

John 1:1-13 – In the Beginning

John's stated purpose for writing the Gospel of John is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". But the Gospel of John has much to offer those who have already believed in Christ. John was in the group of three who were closest to Jesus during his ministry. When I read the Gospel of John, John invites me to have a front row seat to see and listen to Jesus. Note that when I say "John", it is short for "John moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit". On multiple occasions John pointed out that he and the other disciples did not understand what they witnessed until after Christ was resurrected and they were filled with the Spirit of God.



Read Genesis 1:1-5. Read John 1:1-5. What are the first 5 words of the Bible? What are the first 6 words of the Gospel of John? What similarities do you see between the two passages?

What do we learn about God from Genesis 1:1? What has God done that makes him distinct? What do we learn about the Word from John 1:1-3? What has the Word done that makes him distinct? Who is the Word?

What key words are found in John 1:1-5 that are also found in Genesis 1:1-5, 2:7? *The significance of these words will be explained later in the book as well as illustrated by miracles that Jesus performed. The fact that Jesus was the light of the world is proclaimed in John 8:12 and demonstrated in chapter 9 when Jesus gave sight to the man born blind. The fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life is proclaimed in John 11:25 and demonstrated later in the chapter when he raised Lazarus from the dead.*

Read John 1:6-8. John takes us from before creation to John the Baptist in just 6 verses. What was the purpose of John the Baptist? What is "the Light" which is referred to in verses 7 and 8? Is this the light of Isaiah 9:1-2, the light / lamp of 1 Kings 11:36 or some other light?

Read John 1:9-13. Jesus came to the world he created and that same world did not recognize or receive him. What are some other passages in the Bible that talk about the creation not recognizing the Creator? How does someone become a child of God?

In Depth – The Word was God

Have you ever run across a Jehovah Witness who said that John 1:1c should be translated “the Word was a God” because there is no definite article in the original Greek? You may have heard the saying “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts”. Well, beware of strangers quoting Greek! They are just parroting something that they heard someone else say. You may be surprised to know that the definite article does NOT appear in John 1:1c before “God”. Is it time to panic? Should the translation really be “the Word was a god”? The simple answer is, NO WAY!!! If context was removed, “a god” or “God” would both be proper translations of the Greek. So ultimately the proper translation comes down to context. “God” often appears in the Greek New Testament without the article. It is often treated as a proper name. In Greek, proper names sometimes have the article and sometimes they don’t. The New World Translation (the one used by Jehovah Witnesses) translates “god” without the definite article as “God” in many places. Two close examples are their translation of John 1:6 (man sent from God) and 1:13 (born of God). In both cases the definite article is missing before “God” but they translate it as “God” and not “a god”. Given that the Word existed before creation and that the Word was in fact the creator of all things, the context demands the translation “God”.

For me, the answer above is enough but there is more to the story. Why didn’t John just put the definite article before “God” and remove any doubt? For some reason (emphasis or literary structure or some other reason) John wanted to put the word “God” first in the sentence and then the subject, “the Word”, last in the sentence. In Greek, the subject does not need to be first. In Greek, we know that “the Word” is the subject because it has the definite article. “God” does not have the definite article and so is placed last in English translations of the sentence to conform to proper English. Thus we have the English translation “the Word was God”. “God” doesn’t have the definite article so that readers of the original Greek would know that “the Word” is the subject of the sentence and not “God”.

For Further Thought

Scientists and our public schools preach that God did not create the world. The “Diversity” crowd doesn’t have room for Christians who believe that God created the heavens and the earth. Why is this truth so important? What would be the implications for Christians if God was not the creator?

Genesis 1:1 teaches us that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. John 1:1 teaches us that Jesus is God. This is another foundational truth that has been attacked from the time of Christ. Why is it important that Jesus is God and not “a god” or just a good person?

John 1:13 says that a child of God is not a child by physical birth nor are they a child by a decision made by a man or woman. A child of God is birthed by God. The birth is a work of God and not man. It is a spiritual birth. It is a birth from above. This is a truth that is difficult for many Christians to believe. Why do you think this truth is unpopular with many Christians?