christ and strive to do his will do not like to hide in the dark but come to the light, anxious to have their good deeds "manifest," that they might testify that their goodness is "wrought in God," or 'in God's name.'

### John testifies of Jesus again – John 3:22-36

**3:22 Jesus and his disciples . . . baptized.** Only in John's gospel do we read of Jesus and his disciples performing baptisms, though in the Synoptics we see Jesus baptized and he is recorded commanding his disciples to baptize others.

**3:23 AEnon near Salim.** This exact place is unknown, though there are several candidates. "Aenon" means 'springs,' as in water; "Salim" is 'peace' or 'peaceful.' It was a peaceful place with much water. John was perhaps further south than he was in chapter 1. Some believe he went away from the Jordan to the spring of Tell Sheikh Selim where there are pools of water surrounded by growth for privacy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Ostler, "The Lands," 214-215.

3:24 ***John was not yet cast into prison.*** John shows us that for a time, Jesus and John were both preaching and teaching and baptizing, a picture we don't see in the Synoptics.

3:25 ***about purifying.*** Purifying took many forms in their society, but given the context of this one, what they are talking about is using a *miqvah*, a pool of living water, in which to immerse oneself and be ritually cleansed before going up to the temple and other activities.

3:26 ***all men come to him.*** The Jews came to John and told him about the man of whom John had born testimony, now going about baptizing and drawing "all men" to him. Though their intentions are not stated, since the question was about "purifying" (v. 25), it could be that they were asking John if his immersion or Jesus' was the true purifying ritual.

3:27 ***except it be given him from heaven.*** John's reply was that what Jesus was doing was right and good, because it was a gift from heaven.

3:28 ***I am not the Christ.*** John reminded them that he had not claimed to be the Messiah but the forerunner, sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare the way.

3:29 ***the friend of the bridegroom.*** After the betrothal, a friend of the groom had the job to watch over the bride until the wedding. When it was time for the wedding and he heard "the bridegroom's voice," he was grateful his work was done. So was John who was watching over Israel until Jesus came.

3:30 ***He must increase, but I must decrease.*** John fully understood his role as forerunner—he would have the attention of Israel as he called out his message of preparation. But when the Messiah came, he would quietly and happily pass into the background and make way for the King.

3:31 ***He that cometh from above is above all.*** John testified that Jesus had authority and came from "above," meaning heaven, and therefore was above all earthly things.

3:32 ***what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth.*** Echoing Jesus' words to Nicodemus about speaking what he knows and has seen (v. 11), John declares that Jesus' testimony is only what he has seen and heard from above, an image that will echo throughout the gospel of John.

3:33 ***set to his seal that God is true.*** Or, "Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true" (NRSV). Accepting Jesus' witness of the truth also means to accept the reality and truth of God himself, because Jesus' words come from that source (v. 34).

3:34 ***God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*** Jesus doesn't just have a portion of God's Spirit but all of it, which Spirit he sends to his disciples to comfort and support them (John 14-15).

3:35 ***given all things into his hand.*** Because of his love for Jesus, the Father has given everything into his hands. This reflects Jesus' pre-mortal status as a God (chapter 1) and his mortal status as the one who should be listened to, as well as his future status and role in our world.

3:36 ***everlasting life.*** John echoed Jesus' words to Nicodemus, providing a second testimony that eternal life came through belief on Jesus, the Son of God.

### [The woman of Samaria – John 4:1-42 \(Matt 4:12-17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15\)](#)

Though the references to the Synoptics may appear to be linked to the whole story, they are in fact only tied to his departure into Galilee (vv. 3, 43-44). As the story relates, Jews rarely traveled through Samaria, and vice versa, and the other gospels do not record Jesus converting Samaritans. But this encounter with a Samaritan woman is fascinating both for its historical implications and its doctrinal ones as well.

4:1 **JST**

**John 4:1 KJV**

**JST**

<p>When therefore <del>the Lord knew how</del> the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John.</p>	<p>When therefore the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, <b>they sought more diligently some means that they might put him to death; for many received John as a prophet, but they believed not on Jesus. Now the Lord knew this.</b></p>
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The JST gives additional insight as to why Jesus left Judea after an extended stay and returned to Galilee: the leaders of the Jews were already plotting to kill him.

#### 4:2 JST

John 4:2 KJV	JST
“{Though Jesus himself baptized not, <b>but</b> his disciples,}	“{Though <b>he</b> himself baptized not <b>so many as</b> his disciples, <b>for he suffered them for an example, preferring one another</b> }

The JST also helps us understand that Jesus baptized some, but not as many as his disciples, since he wanted them to be an example one to another and to fellowship each other. This parenthetical remark would lead us to believe he didn't baptize at all, but that contradicts what was said in 3:22.

**4:4 he must needs go through Samaria.** Samaria is the land north of Judea and south of Galilee. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (the Ten Tribes) in about 721 BC, they deported many of the people to other lands. But they left behind the poorer people, and in turn brought in other conquered peoples and settled them in Israel (2 Kings 17:24). The resulting intermingling of the groups became the Samaritans, who accepted only the writings of Moses (though in a modified form that minimized the influence of Jerusalem and the temple there) but not other parts of first century Judaic scripture. Political and even military conflicts over the years cause the Jews to dislike the Samaritans, whom they considered apostate, and the more rigid considered even traveling through their lands as an act of defilement. That Jesus determined he needed to go this way was thus contrary to Jewish tradition, even though it shortened the trip and saved time. He may have also felt the need to do so for his own safety (v. 1 JST).

**4:5 Sychar.** This is probably a village near Shechem, a town of ancient Samaria, at the foot of Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. Shechem was visited by Abraham; Jacob bought land here (and presumably dug a well (v. 6), though the Old Testament doesn't mention it); and Joseph had his bones buried here. Today Nablus is near the same site. A probable location for the well is marked today by an unfinished Greek Orthodox church, and two sites vie for the label of Sychar, though neither can be confirmed.<sup>12</sup>

**4:6 sixth hour.** Or, about noon. Women typically came to the well in the morning and evening, and almost always in groups. That this woman came alone in the middle of the day is indicative of her status in the city.

**4:7 Give me to drink.** For a man to speak to a woman in public was unusual; for a Jewish man to speak to a Samaritan woman was unheard of. Strict Jews considered not only Samaritans unclean, but most things they touched, including water pitchers, hence the woman's surprise at his request in verse 9.

**4:8 to buy meat.** Jesus was alone, John explains, because the other disciples had gone off into the city to buy something to eat ("meat" being the KJV word for 'food' and not just animal flesh).

**4:10 if thou knewst the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee.** To paraphrase, 'If you only knew the plan of salvation from God and my role in it.' Water is a precious gift in a desert land like Israel, and Jesus uses the metaphor of such a gift to lift her conversation to higher thinking than what she or he will drink.

**4:10 living water.** The Jews called water that flowed without human intervention 'living water.' Only this kind of water could be used for washings, immersions, and other ritual activities. Well water or that stored in a cistern was

<sup>12</sup> Ostler, "The Lands," 220-221.

never living water. Clearly Jesus had a deeper meaning. Said Bruce McConkie: "Living water is the words of eternal life, the message of salvation, the truths about God and his kingdom; it is the doctrines of the gospel. Where there are prophets of God, there will be found rivers of living water, wells filled with eternal truths, springs bubbling forth their life-giving draughts that save from spiritual death."<sup>13</sup> See also Jeremiah 2:13 and 1 Nephi 11:25.

**4:11 *thou hast nothing to draw with.*** People typically carried a leather bucket on a rope with them to the well, then a larger container (water pot) to put it in. Even travelers often brought their own bucket. The disciples had probably taken their group bucket into town with them, leaving Jesus with no way to get water from the well.

**4:12 *Art thou greater than our father Jacob.*** Jacob/Israel, who dug the well (in their tradition), gave them this gift of water. Jesus was promising living, flowing water. Her question may have been a bit mocking; a poor Jew who doesn't even have his own bucket, comes to a Samaritan well and offers her flowing water?

**4:14 *a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*** Using the same term as with Nicodemus (*aiōnios zoē*), Jesus again tries to get her to think past the daily routine of collecting water to a more significant application of the metaphor. He reminded her that anyone drinking from the well will be thirsty again (v. 13) but what he offered was a way to "never thirst" but instead enjoy a type of water that would bring eternal life. Similarly, the Lord spoke in our day of such a well (D&C 63:23) and Alma spoke of a "tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41).

**4:15 *give me this water, that I thirst not.*** The woman continues to show that she doesn't fully understand, instead asking him for the water that would enable her to never be thirsty or have to come to the well again.

**4:16 *call thy husband.*** Jesus' answer was perhaps quite surprising, but since she wasn't understanding the meaning of his words, he changed directions to get her attention, asking her to get her husband to come to the well.

**4:17 *I have no husband.*** Perhaps with some hesitation, she shared with him that she was not married. Jesus immediately confirmed that she had spoken the truth: "Thou hast well said."

**4:18 *thou hast five husbands.*** The Greek word here can mean 'husband' or 'man', with the latter more likely in the context. In other words, in reply to her statement that she had no husband, Jesus said, 'That's correct, for you have had five men with whom you have lived; and he with whom you are now living is not *your* husband.' The emphatic "not *thy* husband" implies that the man she is with is someone else's husband.

**4:19 *I perceive that thou art a prophet.*** Because Jesus can tell her such details about her personal life, she concluded that he must be a spokesman from God.

**4:20 *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.*** "Our fathers" means Abraham and Jacob, who did worship in the area of Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans also built a temple there, probably about the same time as Zerubbabel was building the second temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8). For many years, the two groups were conflicted about where it was proper to worship. The Samaritan temple was converted to a temple to Zeus by Greek conquerors, then destroyed by the Maccabean reformers. Samaritans today still sacrifice the Passover on this mountain.

**4:21 *Jesus saith unto her, Woman.*** This is the same title Jesus used with this own mother (2:4), demonstrating his respect for the Samaritan women, even though he knew completely what her history was.<sup>14</sup>

**4:21 *neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem.*** Jesus declared that both places would soon be invalid places to worship. The Jerusalem temple was destroyed about forty years after he said this, leaving both locations devoid of a temple.

**4:22 *salvation is of the Jews.*** "Though the Jews were apostate, as a people, yet they did have the scriptures; they did search the writings of the prophets; their priests were still legal administrators; they had the knowledge of God to a degree; and salvation was to come through them to the world. Their Messiah was to be the Savior of the

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<sup>13</sup> McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 1:151-52.

<sup>14</sup> Lund, "Women in the Writings of John," 129.

world.<sup>15</sup> Jesus may have been declaring that the Samaritan's limited use of the Torah (five books of Moses) only left them without proper prophetic writings, which were important and instructive relative to salvation.

4:23 **worship the Father in spirit and in truth.** The day was coming, Jesus warned, that temple worship with its sacrifices and ritual, would be done away, leaving people to worship God in whatever location they found themselves in, doing so "in spirit and in truth." See D&C 34:38 and 43:10.

4:24 **God is a Spirit.** Modern translations drop the article, giving "God is spirit." The context demonstrates that this is not a statement of his substance but of his nature and how we worship him. "God is a spiritual Being" or 'God has a spirit,' just as Doctrine and Covenants 93:33 notes that 'man is spirit.' That isn't all he is, but man, too, has a spirit, and, in a sense, is a spiritual and eternal being."<sup>16</sup>

#### 4:24 JST

John 4:24 KJV	JST
God <i>is-a</i> Spirit: and they <i>that</i> worship him must worship <i>him</i> in spirit and in truth.	<b>For unto such hath</b> God <b>promised his</b> Spirit: and they <b>who</b> worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.

The reworking of this verse in the JST removes the issue of God being a spirit and instead has Jesus explain that God has promised his Spirit to those who worship God in spirit and in truth (v. 23).

4:25 **I know that Messias cometh.** The Samaritans didn't actually have the concept of a Messiah in their beliefs but did have the concept of a *Taher* or 'Restorer' who would come and who would set things straight and tell them all they needed to know. Thus they looked for a teacher who would come from the tribe of Joseph, not a Savior from the house of David. Jesus demonstrated that he was the restorer she looked for by the knowledge of her life that could only come by revelation, and then expanded her understanding by also declaring himself the Messiah of the Jews.<sup>17</sup>

4:26 **I that speak unto thee am he.** Because of the word order in the KJV we lose the flavor of this. In Greek, he says, "*Ego eimi*," 'I am.' This is the same phrase used in the Septuagint (Greek) Old Testament in Exodus 3:14 when God identifies himself to Moses. This is the first recorded public declaration by Jesus of his divine identity, given to a Samaritan woman living in an illicit relationship. It is also the first use of the "I am" phrase, which will be used many times in John.

4:27 **upon this came his disciples.** The text records that they were quite surprised to see Jesus talking to a woman. In their society, it was inappropriate for a man to speak alone to a woman who was not his wife or close relative. But given Jesus' status as their teacher and master, no one dared bring this to his attention.

4:28 **left her waterpot.** Armed with the news that the Messiah was sitting at the well, she ran with such haste into the city that she left behind the very purpose for which she had come out of the city, and told "the men" about Jesus. Because of her situation, she was apparently not able to tell any women, who likely shunned her, but she knew many men.

4:29 **Come, see a man.** As with the other early disciples, the woman invited the men of the city to come with her and see if what she was saying was true or not.

4:30 **they went out of the city.** Based on her word alone, the men went out to the well to see Jesus.

4:31 **Master, eat.** The disciples had accomplished their purpose in going into the city and now tried to persuade their master to eat some of the food they had procured.

4:32 **I have meat to eat.** Jesus enigmatic reply puzzled them: 'Who brought him food?' (v. 33).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah* 1:500.

<sup>16</sup> Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Holzapfel and Wayment, *The Life and Teachings*, 1:265.

4:34 ***My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.*** Anticipating the men who were coming soon to talk to him, Jesus postponed the meal, teaching them that the work he was doing was a higher purpose than mere sustenance.

4:35 ***four months, and then cometh harvest.*** Though some see this as proverbial, with the wheat harvest in April to May, this indicates a winter encounter with the woman at the well.

4:35 ***they are white already to harvest.*** This is the only NT verse with this phrase, with its reference to the whiteness of the field. Some have noted that the word “white” represents wheat at its final stages, as it moves from green to a dry state ready for the harvest. Other scholars have concluded that in John the concept was a metaphor, referring to the white-clothed Samaritans coming out of the city to see Jesus. Whatever the case, this metaphor, used eight times in the Doctrine and Covenants (4:4; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; 14:3; 31:4; 33:3; 7) was understood by the Saints of our day to mean that the field was fully ripe and it was time to reap the harvest.

4:36 ***rejoice together.*** Jesus gave a saying that has comforted many missionaries: those who reap are rewarded, but the sower also rejoices with him. It takes both to have a good harvest.

4:38 ***other men laboured.*** The disciples who had been in the city and returned with food had not made the effort to speak to the woman who brought a crowd out to see Jesus. But now he will allow them to teach the men from the city and reap the harvest that he began. This phrase may also account for prophets and others who prepared the way that these people might be receptive to the message.

4:39 ***many of the Samaritans of that city believed.*** The woman at the well told the village about this Jesus who could tell her all things, and many believed her. But even more came out to meet him, and they believed because of Jesus' own words (v. 41). Our words may pique the interest of those around us, but it is the word of scripture and revelation received through prayer and the Spirit that will have the greatest impact.

### Third Sign: Healing the official's son – **John 4:43-54** (Matt 4:12, 17; 8:5-13; 13:57; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15, 24; 7:1-10)

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The cross-references include mostly passages with similar phrases or a related event. However, the main story here is quite similar to that of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10.

4:43 ***went into Galilee.*** After passing through Samaria, Jesus returned to his home base in Galilee, probably Capernaum at first.

4:44 ***a prophet hath no honour in his own country.*** Matthew 13:57 and Luke 4:24 have a similar phrase given with the rejection Jesus experienced in his home-town synagogue in Nazareth. John does not provide that context but gives the story parenthetically perhaps to explain the general rejection Jesus experienced in Galilee.

4:45 ***seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem.*** In John's gospel, the only thing Jesus is recorded to have done is cleanse the temple. That may have been enough to get them interested in him, but it is likely that John is referring to events not recorded in his gospel, such as teachings or healings.

4:46 ***Jesus came again into Cana.*** He returned to the city where he had turned water into wine to again perform a miracle—the second one explicitly called out in John, and the third sign provided of Jesus' identity.

4:46 ***a certain nobleman.*** This was a man in the service of the king, Herod Agrippa, living in Capernaum, several miles away. Note that John's account has several differences from the similar story told in Matthew and Luke, including that the man making the request was a Jew, not a Roman centurion; the sick person was the man's son, not his servant; the event took place in Cana, though the man was from Capernaum; and the man confirms when he returns to Capernaum the time of his son's healing, which matches Jesus' words.

4:47 ***went unto him.*** It was a fourteen-mile, uphill journey from Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee to Cana in the hill country. If the man left at dawn and walked quickly, he would arrive about noon, then find Jesus and receive the assurance that his son was healed. He would have started back immediately but would probably not finish the trip

that day (travelers would settle down about 4:00 to find shelter, food, etc.). Thus he would have met his servants on the road coming to him the next morning: "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him" (v. 52).

4:54 **The second miracle that Jesus did.** The first was water into wine (chapter 2). Though it's the second miracle, it's the third sign, as we count the cleansing of the temple as a sign of his identity and authority.

## Conclusion

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We begin to see John's themes from his prologue about Jesus more fully developed now. In his nighttime visit with Nicodemus, he was the true light dispelling the darkness of the world and of doubt and misunderstanding. In his visit with the Samaritan woman, he was living water and the I AM who was from the beginning and who created all things, in whom is life. Finally, with the healing of the nobleman's son, he is the Word who speaks and is obeyed.

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### Abbreviations:

- AT – Author's translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament

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