

CHURCH.

LESSON 4

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> MARK 11:20 – 14:72
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Take turns and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Mark 11:20 – 14:72).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[CHRISTIAN CHARACTER]</i> (4) ROMANS 4:20-21
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Review two by two.

(4) Faith: Romans 4:20-21. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <i>[THE GOSPEL OF JOHN]</i> JOHN 1:1-18
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The purpose of studying the Bible together as a group is to grow together in a relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another. It is to help one another to gain knowledge and understanding of the Bible and to practise its truths.

For this reason it is important that the group members encourage one another to participate in the Bible study discussion. The input of every group member is important. Nobody should be put off if what he says turns out not to be completely correct (theologically). The group leader should rather encourage the group members to learn together by discovering and discussing the truths from the Bible. Every group member should feel that the other group members *listen* when he speaks, *take him seriously* and *accept* him. The group members are not competing with one another in Bible knowledge, but love one another by encouraging one another to grow and to share confidently.

The example of the Bible study below is designed to assist the group leader when he prepares the Bible study or to help the group when they discuss a difficult question. Your Bible study discussion may have different things that the group members discover and different questions that the group members ask.

Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study John 1:1-18 together.

Introduce. John chapters 1 to 12 relate the public ministry of Jesus Christ. He reveals himself in ever widening circles, but in the end he is rejected. John 1:1-14 describes the glory of the Word in the beginning before creation, at the creation, after the fall into sin and at the incarnation, when God took on the human nature in Christ. John 1:15 to 2:12 describes the Word, Jesus Christ, revealing himself to John the Baptist and to his early disciples.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ John 1:1-18 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

1:12-13

Discovery 1. Becoming a child of God.

John 1:12-13 says, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God - children born not of (literally) blood (natural descent), nor of (literally) the will of the flesh (sexual urge), nor of (literally) the will of a man (free will), but born of God.” These verses teach me how to become a child of God.

Becoming a child of God is a sovereign act of God. The Bible teaches that everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ has been born of God (John 1:12-13). When someone believes, he becomes a child of God (that is, he is born again):

- not by his natural descent (Greek: “blood”), that is, his nationality, for example: from Abraham (cf. John 8:31-59; Luke 3:8; Galatians 3:11,28).
- not by the physical (sexual) urge of his parents (Greek: “the will of the flesh”)(John 3:6)
- not by his own free will or decision (Greek: “the will of a man”) (Romans 8:7-8; 9:11,16).
- but only by being born of God (Greek: *egennéthesan*) (aorist, passive) (John 3:3-8; John 17:2; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-5).

Everyone who hears the gospel can become a child of God. Although Jesus Christ created the world and even came into the world and lived among the people, many people did not welcome him. But there are also many who welcomed him. He fulfilled the prophecy spoken in Luke 2:34, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many”, not only in Israel, but according to 1 Peter 2:6-8 also in the world. “He will be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” When John says *to all* who received him, then he means *whosoever* of any nation in the world. Jesus Christ did not only come to save Jews, but also to save people from every nation and language in the whole world.

Only those people, who believe in Jesus Christ, become children of God. To believe in “the name” of Jesus Christ means to believe in him as he has revealed himself in the Bible (not as other religions view him). A person, who *believes* this truth in his heart, will *accept* Jesus Christ (the Spirit of Christ) into his heart and life. “To accept” means to *welcome* Jesus Christ, *to acknowledge* and *confess* openly that he is the Saviour and *to take possession* of him in his inner and outer life.

Jesus gives them the ability (right) to become children of God. While Jews liked to call themselves “the children of Abraham”, believers in Jesus Christ receive the right and the ability from Jesus to actually be “the children of God”!

“To become” children of God does not mean that believers only become children of God in the future. It means that they already now are children of God through the instantaneous act of God, which is called regeneration in the Bible. They are justified, forgiven and have eternal life. Their position (state) is that they are children of God.

But it also means that they have started with a process of sanctification, a growth process in which they more and more look like children of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). The highest realisation of becoming a child of God is called glorification. Then believers will be in their human spirit (1 John 3:1-3) and in their human body (Philippians 3:20-21) completely identical in form with Jesus Christ in his human nature.

1:16-17

Discovery 2. The real difference between the law and grace.

John 1:16-17 says, “From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”. The law in the Old Testament consisted of the moral law, the ceremonial (ritual) law and the social (civil) law. There was nothing wrong with this law. God had given it to Moses (“the message spoken by angels”)(Hebrews 2:2). Its purpose was to prepare the people of God to receive the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The purpose of the law was to prepare people to receive the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

- On the one hand the law revealed to people what is sin and their lost condition
- On the other hand the law foreshadowed God’s salvation (for example, the animal sacrifices foreshadowed Christ’s sacrifice of atonement).

But there were two things that the law could not do.

- The law did not supply grace to forgive people their sins or to help them in their lost condition.
- The law also did not supply truth in the sense of reality of the types (illustrations) to which they pointed. For example, the law did not reveal the real nature of the Old Testament temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc., which were illustrations or types of the New Testament realities (cf. Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1)!

Only through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ

- on the one hand earned/acquired and made available “the grace that forgives sin and saves people from their lost condition”
- and on the other hand by fulfilling the law “revealed the realities or true nature of God’s plan of salvation” (for example, his sacrifice on the cross fulfilled all the sacrifices in the Old Testament)

STEP 3: QUESTION

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 1:1-18 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

1:1-3

Question 1. Who is "the Word" and what did he do?

Notes.

The Word is an important name for Jesus Christ.

(1) Jesus Christ is called the Word, because he expresses and reveals God visibly.

When we speak, our words give expression to our invisible thoughts. Likewise, Jesus Christ expresses the inner thoughts and invisible being of God to man. Jesus Christ is *the visible expression* of the invisible God within the limits of human words and the creation on earth (Colossians 1:15). Only Jesus Christ was present with God in heaven and knows his thoughts, plans and words. He reveals to us what we ought to know about God and his plan. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:25-27).

(2) Jesus Christ is God.

The Gospel of John emphasises that Christ is nothing less than God (cf. Hebrews 1:3; 1 John 5:20). He existed from eternity and had the same nature as God the Father (cf. Manual 2, supplement 8. The nature of God and the Son of God).

(3) Jesus Christ was always with God.

He was never created. In order to stress the fact that Christ himself was never created, verses 1 and 2 use *the continuous tense* of the verbs! He existed always from all eternity. He always existed in the closest possible fellowship and intimacy with God the Father. From always existed as a distinct Person from God the Father.

Thus, the Gospel of John emphasises three truths about Jesus Christ:

- He is genuinely Divine
- he existed from all eternity
- and he existed as a distinct Person from God the Father, with whom he enjoys loving fellowship forever.

(4) Jesus Christ created the universe.

In order to stress the fact that Christ created everything without exception, verse 3 uses the aorist and perfect tense of the verb. "Through him all things were *once and for all time* made (aorist tense). Without him nothing was made (aorist tense) that now exists (perfect tense)." Jesus Christ created the universe with its uncountable stars, the sun, the moon, the earth (cf. Genesis 1:1) and also man.

1:4-5

Question 2. What does it mean that Jesus is "the life" and "the light"?

Notes.

"In him was life and that life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Jesus Christ is called "the life" because he embodies God's attributes (characteristics). He is truly God. And he is called "the light" because he manifests or visibly reveals these attributes of God. Jesus Christ reveals God visibly to people.

In order to stress the fact that "life" resided in Christ from eternity, verse 4 uses *the continuous past tense* of the verb: "was". The term "life" refers to the fullness of God's essence, to his glorious attributes (characteristics), like for example his truth, his almighty power, his presence everywhere, his holiness, his love, his sovereignty, etc. This "life" is the source of all created life and all spiritual life. It is the ground of both the general revelation and the special revelation of God to mankind.

When this life is visibly manifested, it is called the "light"! Thus, Jesus Christ is the visible revelation (expression) of God and God's attributes (divine characteristics) (cf. John 14:9; Colossians 1:15). Only through Jesus Christ can we know God and experience God's love. In the Old Testament Christ shone as Light in the prophecies, the promises, the illustrations (shadows) that invited people. For example, the Passover Lamb pointed forward to the sacrificial atonement of Christ that removed the righteous indignation of God against sin. The daily blood sacrifices in the temple pointed forward to the blood of Christ that is shed on the cross and purifies the sinner from all unrighteousness. "Without the

shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Hebrews 9:22). The serpent lifted up on a pole in the desert pointed forward to Christ who was lifted up on the cross. Christ not only shone throughout the Old Testament period, but also throughout the New Testament period. He said, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father". Every attitude, word and deed of Jesus Christ reveals the invisible being of God.

1:9

Question 3. In what way does Jesus Christ give light to (illumine) every man?

Notes.

When a person hears the gospel, Christ illumines him. That means that Christ gives him a degree of understanding of spiritual matters. The person may realise that God really exists. Or he may realise that he is living in darkness (believing in one or another "god" or living is one or another form of slavery). Or he may realise that God has provided a way of salvation for everyone who believes.

But such knowledge, understanding or realisation does not necessarily lead to salvation. The context teaches that not everyone is saved.

- Verse 5 says that not everyone "understood" (caught on) or "grasped" (took possession of)¹ the Light.
- Verse 10 says that not everyone "recognized" or "acknowledged"² the Light.
- And verse 11 says that not everyone "welcomed" or "received"³ the Light.

There are people who hear the gospel, but who do not receive (accept) it, because they prefer to remain living in the darkness (John 3:19-21). But by God's sovereign grace there are other people who receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and are definitely saved (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:11-13). The Gospel of John does not teach universal atonement (the teaching that all people are saved). But it does teach assurance of salvation, namely, that every person once saved, remains saved!

1:10

Question 4. What is meant by "the world"?

Notes.

The word "the world" (Greek: kosmos) has several different meanings in the Gospel of John

(1) The world as the orderly-created universe.

(John 1:10a,b; 17:5,24) or the earth (John 21:25).

(2) The world as the theatre of human history.

It is the kingdom of man, the people on earth, humanity (John 1:9, 10c; 3:19; 9:39; 11:27; 12:46; 14:31; 16:21,28; 17:18; 18:36-37).

(3) The world as the general public.

(John 7:4; 14:22).

(4) The world as the realm of lost people.

This world is alienated from the life of God, loaded with sin, exposed to God's righteous judgement and in need of salvation (John 1:10c; 3:19). This meaning can pass over into the sixth meaning.

(5) The world as people coming from every nation.

It is the world of lost people (as in John 3:19 with the additional thought) without distinction of race, nationality or language (John 4:42) and without implying that it refers to every single individual (John 1:29; 3:16; 3:17; 4:42; 6:33,51; 8:12; 9:5; 11:52; 12:32; 1 John 2:2; 4:14-15). John says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here the world does not and cannot mean "every individual person who has ever lived in the world", because the Bible does not teach that all people will be saved. Also in John 3:16 it has this meaning and says that God loves people from every tribe, nation and language in the world, without implying that it refers to every single individual (Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5; Luke 14:26; Romans 1:18; 9:13; Hebrews 1:9; James 4:4).

(6) The world as the realm of evil.

It is the world of lost people who do evil and are hostile towards God, Christ and Christians (John 7:7; 8:23; 12:31, note the devil is driven out of his position of power at the first coming of Christ; 14:17,30,31; 15:18; 17:9,14-16,25; 1 John 5:19, note verse 18, the devil cannot harm born again Christians).

(7) The world as all God's chosen people.

All God's chosen people from all the nations (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).

It is therefore important to realise that the word "world" in the Bible has different meanings!

¹ Greek: katalambanó

² Greek: ginóskó

³ Greek: paralambanó

1:14

Question 5. What is the meaning of the word "flesh"?

Notes.

The word "flesh" also has several different meanings in the Gospel of John.

(1) Flesh as a human, a man.

John 1:13-14. John says that "a believer is born of God and not of the flesh". Here the "flesh" means man, that is, human nature without any negative ethical value. Regeneration is from beginning to end not the work of man, but the work of God! Also in John 1:14, John says that "Jesus became flesh". Also here the "flesh" means man, that is, human nature without any negative ethical value. Thus, although Jesus was sinless, due to the curse of sin resting upon all human nature until the ransom had been paid, Jesus was subject to the weak human nature, to weariness, pain, misery and death.

(2) Flesh as the sinful human nature.

John 3:6. Jesus says "flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit". Here the "flesh" means the human nature as the seat and vehicle of sinful desires; it is an expression of man as he is by nature. The apostle Paul often uses the word flesh in this sense.

(3) Flesh as the vicarious sacrifice of Christ.

John 6:51-56. Jesus says "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you". Here Jesus is speaking in a mystical sense of his vicarious sacrifice on the cross, which a person must "eat", that is, must accept by faith, in order to have eternal life.

(4) Flesh as the outward appearance or human standard.

John 8:15. Jesus says that the Pharisees "judge by the flesh". Here the "flesh" refers to the outward appearance or human standards.

1:14,18

Question 6. How should we understand the phrase "the only begotten Son of God"?

Notes.

The term "only begotten Son" does not refer to anything akin to the created world. It does not refer to any "beginning" somewhere in the past. It is a term that describes Christ's metaphysical, ontological, eternal and trinitarian Sonship.⁴

John 3:16 proves that Christ was the only begotten Son of the Father *before* he took on the human nature.⁵ John 1:18 in the best and oldest manuscripts in Greek says "the only begotten God" (instead of the only begotten Son). Because God is eternal, the term must refer to Christ's metaphysical, ontological, eternal and trinitarian Sonship. It means that Christ is the Son of God from all eternity. From all eternity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit existed in this unique relationship to one another.

There exists but "one (unique) God" (Mark 12:29) and but "one (unique) name of God" (Matteüs 28:19). His being is "Spirit" (John 4:24; Romans 8:9-10) and his being can therefore not be expressed in any mathematical number.⁶ And yet this one (unique) God revealed himself as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). God reveals to us that there is an inner distinction in the Divine Being that far surpasses our human understanding, but to which we must subject ourselves in obedience. No one in whatever religion knows God except God the Son and the people to whom God the Son reveals him (Matthew 11:25-27; John 10:15; 17:25-26). That is why it is written: "Jesus Christ has made him (God) known". The word "made known" (Greek: *exégésató*) means "explained", "interpreted", "expounded".

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from John 1:1-18.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from John 1:1-18.

- 1:12. Merely knowledge of Jesus Christ is not enough. Welcome and receive him into your heart and life.
- 1:13. A person who welcomes and receives Jesus Christ into his heart and life is born-again.
- 1:16. Continue to live from the fullness of Christ's grace.

⁴ Cf. manual 2, supplement 8. "The nature of God and the Son of God"

⁵ This can therefore not refer to a birth caused by a human begetting!

⁶ Because he is omnipresent!

- 1:17. The real meaning of the Old Testament illustrations (types), like temple, blood sacrifices and Sabbath is only revealed through Jesus Christ in the New Testament period.
- 1:18. Jesus Christ makes the invisible God fully known to us.

2. Examples of personal applications from John 1:1-18.

I want to help Christians to make very sure that they have accepted Jesus Christ into their heart and life. John chapter 1 warns that there are many people in this world who love the darkness more than the light. They do not welcome Jesus Christ. They do not acknowledge Jesus Christ, but disown him. They do not accept Jesus Christ, but reject him. However, Jesus Christ promises that whosoever accepts him, will that same moment be a child of God and will become more and more Christ like during the rest of his life.

I want to live my life continually by grace and truth and not by the law (thora, sharia). I see people around me who tend to think that religion or good works might save them. But John chapter 1 teaches me that the works of the law cannot forgive me or save me or help me. People get saved and live significant lives after they have welcomed Jesus Christ and have received him into their heart and life.

STEP 5. PRAY.	RESPONSE
LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in John 1:1-18.	
(Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)	

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[INTERCESSION]</i> PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. **Preach, teach or study the Bible study** of John 1:1-18 together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Mark 15:1 – 16:20 and 1 Corinthians 1 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** (5) Humility: Philippians 2:3-4. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
6. **Update your notebook** on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.