

If you look at what is happening across our world right now—the rapid acceleration of global events, the confusion in our culture, the shifting geopolitical landscape—people are desperately searching for answers. They are looking for stability, for truth, and for certainty. But as Bible-believing followers of Jesus Christ, we do not look to the news media, to secular philosophy, or to human leaders for our ultimate direction. We look to the unchanging, authoritative, and living Word of Almighty God!

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:1-18)

The beginning of John’s gospel is of such importance and depth of meaning that we must study it almost verse by verse. It is John’s Holy Spirit inspired thought that Jesus is none other than God’s creative and life-giving and light-giving word, that Jesus is the power of God which created the world and the reason of God which sustains the world come to earth in human and bodily form.

Look at what the Apostle John writes in verse 1:3 of his Gospel:

“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (John 1:3)

It may seem strange to us that John so stresses the way in which the world was created; and it may seem strange that he so definitely connects Jesus with the work of creation. But he had to do this because of a certain tendency in the thought of his day.

In the time of John, there was a kind of heresy called Gnosticism. Its characteristic was that it was an intellectual and philosophical approach to Christianity. To the Gnostics, the simple beliefs of the ordinary Christian were not enough. They tried to construct a philosophic system out of Christianity. They were troubled about the existence of sin and evil and sorrow and suffering in this world, so they worked out a theory to explain it. The theory was this.

In the beginning, two things existed – the one was God and the other was matter. Matter was always there and was the raw material out of which the world was made. The Gnostics held that this original matter was flawed and imperfect.

The Gnostics went further. God, they said, is pure spirit, and pure spirit can never touch matter at all, still less matter which is imperfect. Therefore it was not possible for God to carry out the work of creation himself. So he put out from himself a series of emanations. Each emanation was further and further away from God; and, as the emanations got further and further away from him, they knew less and less about him. Finally in the series, there was an emanation which was so distant from God that it was totally ignorant of him and totally hostile to him – and that emanation was the power which created the world, because it was so distant from God that it was possible for it to touch this flawed and evil matter.

The Gnostics took one step further. They identified the creator god with the God of the Old Testament; and they held that the God of the Old Testament was quite different from, quite ignorant of and quite hostile to the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

When John wrote his gospel, this heresy was widespread. It was believed that the world was evil and an evil god had created it. It is to combat this false teaching that the Holy Spirit inspired John to present two basic Gospel truths. The connection of Jesus with creation is repeatedly shared in the New Testament, just because of this heretical thought which completely separated God from the world in which we live. In Colossians, Paul wrote:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16)

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, the apostle Paul wrote of the Lord Jesus Christ, *“through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”* The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the one who was the Son, *“through whom also He made the worlds”* (Hebrews 1:2). John and the New Testament writers were stressing two great truths.

1. Followers of Christ Jesus always believed in what is called “creation out of nothing.” We know that the God of the Bible (the only true and existing God) create all things and His creation was perfect and good. At the end of the last day of creation week God looked at “everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) The Bible clearly teaches that the world was created with alien and evil matter. It does not teach that the world began with a flaw in it. The God’s inspires Scripture teaches that behind everything there is God and God alone.

2. Followers of Christ have always believed the biblical teaching that this is God’s world and He is intimately involved in it. The Gnostics tried to put the blame for the sin of the world on the shoulder of its creator. Scripture clearly presents the truth and fact that what is wrong with the world is due to human sin.

We learn that the Christ who will, in the future, recreate the world was the co-worker of God when the world was first created, and that, in the act of redemption, God is seeking to win back that which was always his own.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4)

Life and light are two of the great basic words on which the Gospel of John is built up. They are two of the main themes which it is the aim of the gospel to develop and to expound.

The Gospel of John begins and ends with life. At the very beginning, we read that in Jesus was life; and at the very end we read that John's, Holy Spirit inspired, aim in writing the gospel was that everyone might *'believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name'* (John 20:31). The word is continually on the lips of Jesus. He declared that He came that men and women might have life and that they might have it abundantly (10:10). He claims that he gives people life and that they will never perish because no one will snatch them out of his hand (10:28). He claims that he is the way, the truth and the life (14:6). In this gospel, the word life (zōē) occurs more than thirty-five times and the verb to live or to have life (zen) more than fifteen times. What then does John mean by life?

1. He means that life is the opposite of destruction, condemnation and death. God the Father sent His Son that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (3:16). Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24). There is a difference between the resurrection to life and the resurrection to judgment (5:29). Those to whom Jesus gives life will never perish (10:28). Until we accept Jesus and trust Him as our Savior and Lord, we cannot be said to live at all. Those who attempt to live Christless lives exist, but they do not know what life is. Jesus is the only one who can make life worth living, and in whose company physical death is only the prelude to fuller life.

2. John makes it clear that, although Jesus, God the Son, is the bringer of life, the giver of life is God the Father. Repeatedly, John, and all of Scripture, uses the phrase "the living God." It is the will of the Father who sent Jesus that everyone who believes and trust in Him will have life (6:40). It is as if God is saying: "I created human beings in my likeness and image that they should experience the same quality of life that I experience; through their sin they have ceased to live and only exist; I have sent them my Son to redeem and empower them to know what real life is."

3. John reveals what real life is. He uses the phrase "eternal life." We will explain the full meaning of the phrase later in our study of John's Gospel. For now, we note this. The word John uses for "eternal" is the Greek word "aionios." Eternal is not a synonym for everlasting. Everlasting is life which lasts forever. In eternal life, there is more than duration of life; it includes a certain quality of life.

Life is not desirable unless it is a certain quality of life. Aionios is the adjective which is repeatedly used to describe God. Only God is aionios, eternal; therefore eternal life is that life which God lives. Eternal life is life which experiences the love, joy, peace, and power of the life of God himself. When Jesus came offering men and women eternal life, he was inviting them to enter into the very life of God.

4. John answer the question, "How do we enter into that life?" We enter into it by believing in Jesus Christ. The word "believe" (Greek: pisteuein) occurs in the Gospel of John at least 70 times. John means two things when he uses the phrase "to believe."

4a. He means that we must be convinced that Jesus is God the Son. If Jesus is only a man, there is no reason why we should give him the absolute obedience that he demands. We need to examine the eyewitness testimony and determine that He is none other than the Son of God.

4b. There is more than intellectual belief in this. To believe in Jesus means to take Jesus at his word, to accept his commandments as absolutely binding, to believe without question that what he says is true and must be obeyed.

For John, belief means the conviction of the mind that Jesus is God the Son, the trust of the heart that everything he says is true and the basing of every action on the unshakable assurance that we must take him at his word. When we do that, we stop existing and begin living.

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

The second keyword that we encounter in John's gospel is "light." The word light is used at least 21 times. The purpose of John the Baptist was to point men and women to that light which was in Christ. Twice Jesus calls himself the light of the world (8:12, 9:5). This light can be in men and women (11:10), so that they can become children of the light (12:36). There are at least three that we discover through the idea of the light which Jesus bring into the world.

1. The light Jesus brings is a light that dispels chaos. In the first chapter of Genesis, God moved upon the dark, formless chaos which was before our world was created and said:

'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). The new-created light of God routed the empty chaos into which it came. So Jesus is the light which shines in the darkness (1:5). He is the one person who can save life from becoming a chaos. Left to ourselves, we are at the mercy of our passions and our fears. When Jesus dawns upon life, light comes.

One of the oldest fears in the world is the fear of the dark. The Bible says that *"love is of God"* and *"God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8); in other words, love is a fundamental characteristic of who God is. Everything God does is impelled and influenced by His love. There is a distinct word for the type of love that God displays. In the Greek, this word is *agape*, and it refers to a benevolent and charitable love that seeks the best for the loved one.

For God so loved (agape, agapao) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

With Jesus our life, that is surrounded by the chaotic, darkness of this world, is as light as day.

2. The light which Jesus brings is a revealing light. It is their condemnation that people loved the darkness rather than the light; and they did so because their deeds were evil; and they hated the light lest their deeds should be exposed (3:19–20). The light which Jesus brings is something which shows things as they are. It strips away the disguises and the concealments; it shows things in all their nakedness; it shows them in their true character and their true values.

The externals, the disguises, the distractions, the outer wrappings and trappings are stripped away; and everything stands revealed in the naked and awful loneliness of what it essentially is.

We never see ourselves until we see ourselves through the eyes of Jesus. We never see what our lives are like until we see them in the light of Jesus. Jesus often drives us to God by revealing us to ourselves.

3. The light which Jesus brings is a guiding light. If people do not possess that light, they walk in darkness and do not know where they are going (12:36). When they receive that light and believe in it, they walk no more in darkness (12:46). One of the features of the gospel stories which no one can miss is the number of people who came running to Jesus asking: 'What am I to do?' When Jesus comes into life, the time of guessing and of groping is ended, the time of doubt and uncertainty and vacillation is gone. The path that was dark becomes light; the decision that was wrapped in a night of uncertainty is illumined. Without Jesus, we are like people on an unknown road in the pitch dark. With Jesus, the way is clear.

Gospel of John — Session 1: Introduction and John 1:1–14

The Gospel of John is a remarkable book. It is so direct, open, and simple that many people recommend it as the first place to begin studying the Bible. At the same time, it is incredibly deep and continually rewards the diligent student. It has been said that the Gospel of John is shallow enough for a child to wade in, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim in.

In this session, we will explore the first fourteen verses of John and establish a perspective for the study ahead. We will begin with some introductory remarks and then consider several hermeneutical principles—our approach to interpreting the biblical text. Everyone approaches Scripture with certain assumptions and interpretive habits, so I want to make those assumptions explicit. The goal is not to impose a particular viewpoint, but to help you understand how we arrive at our conclusions so that you can evaluate them for yourself through your own study.

We will also consider why John wrote his Gospel, how it fits within the four Gospels, and what makes it unique. Our focus will be on the preexistent Christ, particularly the opening declaration that identifies Him as the Word. We will also explore several important concepts and metaphors, especially logos and light, because these terms are too significant to treat casually. Finally, we will introduce an idea that is unfamiliar to many people—the metacosm, or metos, as a way of thinking about a reality beyond the physical world we experience.

Two Critical Discoveries

Our ministry has been shaped by two discoveries, the first being what we call the integrity of design.

When we pick up the Bible, we find sixty-six separate books written by more than forty authors over a period approaching two thousand years. Many of these writers did not know one another and lived in very different circumstances. Yet, when the books are studied carefully, they reveal an integrated message system.

I use that phrase in the professional sense of information science. The Bible consists of sixty-six books, written by more than forty different authors over many centuries, yet details throughout those books appear to anticipate and complement one another in remarkable ways.

Once that becomes apparent, a second question naturally emerges: Where did such an integrated design originate? The answer suggested by the design itself is that its source must lie outside the ordinary human time domain, because Scripture repeatedly presents history before it happens with extraordinary precision.

These two discoveries form the foundation of our hermeneutic: integrated design and an origin beyond the ordinary boundaries of time.

We believe the New Testament demonstrates an important principle: the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. The Bible is an integrated design, even though it is composed of remarkably diverse parts.

That is also why we make such a point of details. We believe details matter. Jesus emphasized this in Matthew 5 when He said that not even a jot or a tittle would pass from the Law until everything was fulfilled.

A jot refers to yod, the smallest of the twenty-two Hebrew letters. A tittle refers to the small decorative marks associated with Hebrew letters. The point is that even the smallest details deserve attention.

This also leads us to be cautious about assuming that two words are simply synonyms. Two words may overlap in meaning, but that does not mean they are interchangeable in every context. The small distinction between them may contain something important.

Resolving Power

Consider the concept of resolving power. If you look at a star through an inexpensive telescope, it may appear to be a single point of light. With a sufficiently powerful telescope, you may discover that what appeared to be one star is actually two.

The ability to distinguish between things that appear nearly identical is called resolving power in optics. The same principle applies to language and biblical interpretation.

For example, Mark, Luke, and John frequently use the expression “the kingdom of God.” Matthew, however, frequently uses the expression “the kingdom of heaven.” Many commentators regard these as synonymous because the surrounding passages often appear similar.

But Matthew also uses “the kingdom of God” several times. That raises the question of whether the distinction is deliberate. Careful examination of the grammatical construction can reveal differences that are easily overlooked.

Another example is the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24 and Mark 13 present very similar accounts, while Luke records material that at first appears to be another version of the same discourse. Yet careful comparison suggests that some of these statements were given at different times, to different audiences, and for different purposes.

Luke gives considerable attention to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, while Matthew 24 contains material concerning a future desolation. If those distinctions are ignored, significant interpretive errors can result.

The lesson is simple: develop enough resolving power to notice distinctions that initially appear insignificant.

The Berean Challenge

For more than four decades, we have used Acts 17:11 as a kind of trademark passage—the Berean Challenge. Luke records that the Bereans received the word eagerly and searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they were being taught were true.

Our emphasis has often been on searching the Scriptures to determine whether something is true. In other words, do not simply believe something because someone says it—even if that person is a teacher you respect. Check it for yourself.

Our goal is not to impose a particular viewpoint. We want to help you develop the tools necessary to reach your own conclusions. We will candidly explain what we believe and how we arrived there, but our views should be treated as an aid to your own investigation, not as a substitute for it.

In recent years, however, I have become convinced that the more difficult part of the Berean challenge is actually the first part: receiving the word with an open mind.

People often approach the Bible with deeply ingrained assumptions. Sometimes those assumptions come from science, tradition, culture, or previous teaching. One of the great challenges in discovering truth is learning to recognize our own presuppositions and test them rather than automatically bringing them to the text.

The word translated “search” carries the idea of investigating, examining, evaluating, and determining whether something is true. But genuine investigation requires intellectual openness.

The Boundaries of Reality

Another issue that will become important as we study John is the nature of physical reality.

Modern science has discovered boundaries on both ends of the physical scale. If we move toward larger and larger dimensions, we enter the macrocosm—the universe studied by astronomy and astrophysics. If we move toward smaller and smaller dimensions, we enter the realm of quantum physics and subatomic particles.

The physical universe appears to have boundaries at both extremes. This raises profound questions about the nature of reality itself.

The idea is that what we experience as physical reality may be only a subset of a larger reality. We can use the term *metos* to describe this broader conceptual realm.

This is not simply a theological speculation. Discussions in modern physics have explored whether our universe might be a subset of a larger reality. That concept is provocative because Scripture has long suggested that the visible world is not the whole of reality.

Paul writes in Romans 1 that the invisible things of God are understood through the things that have

been made. As we continue through John, we will repeatedly encounter the relationship between the visible and invisible realms.

Because some of the subjects we will discuss are controversial, I do not intend to avoid them. Different scholars hold different positions on many of these issues, and where meaningful disagreement exists, we should acknowledge it. The objective is to investigate honestly and allow the evidence to speak.

Augustine is credited with the principle: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

There are truths that are fundamental to Christian faith. There are also many areas in which sincere and knowledgeable Christians disagree. In those areas, we should allow liberty without losing sight of the love that ought to characterize all followers of Christ.

When we pick up the Bible, we find sixty-six separate books written by more than forty authors over a period approaching two thousand years. Many of these writers did not know one another and lived in very different circumstances. Yet, when the books are studied carefully, they reveal an integrated message system.

I use that phrase in the professional sense of information science. The Bible consists of sixty-six books, written by more than forty different authors over many centuries, yet details throughout those books appear to anticipate and complement one another in remarkable ways.

Once that becomes apparent, a second question naturally emerges: Where did such an integrated design originate? The answer suggested by the design itself is that its source must lie outside the ordinary human time domain, because Scripture repeatedly presents history before it happens with extraordinary precision.

These two discoveries form the foundation of our hermeneutic: integrated design and an origin beyond the ordinary boundaries of time.

We believe the New Testament demonstrates an important principle: the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. The Bible is an integrated design, even though it is composed of remarkably diverse parts.

That is also why we make such a point of details. We believe details matter. Jesus emphasized this in Matthew 5 when He said that not even a jot or a tittle would pass from the Law until everything was fulfilled.

A jot refers to yod, the smallest of the twenty-two Hebrew letters. A tittle refers to the small decorative marks associated with Hebrew letters. The point is that even the smallest details deserve attention.

This also leads us to be cautious about assuming that two words are simply synonyms. Two words may overlap in meaning, but that does not mean they are interchangeable in every context. The small distinction between them may contain something important.

Consider the concept of resolving power. If you look at a star through an inexpensive telescope, it may appear to be a single point of light. With a sufficiently powerful telescope, you may discover that what appeared to be one star is actually two.

The ability to distinguish between things that appear nearly identical is called resolving power in optics. The same principle applies to language and biblical interpretation.

For example, Mark, Luke, and John frequently use the expression "the kingdom of God." Matthew, however, frequently uses the expression "the kingdom of heaven." Many commentators regard these as synonymous because the surrounding passages often appear similar.

But Matthew also uses "the kingdom of God" several times. That raises the question of whether the distinction is deliberate. Careful examination of the grammatical construction can reveal differences that are easily overlooked.

Another example is the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24 and Mark 13 present very similar accounts, while Luke records material that at first appears to be another version of the same discourse. Yet careful comparison suggests that some of these statements were given at different times, to different audiences, and for different purposes.

Luke gives considerable attention to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, while Matthew 24 contains material concerning a future desolation. If those distinctions are ignored, significant interpretive errors can result.

The lesson is simple: develop enough resolving power to notice distinctions that initially appear insignificant.

For more than four decades, we have used Acts 17:11 as a kind of trademark passage—the Berean Challenge. Luke records that the Bereans received the word eagerly and searched the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they were being taught were true.

Our emphasis has often been on searching the Scriptures to determine whether something is true. In other words, do not simply believe something because someone says it—even if that person is a teacher you respect. Check it for yourself.

Our goal is not to impose a particular viewpoint. We want to help you develop the tools necessary to reach your own conclusions. We will candidly explain what we believe and how we arrived there, but our views should be treated as an aid to your own investigation, not as a substitute for it.

In recent years, however, I have become convinced that the more difficult part of the Berean challenge is actually the first part: receiving the word with an open mind.

People often approach the Bible with deeply ingrained assumptions. Sometimes those assumptions come from science, tradition, culture, or previous teaching. One of the great challenges in discovering truth is learning to recognize our own presuppositions and test them rather than automatically bringing them to the text.

The word translated “search” carries the idea of investigating, examining, evaluating, and determining whether something is true. But genuine investigation requires intellectual openness.

Modern science has discovered boundaries on both ends of the physical scale. If we move toward larger and larger dimensions, we enter the macrocosm—the universe studied by astronomy and astrophysics. If we move toward smaller and smaller dimensions, we enter the realm of quantum physics and subatomic particles.

The physical universe appears to have boundaries at both extremes. This raises profound questions about the nature of reality itself.

The idea is that what we experience as physical reality may be only a subset of a larger reality. We can use the term *metos* to describe this broader conceptual realm.

This is not simply a theological speculation. Discussions in modern physics have explored whether our universe might be a subset of a larger reality. That concept is provocative because Scripture has long suggested that the visible world is not the whole of reality.

Paul writes in Romans 1 that the invisible things of God are understood through the things that have been made. As we continue through John, we will repeatedly encounter the relationship between the visible and invisible realms.

Because some of the subjects we will discuss are controversial, I do not intend to avoid them. Different scholars hold different positions on many of these issues, and where meaningful disagreement exists, we should acknowledge it. The objective is to investigate honestly and allow the evidence to speak.

Augustine is credited with the principle: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

There are truths that are fundamental to Christian faith. There are also many areas in which sincere and knowledgeable Christians disagree. In those areas, we should allow liberty without losing sight of the love that ought to characterize all followers of Christ.

If you look at what is happening across our world right now—the rapid acceleration of global events, the confusion in our culture, the shifting geopolitical landscape—people are desperately searching for answers. They are looking for stability, for truth, and for certainty. But as Bible-believing followers of Jesus Christ, we do not look to the news media, to secular philosophy, or to human leaders for our ultimate direction. We look to the unchanging, authoritative, and living Word of Almighty God!

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:1-18)

The beginning of John’s gospel is of such importance and depth of meaning that we must study it almost verse by verse. It is John’s Holy Spirit inspired thought that Jesus is none other than God’s creative and life-giving and light-giving word, that Jesus is the power of God which created the world and the reason of God which sustains the world come to earth in human and bodily form.

Look at what the Apostle John writes in verse 1:3 of his Gospel:

“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (John 1:3)

It may seem strange to us that John so stresses the way in which the world was created; and it may seem strange that he so definitely connects Jesus with the work of creation. But he had to do this because of a certain tendency in the thought of his day.

In the time of John, there was a kind of heresy called Gnosticism. Its characteristic was that it was an intellectual and philosophical approach to Christianity. To the Gnostics, the simple beliefs of the ordinary Christian were not enough. They tried to construct a philosophic system out of Christianity. They were troubled about the existence of sin and evil and sorrow and suffering in this world, so they worked out a theory to explain it. The theory was this.

In the beginning, two things existed – the one was God and the other was matter. Matter was always there and was the raw material out of which the world was made. The Gnostics held that this original matter was flawed and imperfect.

The Gnostics went further. God, they said, is pure spirit, and pure spirit can never touch matter at all, still less matter which is imperfect. Therefore it was not possible for God to carry out the work of creation himself. So he put out from himself a series of emanations. Each emanation was further and further away from God; and, as the emanations got further and further away from him, they knew less and less about him. Finally in the series, there was an emanation which was so distant from God that it was totally ignorant of him and totally hostile to him – and that emanation was the power which created the world, because it was so distant from God that it was possible for it to touch this flawed and evil matter.

The Gnostics took one step further. They identified the creator god with the God of the Old Testament; and they held that the God of the Old Testament was quite different from, quite ignorant of and quite hostile to the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

When John wrote his gospel, this heresy was widespread. It was believed that the world was evil and an evil god had created it. It is to combat this false teaching that the Holy Spirit inspired John to present two basic Gospel truths. The connection of Jesus with creation is repeatedly shared in the New Testament, just because of this heretical thought which completely separated God from the world in which we live. In Colossians, Paul wrote:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16)

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, the apostle Paul wrote of the Lord Jesus Christ, *“through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”* The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the one who was the Son, *“through whom also He made the worlds”* (Hebrews 1:2). John and the New Testament writers were stressing two great truths.

1. Followers of Christ Jesus always believed in what is called “creation out of nothing.” We know that the God of the Bible (the only true and existing God) create all things and His creation was perfect and good. At the end of the last day of creation week God looked at “everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) The Bible clearly teaches that the world was created with alien and evil matter. It does not teach that the world began with a flaw in it. The God’s inspires Scripture teaches that behind everything there is God and God alone.

2. Followers of Christ have always believed the biblical teaching that this is God’s world and He is intimately involved in it. The Gnostics tried to put the blame for the sin of the world on the shoulder of its creator. Scripture clearly presents the truth and fact that what is wrong with the world is due to human sin.

We learn that the Christ who will, in the future, recreate the world was the co-worker of God when the world was first created, and that, in the act of redemption, God is seeking to win back that which was always his own.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4)

Life and light are two of the great basic words on which the Gospel of John is built up. They are two of the main themes which it is the aim of the gospel to develop and to expound.

The Gospel of John begins and ends with life. At the very beginning, we read that in Jesus was life; and at the very end we read that John's, Holy Spirit inspired, aim in writing the gospel was that everyone might *'believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name'* (John 20:31). The word is continually on the lips of Jesus. He declared that He came that men and women might have life and that they might have it abundantly (10:10). He claims that he gives people life and that they will never perish because no one will snatch them out of his hand (10:28). He claims that he is the way, the truth and the life (14:6). In this gospel, the word life (zōē) occurs more than thirty-five times and the verb to live or to have life (zen) more than fifteen times. What then does John mean by life?

1. He means that life is the opposite of destruction, condemnation and death. God the Father sent His Son that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (3:16). Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (John 5:24). There is a difference between the resurrection to life and the resurrection to judgment (5:29). Those to whom Jesus gives life will never perish (10:28). Until we accept Jesus and trust Him as our Savior and Lord, we cannot be said to live at all. Those who attempt to live Christless lives exist, but they do not know what life is. Jesus is the only one who can make life worth living, and in whose company physical death is only the prelude to fuller life.

2. John makes it clear that, although Jesus, God the Son, is the bringer of life, the giver of life is God the Father. Repeatedly, John, and all of Scripture, uses the phrase "the living God." It is the will of the Father who sent Jesus that everyone who believes and trust in Him will have life (6:40). It is as if God is saying: "I created human beings in my likeness and image that they should experience the same quality of life that I experience; through their sin they have ceased to live and only exist; I have sent them my Son to redeem and empower them to know what real life is."

3. John reveals what real life is. He uses the phrase "eternal life." We will explain the full meaning of the phrase later in our study of John's Gospel. For now, we note this. The word John uses for "eternal" is the Greek word "aionios." Eternal is not a synonym for everlasting. Everlasting is life which lasts forever. In eternal life, there is more than duration of life; it includes a certain quality of life.

Life is not desirable unless it is a certain quality of life. Aionios is the adjective which is repeatedly used to describe God. Only God is aionios, eternal; therefore eternal life is that life which God lives. Eternal life is life which experiences the love, joy, peace, and power of the life of God himself. When Jesus came offering men and women eternal life, he was inviting them to enter into the very life of God.

4. John answer the question, "How do we enter into that life?" We enter into it by believing in Jesus Christ. The word "believe" (Greek: pisteuein) occurs in the Gospel of John at least 70 times. John means two things when he uses the phrase "to believe."

4a. He means that we must be convinced that Jesus is God the Son. If Jesus is only a man, there is no reason why we should give him the absolute obedience that he demands. We need to examine the eyewitness testimony and determine that He is none other than the Son of God.

4b. There is more than intellectual belief in this. To believe in Jesus means to take Jesus at his word, to accept his commandments as absolutely binding, to believe without question that what he says is true and must be obeyed.

For John, belief means the conviction of the mind that Jesus is God the Son, the trust of the heart that everything he says is true and the basing of every action on the unshakable assurance that we must take him at his word. When we do that, we stop existing and begin living.

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4)

The second keyword that we encounter in John's gospel is "light." The word light is used at least 21 times. The purpose of John the Baptist was to point men and women to that light which was in Christ. Twice Jesus calls himself the light of the world (8:12, 9:5). This light can be in men and women (11:10), so that they can become children of the light (12:36). There are at least three that we discover through the idea of the light which Jesus bring into the world.

1. The light Jesus brings is a light that dispels chaos. In the first chapter of Genesis, God moved upon the dark, formless chaos which was before our world was created and said:

'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). The new-created light of God routed the empty chaos into which it came. So Jesus is the light which shines in the darkness (1:5). He is the one person who can save life from becoming a chaos. Left to ourselves, we are at the mercy of our passions and our fears. When Jesus dawns upon life, light comes.

One of the oldest fears in the world is the fear of the dark. The Bible says that *"love is of God"* and *"God is love"* (1 John 4:7-8); in other words, love is a fundamental characteristic of who God is. Everything God does is impelled and influenced by His love. There is a distinct word for the type of love that God displays. In the Greek, this word is *agape*, and it refers to a benevolent and charitable love that seeks the best for the loved one.

For God so loved (agape, agapao) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

With Jesus our life, that is surrounded by the chaotic, darkness of this world, is as light as day.

2. The light which Jesus brings is a revealing light. It is their condemnation that people loved the darkness rather than the light; and they did so because their deeds were evil; and they hated the light lest their deeds should be exposed (3:19–20). The light which Jesus brings is something which shows things as they are. It strips away the disguises and the concealments; it shows things in all their nakedness; it shows them in their true character and their true values.

The externals, the disguises, the distractions, the outer wrappings and trappings are stripped away; and everything stands revealed in the naked and awful loneliness of what it essentially is.

We never see ourselves until we see ourselves through the eyes of Jesus. We never see what our lives are like until we see them in the light of Jesus. Jesus often drives us to God by revealing us to ourselves.

3. The light which Jesus brings is a guiding light. If people do not possess that light, they walk in darkness and do not know where they are going (12:36). When they receive that light and believe in it, they walk no more in darkness (12:46). One of the features of the gospel stories which no one can miss is the number of people who came running to Jesus asking: 'What am I to do?' When Jesus comes into life, the time of guessing and of groping is ended, the time of doubt and uncertainty and vacillation is gone. The path that was dark becomes light; the decision that was wrapped in a night of uncertainty is illumined. Without Jesus, we are like people on an unknown road in the pitch dark. With Jesus, the way is clear.

Why Did John Write His Gospel?

John gives us the answer himself near the end of his Gospel:

“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

That is John's purpose.

He wants his readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and to receive life through His name.

This is one reason the Gospel of John is so important when considering the identity of Jesus. Anyone who claims that Jesus never identified Himself with God has not seriously engaged with John's Gospel.

The Design of the Four Gospels

The four Gospels present four complementary perspectives on Jesus.

Matthew, writing from a Jewish perspective, emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah and presents His legal genealogy through Abraham to Joseph.

Mark emphasizes Jesus as the Servant. Because the pedigree of a servant is not the focus, Mark is the one Gospel that does not provide a genealogy.

Luke, writing as a physician and presenting Jesus as the Son of Man, traces a genealogy back to Adam. His genealogy differs from Matthew's and is commonly understood as presenting a different line.

John takes us beyond genealogy altogether. He begins before creation itself:

“In the beginning was the Word.”

John's opening functions almost like a genealogy of the One who has always existed.

The four Gospels also emphasize different aspects of Jesus' ministry. Matthew emphasizes what Jesus said and claimed as Messiah. Mark emphasizes what He did. Luke emphasizes His humanity and the human dimension of His experiences. John emphasizes His identity—who He actually is.

The Gospels also appear to correspond to four symbolic faces associated with the cherubim: the lion,

the ox, the man, and the eagle. These symbols recur throughout Scripture in ways that are worth careful study.

Seven Signs in John

John deliberately selects seven major signs:

Turning water into wine at Cana.
Healing the official's son.
Healing the invalid at Bethesda.
Feeding the five thousand.
Walking on the water.
Healing the man born blind.
Raising Lazarus.

These signs are selected with a purpose, and we will examine that purpose as we proceed.

John's Gospel is also structured around seven major "I am" declarations of Jesus:

"I am the bread of life."
"I am the light of the world."
"I am the door."
"I am the good shepherd."
"I am the resurrection and the life."
"I am the way, the truth, and the life."
"I am the true vine."

In John 8, Jesus also makes a remarkable statement concerning His identity in relation to the divine name revealed to Moses.

John the Apostle

John the Apostle was one of the sons of Zebedee. Jesus gave James and John the nickname Boanerges, meaning "sons of thunder." This tells us something important about John's character.

Later artistic traditions often portray John as a particularly soft or delicate figure because he is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Yet the biblical record presents him as one of the more forceful personalities among the disciples.

Peter, James, and John formed an inner circle among the Twelve. They were present at the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus's daughter, and other significant events.

At the cross, Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to John. John subsequently became an

important figure in the early Jerusalem church alongside Peter and James.

According to early Christian tradition, John eventually settled in Ephesus and died a natural death, unlike the other apostles who traditionally died as martyrs.

The Structure of John

In this session, we are concentrating on the first fourteen verses.

The next portion of chapter 1 deals with John the Baptist and the calling of the disciples, which we will examine in the following session.

The subsequent section is often called the Book of Signs. John then devotes an extraordinary amount of attention to the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry. Nearly half of the Gospel concerns that final period, and a remarkable portion focuses on the final twenty-four hours.

John is deliberately narrowing the lens as he approaches the crucifixion.

"In the Beginning Was the Word"

John opens with one of the most profound statements in all of Scripture:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

"The beginning" here reaches beyond the beginning of human history. It reaches beyond the creation of the physical universe and, conceptually, beyond time itself.

Modern physics has demonstrated that time is connected to the physical properties of our universe. John is presenting the Word as existing before the physical creation.

The Greek term is *logos*.

Logos means more than merely a word on a list. It can carry the idea of expression, communication, thought, message, or revelation. John is identifying Jesus with the divine expression—the One through whom God is revealed.

The statement is not merely that the Word existed with God. John also says:

"The Word was God."

And then:

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

John is identifying the Word as the Creator.

Paul makes a similar statement in Colossians, declaring that all things were created by Him, including things visible and invisible. He is before all things, and by Him all things consist—that is, they are sustained or held together.

Hebrews likewise opens by describing the Son as the One through whom God made the worlds, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of His person, and the One who upholds all things.

The message is consistent: Christ is not merely part of creation. He is the Creator and Sustainer.

John the Baptist

John 1:6 introduces another John:

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”

This is John the Baptist, not John the Apostle.

John the Baptist came as a witness to the Light. The Gospel carefully distinguishes him from the Light itself. He was sent to bear witness to the One who was coming.

John the Baptist occupies a unique position. He represents the conclusion of the Old Testament prophetic era while simultaneously serving as the herald of the New Testament.

We will examine his role more closely in the next session.

Life and Light

John continues:

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”

And:

“The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

Light is another word we should not treat casually.

Jesus later declares, “I am the light of the world.” That statement can certainly be understood metaphorically, but there may be much more behind the metaphor.

John's language presents the Light as entering the domain of darkness. The darkness resists it, but cannot overcome it.

The imagery reaches back to Genesis, where the first recorded command of God is:

“Let there be light.”

Light is therefore not merely an illustration. It is deeply connected to creation, life, revelation, and the identity of Christ.

The Rejection and Reception of Christ

John 1:11–12 contains a dramatic contrast:

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

Yet:

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”

The tragedy is rejection; the opportunity is reception.

John then describes those who become God's children as people who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This theme will become much clearer when Jesus speaks with Nicodemus in John 3. We will return to the implications of new birth and the nature of God's work in salvation as we proceed through the Gospel.

The Word Became Flesh

John 1:14 brings us to the heart of the passage:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

The word translated “dwelt” literally carries the idea of tabernacling.

That is deliberate.

The Old Testament Tabernacle was God's dwelling place among His people. It was temporary, humble in outward appearance, located at the center of Israel's camp, and associated with sacrifice, worship, priesthood, the Law, and God's presence.

John is telling us that the Word Himself has now tabernacled among humanity.

The Tabernacle contained the holy place, the Holy of Holies, the menorah, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant with its mercy seat.

Jesus later identifies Himself with several of these images. He says, “I am the door.” He is the Light of the world. He is the Bread of Life. He is the One who intercedes for His people.

The Tabernacle therefore provides an important framework for understanding John's presentation of Jesus.

John 1:1 and John 1:14

There is a striking correspondence between the opening of John and verse 14.

John 1:1 says:

The Word was in the beginning.
The Word was with God.
The Word was God.

John 1:14 says:

The Word became flesh.
The Word dwelt among us.
We beheld His glory.
He was full of grace and truth.

The two passages are carefully connected.

This kind of structure appears throughout John's Gospel. It may read naturally and simply, but closer study reveals intricate patterns and deliberate organization.

“Metaphors Reign Where Mysteries Reside”

There is a phrase that has stayed with me:

“Metaphors reign where mysteries reside.”

It suggests that metaphors may sometimes serve as windows into realities we do not yet fully understand.

That is why we should not move too quickly past John's use of logos and light.

Logos is more than a convenient metaphor for a word. It is the title John applies to the preexistent Christ—the One through whom all things were created.

If Christ created the macrocosm and the microcosm, then everything that exists is ultimately within His creative authority.

Following the Fall, creation was subjected to corruption and bondage. Yet God continues to reveal Himself through His Word.

This raises a profound question: How do we discover God?

The answer, in a Christian sense, is by learning about Jesus Christ.

Jesus says in John 14, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Studying Jesus is therefore not merely an elementary religious exercise. It is one of the most profound pursuits available to us.

Light and the Greek Phos

The Greek word for light is phōs.

Again, we should not dismiss this as merely a metaphor.

Light remains one of the great mysteries of physics. It exhibits both wave-like and particle-like behavior, and quantum physics has revealed properties that challenge our ordinary understanding of reality.

The famous wave-particle duality is one example. Experiments involving the double slit demonstrate interference patterns that cannot be explained simply by imagining light as ordinary particles moving along classical trajectories.

Quantum physics introduces concepts such as probability and nonlocality that challenge many of our ordinary assumptions about what constitutes physical reality.

These scientific observations do not, by themselves, prove theological conclusions. But they remind us that physical reality is considerably stranger and deeper than everyday experience suggests.

Light as the Source of Life

Light is also literally foundational to life on Earth.

The sun provides the energy that drives Earth's biological systems. Through photosynthesis, plants convert light energy into chemical energy, producing sugars and oxygen and sustaining the food chain.

Plants and animals participate in a remarkable cycle of mutual dependence. Plants use carbon dioxide and produce oxygen; animals use oxygen and produce carbon dioxide.

The entire system reflects an extraordinary interconnectedness.

John's association of light and life therefore has both profound theological significance and a striking

connection to the physical world.

The Hologram as a Model

Holography provides another useful model.

A hologram records information about a three-dimensional object in a way that allows the resulting image to be reconstructed when illuminated appropriately. Unlike an ordinary photograph, the information describing the object is distributed throughout the recording medium.

If part of a hologram is removed, the entire image can still be reconstructed, although with reduced clarity.

This provides an interesting analogy for Scripture.

The Bible distributes its themes and doctrines across many books, passages, and historical contexts. Removing one passage does not necessarily destroy the doctrine because related information appears elsewhere.

Isaiah describes this kind of pattern as “line upon line” and “precept upon precept.”

This is one reason isolated proof texts can be dangerous. Biblical doctrines should be understood from the entire scriptural witness rather than from a single verse.

The analogy can be extended further. A hologram is not particularly impressive when viewed in the wrong way; it must be illuminated correctly to reveal the image.

Likewise, Scripture can appear to be merely a collection of ancient stories or traditions when approached without understanding. Yet through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, Christians understand Scripture as revealing Christ throughout its pages.

A Holographic Universe?

There has also been speculation in modern physics about whether the universe itself might be described holographically.

These ideas arise from serious questions in quantum theory, gravity, and the structure of spacetime. Some physicists have explored whether information about a volume of space could, in some sense, be encoded on a lower-dimensional boundary.

Related experiments have attempted to detect extremely small fluctuations in spacetime.

These remain areas of active scientific investigation, and we should distinguish established

experimental results from more speculative interpretations.

Nevertheless, the questions are fascinating: What is the ultimate nature of space and time? Is physical reality fundamental, or does it emerge from something deeper? Could what we experience as ordinary distance and location be manifestations of a more fundamental structure?

These questions reinforce the broader point that our intuitive understanding of reality has limits.

The Constants of the Universe

One final observation concerns mathematical constants.

Two familiar dimensionless mathematical constants are π and e .

π describes the relationship between a circle's circumference and diameter. The constant e , approximately 2.71828, is the base of natural logarithms and appears throughout mathematics, physics, growth processes, wave mechanics, and other fields.

There are claims that numerical relationships involving the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 produce π and that corresponding calculations involving the Greek text of John 1:1 produce e to several decimal places.

These claims are intriguing, but they should be treated carefully. Numerical patterns in ancient texts can depend heavily on the particular counting method, textual form, and assumptions used. They are interesting observations, but they should not be presented as established mathematical proofs of supernatural authorship.

The broader theological point remains important: Scripture repeatedly presents creation as ordered and meaningful, and John begins his Gospel by connecting creation directly to the eternal Word.

Conclusion

John's opening fourteen verses take us from eternity to creation, from the Word to light, from light to life, from the Creator to His incarnation, and from the incarnation to the invitation to become children of God.

The central declaration is simple yet profound:

The Word was God, the Word was with God, and the Word became flesh.

John is presenting Jesus not merely as a teacher, prophet, or historical figure, but as the preexistent Creator who entered His creation.

That is the foundation upon which the rest of the Gospel is built.

For the next session, read the remainder of John 1, particularly the passages concerning John the Baptist and the calling of the disciples. It would also be useful to read Matthew 17, concerning the Transfiguration, and Revelation 11, concerning the two witnesses.

We will continue by examining John the Baptist and then move deeper into the themes and structures John has introduced.

Let us close with a word of prayer.

Introduction to Weekly In-depth Bible Study section.

1. The Bible as an Integrated Design

When we open the Bible, we hold sixty-six distinct books written across nearly two millennia by more than forty authors, all inspired by the Holy Spirit. Despite their vastly different backgrounds and circumstances, these writers produced an extraordinary, cohesive whole. In the technical language of computer science, Scripture functions as an integrated message system—where microscopic details throughout the text consistently anticipate and complement one another.

This level of cohesion raises an obvious question: Where did such a design originate? The evidence points outside our ordinary space-time domain. Scripture repeatedly reveals history before it happens with breathtaking precision, establishing the dual foundation of my interpretation of Scripture: an integrated structure originating beyond time.

2. The Power of Microscopic Detail

As the ancient maxim states: *"The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed."* Because every detail contributes to this master design, small things matter. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 5, declaring that not a single jot or tittle—the smallest Hebrew letter and decorative mark—would pass from the Law until all was fulfilled.

This commitment to detail requires us to approach biblical language with high "resolving power"—the optical ability to distinguish between two objects that appear identical at a glance.

- Vocabulary: Words often labeled as synonyms usually carry deliberate, crucial distinctions. For instance, while Matthew frequently uses "kingdom of heaven" where Mark and Luke use "kingdom of God," Matthew also uses "kingdom of God" in specific instances, proving the distinction is intentional.
- Context: In the Olivet Discourse, Luke focuses heavily on the historical destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, whereas Matthew 24 details a future desolation. Treating these passages as identical conflates distinct events, audiences, and purposes.

3. The Berean Challenge

For more than 50 years decades, I have advocated Acts 17:11. Luke notes that the Bereans *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."*

Searching the Scriptures means refusing to accept teaching blindly—even from instructors you trust. My goal is never to impose a viewpoint, but to equip you to weigh the evidence for yourself. However, the harder half of the Berean challenge is often the first part: receiving the word with an open mind. We all carry hidden presuppositions shaped by culture, science, or tradition. Genuine investigation requires us to acknowledge these biases and test them against the text.

4. A Larger Reality

Modern physics has shown that the physical universe is bounded on both extremes—from the vast macrocosm of astrophysics to the finite realm of quantum mechanics. Science increasingly suggests that our physical universe is merely a subset of a much larger reality.

Scripture has asserted this all along. As Paul writes in Romans 1, the invisible attributes of God are understood through the things that are made. The physical world is not the sum of existence; it is a gateway to a broader, divine reality.

As we tackle complex and sometimes controversial topics, we will do so candidly and honestly, holding fast to Augustine's timeless maxim:

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."