

Youth Teaching Resources

January 5, 2020



Season after Christmas (January 5)

Now Appearing

John 1:1-9, 10-18 – “The Word that Reveals”

Epiphany (January 12-February 23)

Matthew 3:13-17 – “A Son Who Pleases”

John 1:29-42 – “A Lamb Who Leads”

Matthew 4:12-23 – “A Preacher Who Calls

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The Word that Reveals

John 1:1-9, 10-18

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

PARENT PREP

With all of the different mediums that are available to send our students messages, it is hard for them to decipher what will truly be helpful for them and what is just trying to grab their attention to sell them something. Helping your students filter through all of inputs can be hard as they might see you as trying to limit what they see and what have access to. There is no one way to do this, but do remember that the more influence you want to have over your student, the less control you need to have over them.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by lighting all of the Advent candles and the Christ candle. With the candles lit, facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What has been your favorite memory of Advent this year?
- 2) What was your favorite gift that you received this Christmas?
- 3) What was your favorite gift you have given this Christmas?
- 4) How can you continue to be the presence of Christ to those around you throughout the year?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading John 1:1-18. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What does the word logos mean?
- 2) When does John say Christ came into existence?
- 3) How did the world first come to know Christ?
- 4) What power does Christ have?
- 5) What is the glory that Christ possesses?
- 6) What grace does Christ bring?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) Who wrote the gospel according to John?
- 2) How are we to become children of God?
- 3) Does John name God?
- 4) What does it mean by "grace upon grace"?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": How should we use the phrase "the Word of God"?

Transformation

Conclude your session by showing the clip "Finally Meeting" from *Sleepless in Seattle*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What reactions did they have when they realized who the other person was?
- 2) Why does the boy not seem as shocked as the two adults?
- 3) Have you ever met someone for that you didn't think you would ever meet?
- 4) What was it like the first time you realized you were in the presence of Christ?
- 5) How can you daily realize that you are in the presence of Christ?

Close with a prayer thanking God for Christ being present in our lives on a daily basis.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The author—The Fourth Gospel, commonly called the Gospel of John, was written anonymously. Tradition holds that it was written by the apostle John, brother of James and a son of Zebedee. A concluding note to the gospel identifies the author as “the apostle Jesus loved” (21:20-24).

Many scholars doubt that John the son of Zebedee could have been the author, citing significant differences between the Fourth Gospel and the earlier synoptics of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. It appears to have been written late in the first century, and takes a more philosophical approach that seems uncharacteristic of a Hebrew fisherman.

A strong tradition associates a man named John, perhaps the same as the John known as “the Elder,” who spent the last years of his life in Ephesus (some traditions insist that John, the beloved disciple, took Jesus’ mother Mary there to care for her). Some attribute authorship to him.

Others believe multiple authors contributed to the Fourth Gospel. The puzzle has no clear solution. Fortunately, the truths we learn from it do not depend on knowing the identity of the author.

The logos—Greek philosophers used the word *logos* in different ways. Some, such as Aristotle, used the term in the sense of reasoned discourse or the body of an argument, while the Stoics associated the word *logos* with a supernatural principle that pervades the universe and animates living things. Philo, a first century Jewish philosopher, employed the term *logos* with reference to a supposed demiurge, an intermediary bridging the great distance and difference between God and humans. In the Jewish philosopher Philo’s thought, the *logos* was the means by which God created the world and holds all things together. Scholars have often noted some similarities between the Fourth Gospel and Philo’s concept of the *logos*.

Power to become children of God—The word often translated as “power” is *exousía*, and it can also be translated as “right,” “privilege,” or “ability.” Without Christ we are mortal persons in a mortal world with no hope for anything beyond. With the coming of the *logos*, however, those who acknowledge Jesus as the divine Word can enter a special relationship with God.

Down and up—To put John’s argument in simplistic terms, Jesus left heaven and came to earth to engage with humans so humans can leave earth and enjoy a heavenly relationship with God.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Naming God, or not—Although we tend to think of John’s gospel as being written largely for people well versed in Greek philosophical categories, this verse reflects John’s desire to communicate with literate Jews, as well. Readers familiar with rabbinic writings would immediately notice that John used three common references to God in a single verse.

In Jewish writings such as the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament) and the Mishnah (collected teachings and commentaries of the rabbis), there was a strict prohibition on using God’s name – even the Hebrew versions of “God” and “Lord” – because it was thought to be presumptuous. Therefore, a number of circumlocutions were used to speak of God without naming God.

In the Targums, the most frequent terms used to indicate God’s activity were terms that we would translate as “Word,” “Presence,” and “Glory.” In describing God’s work, the rabbis would say, for example, that the Word spoke, the Presence dwelt, the Glory appeared.

Notice John’s use of similar terms in v. 14: “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” For any literate Jew, the obvious presence of these common circumlocutions would make a clear claim that Jesus Christ was the living embodiment of God himself (see G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine* [Harper & Row, 1966], 264).

The custom of avoiding any public use of God’s name continues among observant Jews, who avoid either saying or writing “Yahweh,” “God,” or “Lord.” Instead, they are likely to refer to God as “the Holy One, blessed be He,” or “the Name (in Hebrew, *HaShem*). When writing God’s name, they will intentionally misspell it as “G-d.”

Grace upon grace—In the phrase “grace upon grace,” the word translated as “upon” could also mean “over against” or “instead of.” Perhaps John is suggesting that the grace we have received for past sins can be “exchanged for” new grace to deal with our present failure. We can experience God’s grace time after time because it comes from an inexhaustible source, “from his fullness.”

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How should we use the phrase “the Word of God”?

Many people habitually refer to the Bible as “the Word of God,” going so far as to capitalize “Word.” We often conclude a public scripture reading, for example, with “The Word of God for the people of God.”

This is typically done as a sign of respect, and I don’t wish to criticize those who practice it, but the question is worthy of more thought than we typically give it. My personal preference is to reserve “Word” with a capital “W” as a term for Christ, after John 1:1 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Capitalizing “Word” in this instance recognizes the divinity of Christ as the incarnate Word of God.

The Bible, although it claims to contain words of God, does not present itself as “the word of God.” The prophets often spoke what they believed to be direct words from God, using formulas like “this is what God says” (Isa. 42:5), or “thus says the LORD” (Isa. 37:6; Jer. 37:7, 44:25; Ezek. 45:9). More commonly, however, they insisted “the word of the LORD came to me ...” (Jer. 1:11, 13; 2:1; Ezek. 3:16, 6:1; among many others) or told their listeners to “hear the word of the LORD ...” (Isa. 1:10, 28:14; Jer. 7:2, 17:20; Amos 7:16, et. al.).

Narrators telling stories about the prophets often used similar language. “The word of the LORD” is said to have come to Abraham (Gen. 15:4), Samuel (1 Sam. 15:10), Elijah (1 Kings 17:8), Nathan (1 Chr. 17:3), Isaiah (Isa. 38:4), Hosea (Hos. 1:1), Joel (Joel 1:1), and others. Similar permutations appear: Moses taught “the words of the LORD” (Exod. 24:3, Num. 11:24, others). “The word of the LORD” came to all Israel (Deut. 5:22) and was even spoken of as being heard by a “stone of witness” (Josh. 24:27).

We could cite many similar instances, but the point is that the Bible contains some words that it claims were spoken *by* God, but most of the Bible consists of words *about* God, or about the ongoing and usually troubled relationship between God and God’s people. It is a witness to Hebrew and Christian efforts to explain their understanding of God, the beginning of a long relationship story in which we continue to play a part.

The Bible as a whole, then, does not claim to be “the word of God” (with or without an uppercase W), though it does purport to contain words from God. Although it’s commonly done, to speak of the Bible as “the Word of God” – especially when “Word” is capitalized – could be seen as overstating the case. Moreover, for some believers it may come perilously close to “bibliolatry,” to making of the Bible an idol, ascribing to it a sacred or divine status that it does not claim for itself.

The Hardest Question *continued*

The Bible itself, keep in mind, does not name itself. The word “Bible” is from the Greek *biblia*, meaning “scrolls” or “books,” and “Holy Bible” is a title ascribed by people, and not claimed by the text itself.

We believe the Bible is a vehicle for divine revelation, but it is not in itself divine.

While we clearly should have deep respect for the Bible and may properly speak of it as “sacred” Scripture, that is because of its testimony that points us to God, not because it possesses divinity.