

NT CFM 04 – John 1 – “We have found the Messiah”  
Potomac Crossing Ward, Ashburn Virginia  
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## **Tools for the New Testament**

### **Commentaries**

Studying the NT this year, below are some good online Bible commentaries. All of these are old enough to be off copyright, so they are freely available on the Internet or in reprint:

Commentary Critical and Expository on the Whole Bible, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown and published, 1871, available at:

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/>

Notes on the Bible, Albert Barnes, 1834

<https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/barnes/index.htm>

A Commentary on the New Testament From the Talmud and Hebraica, John Lightfoot, 1658

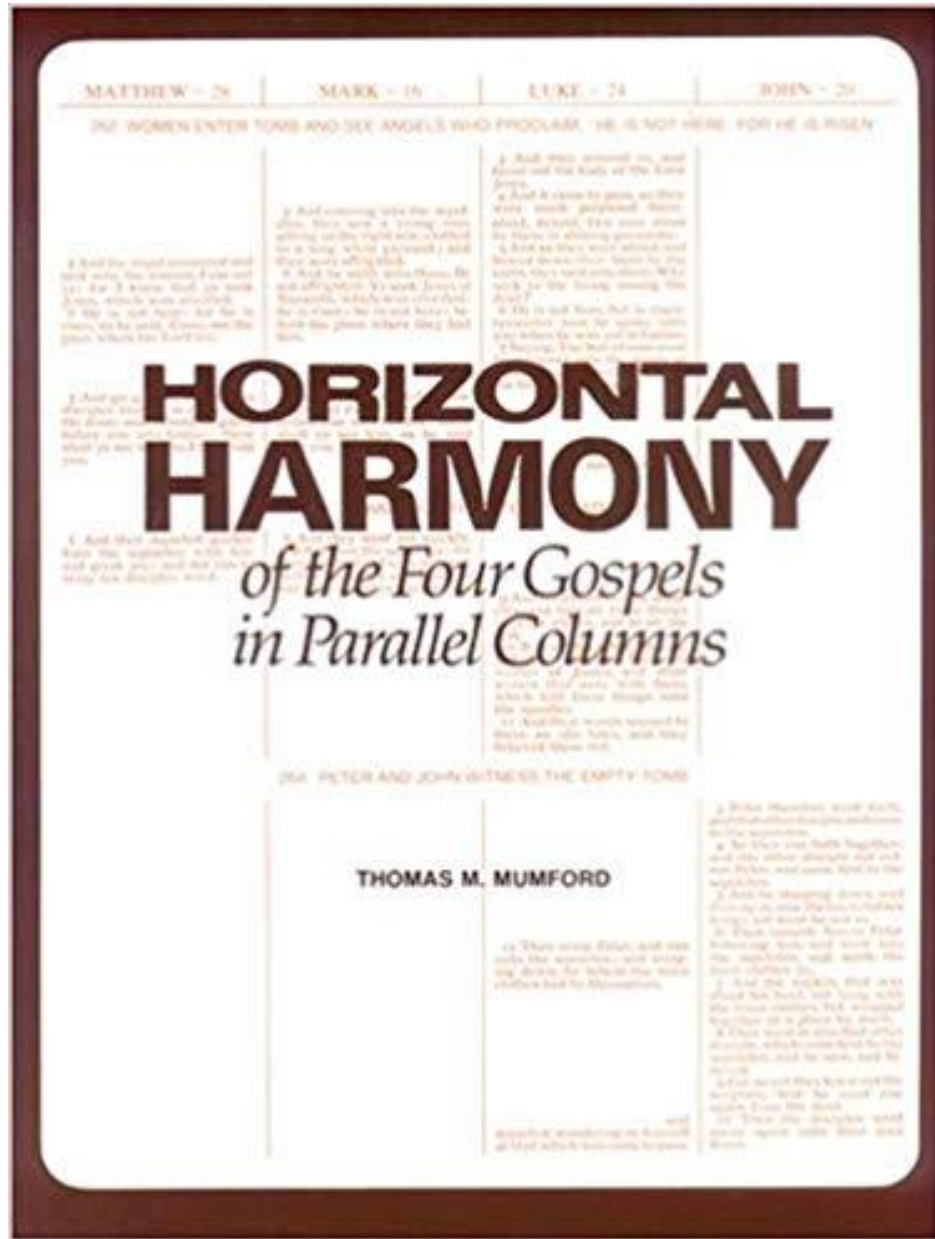
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/lightfoot-new-testament/matthew/>

There are plenty of other old commentaries online as well, but the majority of them blatantly forward a specific sectarian theological point of view, which limits their utility. These above are examples of commentaries that avoid sectarianism and focus instead on the meaning of the text.

In local libraries, a good Bible commentary that is non-sectarian and generally well respected is the Anchor Bible.

## Horizontal Harmonies of the Gospels

When reading in the Gospels, a horizontal harmony is a useful tool that puts the related texts into parallel for comparison. Here is the one I use most often:



You can see how the text of the various gospels is placed into parallel for comparison. There are plenty of other versions of the same thing available for sale, some by LDS authors.

## **General Comments on John**

### **Synoptic Gospels Versus John's**

John's account differs from the Synoptic Gospels in that where they are largely descriptive and informative of events as they occurred, John writes with a more deliberate theological and doctrinal purpose. John presents a series of lengthy dialogues or discourses, where the Synoptics tend towards discreet events, pointed statements and parables. Their intent is to show the reader that Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the Hebrew Bible. John's account is much more theologically driven. It simply assumes you already know the content of the Synoptic gospels, and presents the reader with a much more challenging and dense set of text. John's account explains the motivation and theology of Jesus the Messiah.

The lack of overlap in events between John's account and the Synoptic gospels was surely deliberate, as there was no need for him to recount what was already broadly published and well known. Rather, John's intention was to bring his first-hand experience and testimony to the believing body of the Church. It is likely John's motivation was, at least in part, to address heresies leaking into the Church, specifically Gnosticism (which he comments on in his epistles). In the case of the introductory content of chapter 1, John clearly intentionally takes a different approach to Matthew and Luke's royal pedigrees. John instead presents Jesus as fully the Lord God of Israel in the flesh, drawing on Isaiah's prophecies to establish this point.

### **Overarching Themes**

One of the themes running through John's account is that the Father has committed all things to the Son: judgment (5:22, 5:27), life (5:26), power over flesh (17:2), followers (6:37, 17:6), what to say (12:49, 17:8), the divine name (8:58, 17:11-12), glory (17:22). But, despite this, through the text, Jesus constantly defers to the Father, acknowledging the original source. John's intention is to show the coupling of extraordinary power with extraordinary humility. Throughout the Old Testament the various kings of Israel and Judah all have fatal flaws. The power, fame and wealth corrupt them all (e.g., Saul, David, Solomon, etc.). But, in the case of Jesus, he successfully avoids the tragic pitfall by avoiding the earthly throne, staying humble and deferring to the Father. John even avoids the use the word "kingdom" in his account, which term appears frequently in the other accounts.

Throughout John's account the hostility between Jesus and the Pharisees, whom John labels "the Jews" is persistent. It should be noted these Pharisees, the Sanhedrin in specific, are not natives of Jerusalem. These are Babylonian Pharisees. Herod had the local Sanhedrin and high priests killed off early in his reign and had them replaced with Jewish religious leaders from Babylon. These leaders were favorably disposed towards Herod because they owed their high positions to him. Hence the obvious lack of regard the Jewish population has towards the religious leaders at Jerusalem. John's approach is not anti-Jewish, it is anti-Sanhedrin, a specific

subset of Jews with a clear political agenda.

### **Rhetorical Style**

One of the rhetorical devices John uses throughout his Gospel is irony, so much so that among commentators it has been branded “Johannine Irony”. For example, in the first chapter we start with the example of John Baptist who completely understood who Jesus was, namely the incarnate Lord God of Israel. But by the end of the chapter, Jesus has composed his initial body of disciples and they don’t really understand who Jesus is, hence Nathanael’s confession “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” Nathanael accepts Jesus as the Messiah, but he sees him very much as a political King.

Another example is that of chapter 9, where Jesus heals the blind man. As the chapter progresses the healed blind man’s testimony of Christ grows stronger and stronger as the accusations against him from the Pharisees become more and more strident. His spiritual vision gets better and better, while they plunge deeper into spiritual blindness. John uses irony like this throughout his account.

John uses a rhetorical pattern of real life incident (RLI) and then Jesus' discourse (D) on the related doctrinal topic. This pattern is used consistently through ch. 2-13, as follows:

- 2     RLI: Wine at wedding party and Temple cleansing (replacement themes)  
      D: Mine hour not yet come, destroy this temple (this one is obscure, it mixes replacement themes with messianic themes, but in both cases Jesus forestalls fulfilment, delaying the sign they ask for in v. 18)
- 3     RLI: Nicodemus at night, John Baptist in day  
      D: Jesus is the light, men love darkness
- 4     RLI: Woman at well  
      D: Living water
- 5     RLI: Paralytic healed and judged  
      D: Resurrection and judgement
- 6     RLI: Throng demands manna and physical king  
      D: Living bread, a spiritual king
- 7     RLI: Jews (Sanhedrin) seek to kill him  
      D: If any man will do his will...none of you keep the Law (sinning and knowing the Father are contradictory)
- 8     This chapter is a unity with ch. 7 and continues the same theme only forwarding Abraham instead of Moses as the one they are offending, the woman taken in adultery is a later addition not in the most ancient texts

- 9 RLI: Healing of blind man  
D: Seeing and not seeing
- 10 RLI: Pharisees hostile to Jesus attempt to coerce and stone him  
D: the good shepherd and sheep versus the thieves, robbers, hirelings and wolves
- 11 RLI: Lazarus dies and revived, Sanhedrin seeks to kill Jesus and Lazarus  
D: I am the resurrection and the life
- 12 RLI: Jesus anointed for death, Triumphal entry  
D: Son of man glorified of the Father, not of man
- 13 RLI: Jesus washes their feet  
D: Your lord and master washes your feet, you should do as I have done...new commandment...love one another

The subsequent ch. 14-17 deal with doctrines centered around the imminent separation because of his death. The tenor of John's Gospel then changes completely for ch. 18-20 as Jesus willfully submits to his enemies where he is elsewhere the one in control. Chapter 20 picks up the RLI/D pattern again with Jesus using the context of fishing to send the apostles back to the ministry.

## Comments on John 1

By subject, the text of this chapter can be broken into the following blocks:

- v. 1-14           The testimony of John Baptist, that Jesus is the Lord God of Israel
- v. 15-34         John's threefold Testimony
  - v. 15-18 John's testimony to his own disciples
  - v. 19-28 John's testimony to priests and Levites
  - v. 29-34 John's testimony to Jesus himself
- v. 35-50         John passes his disciples to Jesus, and Jesus collects them
- v. 51            Son of Man is heavenly conduit, not king of Israel

Chapter 1 is a general theological introduction to the person of Jesus (v. 1-14) as given by the testimony of John Baptist, who first-hand sees his anointing/deification (v. 15-34), the collection of the disciples and John Beloved's introduction to Jesus (v. 35-50), and the introduction of the replacement theme which establishes the context of the entire religious and theological import of this gospel (v. 51).

We learn from the text John Beloved was a disciple of John Baptist before he was a disciple of Jesus, and John passed him off to Jesus. This explains the depth of understanding and detail of John Beloved's ministry documented in this chapter. It also suggests the two had quite an affinity between them. The author clearly respected John Baptist and understood the importance of his role.

v1-14 John follows suit with the Synoptic Gospel writers in addressing paternity, authority and John Baptist's testimony, but does so in an eternal context, as opposed to an earthly context. In Matthew and Luke, we are presented with two patrilineal lines arguing for Jesus' rightful place as king of Judah. In this account, John presents Jesus as the Lord of the Old Testament, the Creator, the Light of the world. Jesus' authority stems from his Heavenly Father, not from his earthly connection to David.

The text invokes Creation themes with the "In the beginning...", the reference to light and darkness, which was divided on the first day of Creation, and the explicit reference to His Creatorship in v. 2. While these themes are an authority statement in and of themselves, they also appear prominently in Isa. 42 as well, which is blatantly messianic.

Isa. 42:5 Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens,  
and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that  
which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people  
upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

6 I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold  
thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of  
the people, for a light of the Gentiles;

7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

The clear theological implication is that Jesus Christ is the pre-mortal Lord of the Hebrew Bible. John presents Jesus as the fulfilment of Isa. 42, as John Baptist is the fulfilment of Isa. 40:3, which John himself references in v. 23, when questioned by the priests and Levites.

“the Word”, the Greek word here is “logos”, and it comes with a lot of baggage from Greek philosophy. The IV/JST fleshes out the more enigmatic KJV by explaining the "word" connection to the Son. The Greek term "logos", here translated to "word", has an entire theological/philosophical meaning and lore entirely its own drawn from Greek philosophy.

The general concept associated with logos is that of independence, in the philosophical sense of not relying on anything else for existence. Things such as natural laws, math, ideas, and so forth, were considered independently true. Their truth or existence is not contingent upon anyone or anything to determine their correctness or reality. They simply exist regardless of what we think of them.

This philosophical usage has led various commentators to equate the philosophical implications of logos with the eternal and transcendent nature of the Son. John makes no equation between the explicit theme of the incarnation of the Law and the implicit theme of philosophical logos. The IV is hostile to the philosophical reading as it emphasizes the gospel, the good news of the Messiah, and ignores philosophical implications. The gospel-oriented theme is additionally emphasized by the IV with the additions in v. 4 and 7.

Most Christian commentators separate off verses 1-4 from the following v. 5-14, when they really are all part of the same subject, namely the testimony of John Baptist. They typically treat v. 1-4 as an authority statement regarding the person of Jesus and positioning him with God the Father pre-mortally.

“Which were born, not of blood”, the translation here in v. 13 of the KJV is not great. The Greek term translated to “which” is “hos” and is an ambiguous pronoun. The KJV translators assumed it was referring to the people of the preceding verse (v. 12) who accept the true light, and not the true light Himself. The IV emends the text to change it to Christ, which is attested to by the pattern in the text.

The translation of “blood” should also be plural, as in “bloods”. The reference here is obscure, but in following the context of the will of flesh and of men later in the verse, it is making reference to matters of the Law of Moses in mortality, namely the Law of Sacrifice, the Passover, circumcision, the Fall and so on. Jesus is above the Law, not beholden to it, and His purpose and sacrifice is above it, because He Created it and owns it. This ties into the OT theme of redemption.

This section of text can be arranged as an inverted parallelism, peaking on John Baptist’s testimony.

KJV

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

2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.  
7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light,

that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word was made 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.

**The IV/JST changes the peak of the text and clarifies v. 13 to make is clear it is Jesus who was born not of blood, flesh or man.**

IV/JST

1 In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made.

4 In him was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men;

5 And the light shineth in the world, and the world perceiveth it not.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.  
7 The same came into the world for a witness, to bear witness of the light,

to bear record of the gospel through the Son,  
unto all,

that through him men might believe. 8 He was not that light but came to bear witness of that light,



9 Which was the true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world, 10 Even the Son of God--he who was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; only to them who believe on his name.

13 He was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the same word was made 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.

The IV/JST makes clear that v. 1-14 are a unity and the primary subject is John Baptist's testimony that Jesus is the Lord God of Israel.

v15-34 The witness and testimony of John Baptist. Three portions of John's testimony are recounted.

v. 15-18 John's testimony to his own disciples and to all Judah

v. 19-28 John's testimony to priests and Levites

v. 29-34 John's testimony to Jesus himself

First, his general witness to all that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 15-18), second his testimony to the priests and Levites (v. 19-28), third his testimony to his own disciples (v. 29-36).

From the text, we learn John Beloved was originally one of John Baptist's disciples, and then when John defers to Jesus, John Beloved is true to John Baptist and leaves him and starts following Jesus.

The events detailed herein (v. 15-36) present the anointing and deification of the Son in the flesh (i.e., the investiture of all of the Father's power and authority and thus exaltation, esp. see D&C 93).

D&C 93:6 And John saw and bore record of the fulness of my glory, and the fulness of John's record is hereafter to be revealed. 7 And he bore record, saying: I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was; 8 Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation— 9 The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. 10 The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. 11 And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten

of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. **12 And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; 13 And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; 14 And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first. 15 And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son. 16 And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; 17 And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. 18 And it shall come to pass, that if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record of John.**

The text of D&C 93 confirms John Baptist was the only witting individual with respect to Jesus' mission as a spiritual Messiah and not a physical king. His unique calling, role and experiences, not to mention his exceptional humility, certainly all contributed to his spiritual insight.

These events of v. 15-37 are presented as occurring right after each other, day by day, so we would presume this occurred after Jesus had been baptized and then gone out into the wilderness for 40 days and nights. He apparently returned back to see John after that ordeal.

v15-18 John Baptist defers to Jesus as the Messiah, acknowledging his role as the predicted forerunner. The theological point here is that John Baptist recognizes the spiritual aspect of the Messiah, where pretty much everyone else doesn't. Everyone else is looking for a king like David, where John heralds a spiritual deliverer from the punishment of the Law of Moses.

KJV

15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. 16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. 17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

IV/JST

15 John bare witness of him and cried, saying, This is he of whom I spake. He who cometh after me is preferred before me, for he was before me. *16 For in the beginning was the Word, even the Son, who is made flesh and sent unto us by the will of the Father. And as many as believe on his name shall receive of his fullness.* And of his fullness have all we received, even *immortality and eternal life*, through his grace. 17 For the law

was given through Moses, but *life* and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 *For the law was after a carnal commandment, to the administration of death; but the gospel was after the power of an endless life through Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.* 19 *And no man hath seen God at any time, except he hath borne record of the Son; for except it is through him, no man can be saved.*

v19-28 The Pharisees at Jerusalem send priests and Levites to question John Baptist over what he is doing. The underlying implication is they want him to stop. They are the authorities in tevillah, or baptism, and are coming to question him. Note they do not tell him to stop, because he is the first born son of a priest and is authorized to do this. But, his ministry is outside of their purview, so they'd rather stop him. They cannot legally do so, so they try to argue with him.

This interaction clearly foreshadows the interactions the Pharisees will have with Jesus.

Later in ch. 5, when the Pharisees are questioning Jesus in an adversarial fashion, John Baptist is the first of Jesus' witnesses, when they accuse him of bearing witness of himself, and he points out to them he has three witnesses, namely John Baptist, the miracles he performs, and the Scriptures (cf. 5:31-35). John Baptist's testimony is persuasive and authoritative, they cannot argue against it.

v29-34 is John's testimony concerning Jesus being the Son of God. In Jesus' presence, he testifies of who Jesus is, as revealed to him by the Spirit.

v35-50 John passes his disciples off to Jesus (v. 35-37), and the group adds to its numbers, including one Nathanael (v. 49) who declares that Jesus is the Son of God and king of Israel. Jesus is impressed with Nathanael's belief (v. 50), but redirects him towards spiritual things, not physical things (v. 51).

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. 49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. 50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. 51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

In v. 49, Nathanael calls Jesus “Son of God...king of Israel”, he realizes Jesus is the Messiah, but he wants him to be the king like David, not a spiritual deliverer. Johannine irony comes to play here as the chapter starts with John Baptist, who completely understands who Jesus is, but we end with someone who does not completely understand who Jesus is.

After this, John Baptist continues his ministry and testimony, and continues to send his disciples to Jesus in complete humility and deference, as documented in 3:22-36.

John uses a rhetorical pattern of real life incident (RLI) and then Jesus' discourse (D) on the related doctrinal topic. This pattern is used consistently through ch. 2-13, as follows:

- 2 RLI: Wine at wedding party and Temple cleansing (replacement themes)  
D: Mine hour not yet come, destroy this temple (this one is obscure, it mixes replacement themes with messianic themes, but in both cases Jesus forestalls fulfilment, delaying the sign they ask for in v. 18)
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The subsequent ch. 14-17 deal with doctrines centered around the imminent separation because of his death. The tenor of John's Gospel then changes completely for ch. 18-19 as Jesus submits to his enemies where he is elsewhere the one in control. Chapter 21 picks up the RLI/D pattern again with Jesus using the context of fishing to send the apostles back to the ministry.