John 1:29-42
Isaiah 49:1-7 • Psalm 40:1-11 • 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John Testifies About Jesus

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” 30 This is the one about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because he existed before me.’ 31 Even I didn’t recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he might be made known to Israel.” 32 John testified, “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove, and it rested on him. 33 Even I didn’t recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I have seen and testified that this one is God’s Son.”

The First Disciples of Jesus

35 The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus walking along he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said, “Rabbi (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?”

39 He replied, “Come and see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon.
40 One of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Christ). 42 He led him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Footnotes:

a. John 1:34 Other ancient authorities read is God’s chosen one
b. John 1:41 Or Christ
c. John 1:42 Gk him
d. John 1:42 From the word for rock in Aramaic (kepha) and Greek (petra), respectively

NIV Cross references

A. John 1:29 : ver 36; Ge 22:8; Isa 53:7; 1Pe 1:19; Rev 5:6; 13:8
B. John 1:29 : S Jn 3:17
C. John 1:30 : ver 15, 27
D. John 1:32 : Mt 3:16
E. John 1:33 : S Mk 1:4
F. John 1:33 : S Mk 1:8
G. John 1:34 : ver 49; S Mt 4:3
H. John 1:35 : 1:40-42pp — Mt 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:2-11
I. John 1:35 : S Mt 3:1
J. John 1:36 : S ver 29
K. John 1:38 : ver 49; S Mt 23:7
L. John 1:41 : Jn 4:25
M. John 1:42 : Ge 17:5, 15; 32:28; 35:10
N. John 1:42 : Mt 16:18

About the Book:

John is the fourth gospel. Its author makes no attempt to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus (which the other gospels do, to a degree), but rather "...these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." John includes what he calls signs, stories of miracles, to help in this process.

About the Reading:

John the Baptist has denied that he is any of the figures expected by Jews to inaugurate a new era: he is neither the Messiah, Elijah, nor the prophet like Moses; rather he prepares people for the coming of the
Lord. He has also told some religious authorities that one is already among them who is far more worthy than he.

“The next day” John acclaims Jesus as “Lamb of God”. He is probably thinking of the fourth Servant Song: there the servant is “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”. John recognizes that Jesus outranks him (“ranks ahead”, v. 30) and “was” (existed) before him. In vv. 31-33 he recalls his experience of Jesus’ baptism, and justifies what he has proclaimed. He says: I didn’t recognize him as Messiah (“know him”), but I now realize that I baptised with water in order that Jesus might be shown to Jews. The coming of the Spirit showed me that Jesus is the one chosen by God. I am convinced that he is, and I have told others (v. 34). (Later on, on the lips of Martha, “Son of God” and “Messiah” are synonymous.)

In vv. 35-42, two of John’s disciples begin to follow Jesus. First, they are curious about Jesus when John tells them who he is. They follow him, recognizing that he is an authority (“Teacher”, v. 38). Jesus invites them to “Come and see” (v. 39), to investigate what he teaches. “Staying” and “remained” are technical terms in this gospel: the two begin to understand the way of life Jesus offers and expects. V. 40 tells us that one of the two is “Andrew”; the other is unnamed. Andrew tells “Simon” (v. 41) the good news and introduces him to Jesus. (The Greek word translated “Anointed” is Christos.) Jesus prophesies that Simon will be nicknamed “Cephas” (v. 42), the Aramaic word for rock. Petros, the Greek word for “Peter”, also means rock.

**More Detail:**

**Comments:** John the Baptist has denied that he is any of the figures expected by Jews to inaugurate a new era: he is neither the Messiah, Elijah, nor the prophet like Moses: See vv. 20-25. Jews expected the Messiah to come based on Psalm 2:5-6: “Then he [Yahweh] will speak to them [the kings of the earth] in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’”. Their expectation of Elijah’s return was based on Malachi 4:5-6: “I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes ...”. In Deuteronomy 18:18, God says “ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.”.

**Verse 29:** “The Lamb of God”: Meaning the Lamb provided by God. See also Exodus 12:3-5 (the sacrificial lamb in Egypt); Jeremiah 11:19 (“I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter”); Isaiah 42:1-9; 52:13-53:12 (both are Servant Songs). John the Baptist probably thinks of Isaiah 53:4, 7. By the time John wrote his gospel, the death of Jesus was seen as being like that of the Passover lamb: see John 19:36, 1 Corinthians 5:7 shows that the interpretation of Jesus’ death as that of the Passover lamb is early. [NJBC] In Revelation, “the Lamb” is both a sacrifice (“a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered”, Revelation 5:6) and the leader of God’s people, the Messiah (“the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd”, Revelation 7:17). Note that the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 53:7 uses the word amnos for lamb, as does John in this verse and in v. 36. [BlkJn]

**Verse 29:** “who takes away”: The Greek can also mean who bears. John probably means it in both senses. [BlkJn]

**Verses 30-34:** In the account of Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:1-9, John the Baptizer does not appear to recognize Jesus as anyone out of the ordinary; there Jesus alone sees the descent of the Holy Spirit, and alone hears the divine declaration “‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’”. Also in Mark, the descent of the dove is shown as a sign to the Baptizer that the Christ has come, and the Baptizer is merely a witness to this fact. Matthew 3:17 objectifies the divine voice; there it declares “‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased’”. Some argue that the Baptizer
recognizing Jesus at this stage is incompatible with the Baptizer’s question from prison: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (in Matthew 11:3 and Luke 7:19). If the synoptic gospels are correct, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (v. 29) is to be interpreted in terms of John the evangelist’s teaching. [BlkJn]

Verse 30: “‘he was before me’”: BlkJn offers he was first in comparison with me.

Verse 31: “‘I myself did not know him’”: This, BlkJn says, means I did not recognize him as the Messiah (when I baptised him) rather than He was a stranger to me. John had been looking for the return of Elijah; it was then revealed to him that the descent of the Spirit and its remaining on the man he had baptised was the sign that what he had expected had indeed happened.

Verse 31: “‘but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel’”: BlkJn offers but [I now realize that] it was in order that he should be made manifest to Israel that I came baptising in water.

Verse 32: “I saw the Spirit ... like a dove”: See also Mark 1:10; Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:22. See also the prophecy of David’s royal heir in Isaiah 11:1-2: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him ...” John does not tell the story of Jesus’ baptism because his purpose in writing is primarily theological. [BlkJn]

Verse 32: “remained”: This shows the permanence of the relationships between the Father and the Son and between the Son and believers. Jesus dispenses the Spirit in 3:5, 34; 7:38-39; 20:22.

Verse 33: “‘I myself did not know him’”: BlkJn appends then as an aid to understanding.

Verse 34: “this is the Son of God”: In v. 49, Nathanael links being Son of God with being Messiah. Martha’s assertion (referred to in Comments) is in 11:27. See also Psalm 2:7. Some manuscripts have God’s chosen one or elect of God. The phrase Son of God is used often in this gospel. A rule of biblical study is: the more difficult is more likely to be correct. Elect of God is more likely because, of the two, Son of God is more likely to have been introduced – to fit with its other uses in the gospel. Isaiah 42:1 also speaks of “chosen” or elect. [BlkJn]

So which account is correct: this one, where John the Baptizer is witness and offers personal testimony, or the synoptic gospels, in which the accounts are detached from Jesus’ baptism to a degree? BlkJn says that the statements the Baptizer makes here correspond to some extent with the expectations of the Qumran community. That they applied Isaiah 11:1-4 to their Messiah of Israel is shown by a fragment of their commentary on Isaiah. They considered themselves the elect, and believed their task to be making atonement for the world by punishing the wicked. What applied to each one of them could apply a fortiori to their war-leader (see their War Scroll), their Messiah of Israel. John the Baptist may have learnt some of what he taught from them. John’s question from prison may have been due to his surprise that Jesus was not behaving as he expected. Jesus knew himself to be the Messiah, but he repudiated the Baptizer’s conception of his role. BlkJn says that all four of the tellings of Jesus’ baptism are influenced by theological considerations: the synoptic gospels by embarrassment that the lesser (the Baptizer) baptised the greater (Jesus); John by the purpose of his gospel, particularly the role of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 38: “Rabbi”: In Jesus’ time; rabbi simply meant teacher. The rabbinic movement was in its infancy. The title often appears in the first twelve chapters of this gospel, where it is a sign of respect, combined with a statement or question which requires correction of an individual’s understanding of Jesus. See 1:49; 3:2; 3:26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8. [NJBC]

Verse 39: “Come and see”: An invitation Jesus also used later: see 1:46; 4:29; 11:34. Jesus elucidates this in 8:12: “‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life’”. [NOAB]
Verse 39: “They came and saw ... and they remained with him”: BlkJn offers stayed for “remained”. This simple episode may have a deeper meaning, as conforming to, and illustrating, the pattern of human quest for Christ and its outcome. 15:4ff makes clear that the place where Christ stays (“abide”) is in the Christian community, and that where the Christian stays is in Christ. [BlkMt]

Verse 40: “One of the two”: Who is the other one? There are various scholarly suggestions, including:

- John the son of Zebedee: by translating v. 41 as He was the first to find his own brother, but BlkJn says that the emphatic use of his (as in his own) is less frequent in New Testament Greek than the unemphatic (his);
- Philip, in that Jesus finds him in v. 43 below; and
- the Beloved Disciple, usually thought to be John. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20 speak of the disciple “whom Jesus loved”.

Verse 40: “Andrew”: He is also mentioned in 6:8; 12:22; Mark 13:3 and in his calling and in the lists of the Twelve. [BlkJn]

Verse 41: “first”: BlkJn suggests that the Greek word, proton, may be a copyist’s error; he argues that proi (in the morning) is more likely, the next word being ton. “Four o’clock in the afternoon” (v. 39) is near the end of the day: Andrew would have had little time for hearing Jesus. If in the morning is correct, Andrew stayed with Jesus overnight.

Verse 41: “We have found the Messiah”: This is not incompatible with Peter’s later confession at Caesarea Philippi (in Mark 8:29), though it may be with Mark’s presentation of it. Andrew means no more than John the Baptizer did earlier by “Lamb of God”, i.e. the one who would triumph over evil by pacific means. Peter’s confession is not a new discovery, but the triumph of faith over appearances. [BlkJn]

Verse 42: “You are to be called Cephas”: This is a prophecy that “Simon” will be called “Cephas”, not the giving of the name. None of the gospels states explicitly the occasion when Simon actually receives it, but note Mark 3:16 (“Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter)”). Matthew 16:18 (“you are Peter”) may be intended as the formal bestowal of the name.

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