

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 1:19-34 | MAKE WAY FOR A NEW DAY

KEY TERMS

Jews, priests, Levites, Pharisees - Each of these terms represents a group who regularly shows up in John. *Jews* can refer to Jewish people in general, but is also used to refer to Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus. *Priests* were those who led Jewish temple worship, and were only those descended from Aaron (Ex 28). *Levites* were from the tribe of Levi—but not the family of Aaron—and served as assistants of the High Priest. Pharisees were a small Jewish sect, which held revered but non-priestly leadership positions in the temple.

Lamb of God - The title *Lamb of God* evokes rich imagery from the OT, particularly the Passover Lamb (Ex. 11-12), the daily sacrifices at the temple (Ex. 29), and the suffering Messiah, as prophesied in Isaiah (Isa. 53:7). According to the NT, Jesus as the Lamb of God fulfills and surpasses these sacrifices as a sacrifice for our sin.

The Spirit - This is the first mention of the third person of the trinity—the Holy Spirit—in John’s gospel. The OT envisions a coming Messiah filled with God’s Spirit (see Is 11:1-2, 42:1, & 61:1), and thus the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism confirms his identity and also marks the beginning of his public ministry.

SYNOPSIS

As John wraps up his prologue (vv. 1-18), he shifts into narrative and returns to John the Baptist. In this scene, Jewish leaders ask about John the Baptist’s identity, and John says he is not the Messiah, nor Elijah, but is *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”* (v. 23). This claim—from Isaiah 40:3—appears in all four gospels, but John’s gospel is the only one where John the Baptist is the one making the claim about himself. John’s emphasis is on his role as forerunner for Jesus *the strap of whose sandal [he] is not worthy to untie* (v. 27). A day after this interrogation, Jesus comes to John and John identifies him as the one coming saying, *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (v. 29). John says *I did not know him*, which likely does not mean that John did not have a relationship with Jesus (they were cousins and likely knew each other), but that John did not know (until recently) that he was the Messiah (v. 31). The event that caused John to come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah was Jesus’ baptism, where the Holy Spirit descended and remained on Jesus (vv. 32-33). John says that he saw this and is testifying that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 34).

GOING DEEPER

Read Philippians 2:5-11. In this passage, Paul describes Jesus’ humility and obedience in laying down his life for our sin. How does this align with John’s depiction of Jesus as the *Lamb of God* who takes away the sins of the world? Consider Jesus’ willingness to die for you. What emotions come up? What responses should this truth lead you to ?

DID YOU KNOW?

John was asked, *Are you Elijah?* because of Malachi 4:5, which prophecies that the OT prophet Elijah will come again before the Messiah. Interestingly, John the Baptist himself denies being Elijah, while Jesus affirms John as a figurative Elijah (Matt 11:14).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 1:19-34. Make 4-5 quick observations on these verses? What stands out to you?
2. Verse 20 records a simple statement made by John the Baptist that he is not the Messiah, but he says it in a surprisingly strong way. Then, in verse 27, John makes a bold statement about the one who is the actual Messiah. Why do you think we see such strong statements here? How is this an important part of John's witness to the world about Christ?
3. In verse 33, John explains his calling from God and quotes from Isaiah, where the prophet is speaking about the Israelites restoration to the Lord and their return home from exile. Read Isaiah 40:1-5. These verses are a metaphor speaking of the need for a road to be built in order for God's people to travel home. By quoting this verse, what is John saying about his own role before the coming of Jesus Christ?
4. In this passage, how is Jesus visually identified as the Son of God? How do we see all three members of the Trinity in this identification (can you make 3-4 observations about this)?

LIVING THE WORD

5. John says that he is not worthy even to untie the sandals of Jesus. Our world might say that this is an unhealthy view of oneself, that maybe John needs to see his own significance or improve his self-esteem. How would you respond to such an argument? How does the gospel actually elevate our status while at the same time humbling us?
6. What does it look like for you personally to heed John's exhortation: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"? What is one way that you can practice "beholding" Jesus as the sacrificial lamb who took away your sins?
7. John is the first human witness to the person and work of Jesus as the Redeemer. How does he set an example for us as witnesses to our world about Jesus?

Practice to consider: How can you be a witness for Christ this week? Are you praying for people in your relational circles to meet Jesus? Ask God to give you opportunities to share a gospel witness.