

**More on the Divinity of Christ;
Three Questions for John the Baptist (John 1:19-1:28 Part A)**
Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Recap of Prior Lesson (which had been first lesson in John)

- a. Introductory comments regarding how gospel of John was viewed in comparison with the three 'synoptic' gospels.
 - i. Early accounts indicate that John written last, after the other three, and authored by the apostle John.
 - ii. For that reason, he tended to focus on things not mentioned in the first three gospels.
- b. Second half of gospel (John 12-21) focuses on events in the last week leading up to the crucifixion, plus the resurrection.
- c. Gospel of John begins by diving into the depths of the nature of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is God (proceeding from the Father; not created)
- d. Early Christian views of Jesus' relation to the Father, similar to a ray of light proceeding from the sun; or a stream proceeding from a spring on a hill.
- e. John's gospel begins, in the first chapter with many references to the Old Testament; appears to assume that his readers were quite familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures.

II. On the Divinity of Christ (continued from prior lesson)

- a. In the last class, we touched on the divinity of the Word of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ. Also, that the Word of God was in the beginning, before all things; and that all things were made through the Word of God:
 - i. "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." (**John 1:1-3**, NKJV)
 - ii. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." (**John 1:10**, NKJV)
 - iii. "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 1:14**, NKJV)

- b. **Question:** The other three gospels discuss Jesus being: the Christ (Messiah); king over the kingdom of God; and the Son of God. However, apart from **John 1**, where else in Scripture is the divinity of Christ established, or His being there at the beginning and involved in the Creation?
- i. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...'" (**Genesis 1:26**, NKJV)
 1. Early Christians saw this plural reference ('us' rather than 'me') as speaking of the Word and the Spirit who were with the Father and involved in the creation.
 2. From Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) "For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things, to whom also He speaks, saying, 'Let Us make man after Our image and likeness...'" (Source: Irenæus, *Against Heresies*. ANF vol. 1, pp. 487–488).
 3. Theophilus (c. 180 AD) wrote, "God is found, as if needing help, to say, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.' But to no one else than to His own Word and wisdom did He say, 'Let Us make.'" (Source: Theophilus of Antioch. *Theophilus to Autolytus*; in ANF vol. 2, p. 101)
 4. Also see: Barnabas (c. 70-130 AD) in ANF vol. 1, p.139; and Tertullian (c. 210 AD) in ANF vol. 3, p. 549
 5. For many more references, refer to article on Christ, Divinity of; in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, David Bercot, editor.
 - ii. "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'" (**Matthew 1:23**, NKJV; quoting from **Isaiah 7:14**)
 1. Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) wrote, "Carefully, then, has the Holy Ghost pointed out, by what has been said, His birth from a virgin, and His essence, that He is God (for the name Emmanuel indicates this)." (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. In ANV vol. 1, p. 452)
 - iii. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." (**Colossians 1:15–17**, NKJV)
 - iv. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the

express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” (**Hebrews 1:1–4**, NKJV)

- v. “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’” (**Hebrews 1:8–9**, NKJV)
 - 1. Here the Hebrews writer is quoting the Septuagint word-for-word, from **Psalms 45**, which speaks of a great and beloved warrior-king to come, and appears to refer to him as ‘God’.
 - 2. However, it also refers to His God!
 - 3. Keep in mind that this Psalm was written about 1,000 years before Christ, and the LXX translation which is quoted in **Hebrews 1** was made by Jews about 200 years before the birth of Jesus!
- vi. “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” (**Micah 5:2**, NKJV)
 - 1. In the LXX it says “whose goings forth were from the beginning” (same word as “beginning” in **Genesis 1:1** and **John 1:1**)
- vii. Paul says to the Corinthians, “but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (**1 Corinthians 1:24**, NKJV)
 - 1. Several early Christian writers connected this reference about ‘the Wisdom of God’ back to **Proverbs 8**, where this Wisdom was there in the beginning with God, and involved in the creation of all things.
 - 2. “The LORD possessed me (referring to ‘Wisdom’) at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.” (**Proverbs 8:22–23**, NKJV)
 - 3. For early Christian references to this, see article on Wisdom, in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*; David Bercot, editor.
- c. The original Nicene Creed is a good orthodox description of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Church leaders came up with at the Council

of Nicaea, to clearly state what the church had historically held, to avoid heresy on this point. The original Nicene Creed (325 AD):

- i. “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
- ii. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.
- iii. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.”

III. No One Can See God?

- a. It clearly states in **John 1:18** that no one can see God:
 - i. “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 1:18**, NKJV)
 1. Note: many translations have, “He has made him known” instead of “He has declared Him.”
 2. It clearly states that it is not possible to “see God” (referring to the Father); yet the Son has declared Him, revealed Him, or made him know.
- b. When Moses asked for God to reveal himself to Moses, the Lord refused that request, saying “You cannot see my face; for no man can see My face and live.” (**Exodus 33:20**)
 - i. Paul says something similar in **1 Timothy 6**, “...which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” (**1 Timothy 6:15-16**, NKJV)
- c. But what about all those examples in the Old Testament where it says someone was “seeing” God?
 - i. Examples include:
 1. The Lord “walking in the Garden” where Adam and Eve were, in **Genesis 3:8**

2. The Lord, accompanied by two angels, appearing to Abraham and having a meal with him and Sarah in **Genesis 18**, shortly before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.
 3. After wrestling with a mysterious “man” all night, Jacob said, “I saw God face to face and my soul was saved” (**Genesis 32:30**).
 4. In **Isaiah chapter 6**, the prophet says, “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up”. The Lord is surrounded by seraphim who were shouting, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts...”
- d. The early Christian writers provide a clear and compelling answer to this problem (impossible to see God, yet men saw God in the Old Testament). Their understanding fits with John 1 and all the rest of Scriptures. Furthermore, it brings into focus important aspects of the nature of the Father (who cannot be seen, and cannot be confined to any one place) and the Son (who can take form, who can be seen, and who reveals the nature of the Father to us). The quotes that follow, which are taken from the Ante-Nicene Fathers, are also found in an article on Theophany (meaning ‘an appearance of God’) in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, edited by David Bercot.
- i. Theophilus (c. 180 AD), a bishop of the church who lived in Antioch in Syria wrote, “How do you now say that He walked in Paradise?” Hear what I say: The God and Father of all, indeed, cannot be contained. He is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest. Instead, His Word, through whom He made all things, being His Power and His Wisdom, assumed the character of the Father and Lord of all. He went to the garden in the person of God, and conversed with Adam.... The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place. And when the Word appears, He is both heard and seen, being sent by Him. And He is found in a specific place.” (ANF vol. 2, p. 103)
 - ii. Irenaeus (c. 180 AD), a leader of the church in Gaul who had learned from Polycarp (who had been a disciple of the apostle John) wrote, “The Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout Moses’ writings. At one time, indeed, He spoke with Abraham, when about to eat with him. At another time, He was with Noah, giving to him the dimensions [of the ark]. At another time, He inquired after Adam. At another time, He brought down judgment upon the Sodomites. And again, He became visible and directed Jacob on his journey and spoke with Moses from the bush.” (ANF vol. 1. p. 473)
 - iii. Tertullian (c. 197), a Christian writer who lived in North Africa wrote, “This Word is called His Son. Under the name of “God,” He was seen in various ways by the patriarchs, and He was heard at all times in the prophets.” (ANF vol. 3, p. 249)

- iv. Novatian (c. 235 AD), a presbyter in the church in Rome wrote, “Moses everywhere introduces God the Father as infinite and without end. He is not enclosed in any place.... So, with reason, He can neither descend nor ascend, because He Himself both contains and fills all things. However, Moses speaks of God descending to consider the tower that the sons of men were building.... Whom do they pretend here to have been the God who descended to that tower?... God the Father? But then He is enclosed in a place. So how does He embrace all things?... Accordingly, neither did the Father descend ... nor did an angel command these things.... Then it remains that He must have descended, of whom the apostle Paul says, ‘He who descended is the same who ascended above all the heavens, that He might fill all things,’—that is, the Son of God, the Word of God. Yet, the Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us. This must be Christ. Therefore, Christ must be declared to be God.” (ANF vol. 5, p. 627)
- e. The early Christian writers believed that all the Scriptures like **John 1:18** that state “no one can see God” (referring to the Father) AS WELL AS all the passages in the Old Testament where someone was reported to “see God” (as referring to the Son). If this explanation is correct, all the pieces “fit”, and we can conclude:
 - i. No one has ever seen or can see God the Father, who dwells in unapproachable light and cannot be contained in any one place.
 - ii. Wherever it says in the Old Testament that someone “saw God”, that person was seeing the Word of God, or the Son of God, who can take on human form, who can be located in one place, and who can be seen.
 - iii. The presence of the Son of God therefore can be seen throughout the Old Testament. The story of the Son of God begins in **Genesis 1**, not **Matthew 1**!

IV. Introducing John the Baptist (Read **John 1:19-28**)

- a. Note that all four gospels begin with John the Baptist.
 - i. **Mark, Luke and John** start off immediately discussing John the Baptist, even before really introducing Jesus.
 - ii. In **Matthew 3**, right after the birth and childhood of Jesus, we are introduced to John the Baptist prior to the start of Jesus’ ministry.
 - iii. **Question:** Why does the story of Jesus need to start with John the Baptist, who was put to death by Herod before Jesus completed his preaching and teaching?
- b. The three questions posed to John the Baptist.
 - i. Taking all the gospel accounts together, we find John is in the Wilderness (the desert) preaching a strong message of repentance and baptizing people in the Jordan River.

- ii. Religious Jews see something prophetic about what John is doing, and ask him three very significant questions:
 1. Are you the Christ?
 2. Are you Elijah?
 3. Are you “the Prophet”?
- iii. These three questions are based on prophecies in the Old Testament regarding significant spiritual leaders who would come.
- c. The first of the three questions: “Are you the Christ?”
 - i. Consider **Psalm 2**, which speaks directly about the Christ who would come. About 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, king David, who also was a prophet, wrote about the Christ, who would come to rule over God’s kingdom.
 1. Note that “Christ” (Greek word used in the LXX and the New Testament), “Messiah” (Hebrew word) and “the Anointed One” (English) all have identical meaning; just in different languages.
 2. From the Septuagint, the Old Testament version most quoted by Jesus and the apostles, it says, “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers gathered themselves together, against the Lord, and against his Christ...” (**Psalm 2:2**, Brenton LXX)
 3. Furthermore, this king established by God, who would be opposed by the kings and rulers of the earth, would be called God’s Son. (Read **Psalm 2:6-9**)
 - ii. In **2 Samuel 7** the prophet Nathan revealed to David some significant things about this one who would rule over God’s kingdom and would be called God’s Son. (Read **2 Samuel 7:12-16**; called **2 Kingdoms 7:12-16** in the LXX. This is also found in **1 Chronicles 17:11-14**)
 1. God would “raise up” one destined to sit on the throne, after David’s death.
 2. He would come from David’s body (a direct descendant)
 3. He would reign over an eternal kingdom
 4. He would build a house for God’s name
 5. He would be called *God’s son*.
 - a. (Muslims would later claim that while Jesus is the Christ, he cannot be the ‘Son of God’. They claim that Christians somehow changed the story and added that part centuries after the time of Christ. However, these things were written 1,000 years before Jesus was born

in Bethlehem, and are found in the Scriptures of the Jews!)

- iii. In **Daniel 9**, the prophet Daniel also spoke about the Christ. This prophecy dates back to the time of the Persian Empire, about 550 BC. There, Daniel tells us what the angel Gabriel revealed to him, in the famous “Seventy Weeks” or “Seventy Sevens” prophecy. (Read **Daniel 9:24-26**)
1. Christ (the Anointed One) the Prince will come.
 2. He will come after Jerusalem is rebuilt (it had been destroyed by the Babylonians and was still in ruins at the time Daniel received this message).
 3. The Christ will be put to death (other translations: “cut off” or “slain”).
 4. Then the city (Jerusalem) and the sanctuary (its temple) will be destroyed by a prince to come.
 - a. This was fulfilled with the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus and the Roman army in AD 70.
 5. From this prophecy of Daniel, we learn:
 - a. Christ, the prince will come after Jerusalem is rebuilt, but before it is ultimately destroyed
 - i. Cyrus issued decree to rebuild the temple c. 536 BC
 - ii. Nehemiah returns to rebuild the walls c. 444 BC
 - iii. Jerusalem destroyed by Titus 70 AD. Temple never rebuilt after that.
 - b. Many **Jews** are still waiting for the Messiah (the Christ) to come. However, he had to have come before 70 AD (prior to when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans), according to Daniel’s prophecy!
 - c. Many **Muslims** accept Jesus as a prophet and even as the Christ, one who will return on the Last Day. However, they insist that Jesus did *not* actually die on the cross, but *only appeared* to have done so. Mohammad, who lived about 600 years after the time of Christ, claimed that Christians changed the story about Jesus in that regard. However, we have:
 - i. Eyewitness accounts of Christians who spread the news all over the world and went to their

deaths proclaiming the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the foundation of the gospel. (See **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**)

- ii. The testimony of Jewish opponents of the Christians, who admitted that Jesus was crucified (however they claimed that the disciples stole the body).
 - iii. Daniel, writing centuries before the time of Jesus, in the Hebrew Scriptures, said that the Christ would be killed. (This is similar to what Isaiah said in **Isaiah 53** about the “Suffering Servant” who would be killed.)
- iv. In conclusion, when the Jews were asking John the Baptist if he was the Christ, the full significance of that question can be appreciated if we grasp what the prophets said about the Christ who would come!
1. It helps us appreciate the great expectation of the Jews for the long-awaited Christ.
 2. The prophecies about the Christ reveal a lot of very specific, detailed information about the Christ, so that diligent truth-seekers would be able to confirm when He finally came.
 3. The Old Testament Scriptures tell us:
 - a. To the Jews still waiting for the Christ: According to Daniel, he must have come before AD 70.
 - b. To the Muslims who say that Jesus was the Christ but he was not the Son of God and did not die on the cross: The Scriptures in the possession of the Jews, written 500 and 1000 years before the time of Jesus clearly state otherwise.
- d. In our next class we plan to look at the other two questions asked of John the Baptist: “Are you Elijah?” and “Are you the Prophet?”