

# Lesson Two

(John 1:19-2:12)

In John 1:19 through 2:11, the apostle gives a carefully detailed account of the first week of Jesus' public ministry. These passages contain the personal witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the first disciples of Jesus, and the witness of the first miracle Jesus ever performed.

## The First Day

(John 1:19-28)

<sup>19</sup>The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to John to ask him, "Who are you?"

<sup>20</sup>John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup>"Who are you, then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," John answered.

"Are you the Prophet?" they asked.

"No," he replied.

<sup>22</sup>"Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an

answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

<sup>23</sup>John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah: "I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!" "

<sup>24</sup>The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, <sup>25</sup>then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?"

<sup>26</sup>John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. <sup>27</sup>He is coming after me, but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."

<sup>28</sup>All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

A famous theologian often asked his "preacher boys" how their Sunday sermons went. His favorite questions were: "Did you convert anybody?" and "Did you make anybody mad?" He figured that when the gospel of Christ is clearly and forcefully preached one result or the other will take place. John the Baptist preached like that. His listeners either repented and were immersed, or they got mad and left.

So John the Baptist's fame quickly spread throughout the region. And when the Jewish authorities could no longer disregard his scorching — not preaching, they sent a committee of priests and Levites out to investigate. In unpretentious humility, the Baptist denied (1) that he was the Messiah; (2) that Malachi 4:5 literally referred to him, for many of the Jews believed that Elijah would physically return from the grave before the coming of the Messiah; and (3) he denied that he was "the Prophet" whom Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. And so he quotes from Isaiah 40:3-5 to describe himself simply as one preparing the way for the Lord.

This delegation of Jews was particularly concerned about John's authority for introducing the new rite in which those adult Jews who heard and believed his message were totally immersed in water. The Baptist's answer is that Jesus is his authority. And there is not the slightest hint that Jesus would not also require repentance and immersion of adult believers (Matt. 28:19-20). Nor was this the last committee to end its work in total frustration!

## **The Second Day**

*(John 1:29-34)*

<sup>29</sup>The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "There

is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.'

<sup>31</sup>I did not know who he would be, but I came baptizing with water in order to make him known to the people of Israel."

<sup>32</sup>And John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. <sup>33</sup>I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>I have seen it," said John, "and I tell you that he is the Son of God."

John the Baptist was probably thinking of Jesus as a symbolic Passover Lamb (Exodus 12 and 13; I Cor. 5:7; I Peter 1:19), a similar symbolism having been used in Isaiah 53. But unlike the hundreds of thousands of lambs sacrificed by the Jews over the years, this Lamb: (1) was provided by God himself, not by man; (2) could actually, rather than symbolically, take care of men's sins; and (3) made salvation available to all people, not just the Jews.

The baptism which John practiced was for the remission or forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Those who were immersed by him looked forward to the cross of Calvary, while we today look backward to that day nearly 2,000 years ago when Jesus purchased our salvation.

Obviously, however, John the Baptist did not immerse Jesus for the remission of his sins. Instead, the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17) served to reveal his true identity to John and was a symbolic, public anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. Prior to that event, John had been unaware that his own cousin, Jesus, was the long-awaited Messiah (1:31).

### **The Third Day**

*(John 1:35-39)*

<sup>35</sup>The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup>when he saw Jesus walking by. "There is the Lamb of God!" he said.

<sup>37</sup>The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus.

<sup>38</sup>Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?"

They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher.")

<sup>39</sup>"Come and see," he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him.

John the Baptist preached a short sermon to his "two-member congregation" and both were converted (one was Andrew and the other was probably the apostle John himself). It was a small beginning, but these two men in turn led many others to Jesus.

Note that at the sound of Jesus' voice, these two men quickly responded. Unnecessary delay is always dangerous. It is significant that when the Jews heard the gospel on the Day of Pentecost, "Many of them believed his message and were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day" (Acts 2:41). And when the Philippian jailer became convinced of his need for Jesus, he wasted no time. "At that very hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; and he and all his family were baptized at once" (Acts 16:33).

There is another important lesson in this passage: every soul is important. Many years ago James A. Harding preached a revival for a small congregation in Clark County, Kentucky. He only immersed one boy, little Jimmie Shepherd. That boy, however, grew up to be known as James W. Shepherd. He served the cause of Christ as a preacher, as a missionary to Australia, and as the author and/or compiler of three books about Jesus! As someone has said, "Man can tell how many seeds are in an apple, but only God can tell how many apples are in a seed."

### **The Fourth Day**

*(John 1:40-42)*

<sup>40</sup>One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup>At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") <sup>42</sup>Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock.")

Jerry Clower is a highly successful comedian. But he is also known for his deep faith in Jesus. He once told a reporter, "I don't cram Jesus down anybody's throat, but it just sets me on fire when one of those prissed up, highfalutin folks say, 'Mr. Clower, what makes you behave as you do?' Man, I couldn't keep from telling them what Jesus has done for me if my life depended on it!"

And that's exactly how Andrew, who later became an apostle, felt about it (6:8-9; 12:22). Although he was overshadowed by

other men, there is no indication that he resented their success. As William Barclay says, "It was Andrew's great joy to bring others to Jesus. He stands out as the man whose one desire was to share the glory. He is the man with the missionary heart" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 73). And you and I may do what Andrew did, single out one person and bring him to Jesus.

### The Fifth Day

(John 1:43-51)

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!" (<sup>44</sup>Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

<sup>46</sup>"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.

<sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, he said about him, "Here is a real Israelite; there is nothing false in him!"

<sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree before Philip called you."

<sup>49</sup>"Teacher," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you when you were under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than this!" <sup>51</sup>And he said to them, "I am telling you the truth: You will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man."

Galilee boasted such a large non-Jewish population in Old Testament days that Isaiah spoke of it as being "where the foreigners live" (Isaiah 9:1). It was this interaction of different races which produced the easily distinguished Galilean accent (Matt. 26:69-73). During the Roman occupation, first Herod the Great and then Herod the tetrarch ruled this area. It was 60 miles long (north to south) and 30 miles wide (east to west), and was the wealthiest and most beautiful province in Palestine. Such Old Testament personalities as Deborah, Barak, Jonah, and Elisha called it "home".

And much of Jesus' own private life and public ministry took place in Galilee. John tends to place the emphasis upon Jesus' ministry in Judea, perhaps because Matthew, Mark, and Luke covered the events of the Galilean ministry in such depth.

In 1:43 Jesus starts north to Galilee and stops at Bethsaida for the express purpose of finding Philip and asking him to become his disciple. There was no hesitancy on the part of Philip. His response to Jesus' request was fast, favorable, and final.

Nor did Philip drag his heels when it came to sharing the news that the Messiah had actually arrived. Jack Exum wrote, "The prime difference between a salesman and a clerk is simple. The customer finds the clerk, while the salesman finds the customer. The Lord has many clerks but few salesmen" (*The Glory of the Ordinary*, p. 75). Philip was a salesman for the Lord!

And Philip's first customer, Nathanael, was a tough one. By his question about Nazareth (1:46), Nathanael was probably questioning Philip's interpretation and application of the Old Testament prophecies, rather than expressing some kind of community rivalry. This understanding is in keeping with his character, for Jesus even praised him for being a person of transparent, if sometimes blunt, honesty (1:47).

The Jews often rested in the dense shade of the groves of large fig trees to escape the boiling sunshine. And the fact that Jesus knew he was there (and knew things about him which John does not stop to record) caused Nathanael to proclaim that Jesus is "the Son of God" (1:49). Frank Pack says that Nathanael "may not have understood fully the significance of these terms, but he implied that he was a believer in Jesus's divinity and that Jesus was surely more than an ordinary man. Throughout this chapter in the calling of the first disciples, the writer impresses upon the reader the attractive power of Jesus which was a key to that popular favor which characterized his early ministry" (*The Gospel According to John*, I, 48).

In 1:51 Jesus uses the imagery found in Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching into heaven in order to describe how God was revealing himself through the life and works of Jesus.

### **The Sixth Day**

Since this was simply a day spent in uneventful travel on toward their destination (2:1), no record of this day's activities was made by John.

### **The Seventh Day**

(John 2:1-12)

<sup>1</sup>Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup>and Jesus and his disciples had

also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine."

<sup>4</sup>"You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup>Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do what ever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup>The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim, <sup>8</sup>and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, <sup>9</sup>which now has turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!"

<sup>11</sup>Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

<sup>12</sup>After this, Jesus and his mother, brothers, and disciples went to Capernaum and stayed there a few days.

This was the third day since Jesus had originally announced plans to go to Galilee (1:43), and was the last day of an exciting week. It had taken Jesus nearly three whole days to travel about sixty-five miles, but he arrived in plenty of time to meet his mother at the wedding ceremony which probably started at dusk (the fact that Joseph is not mentioned is taken as evidence that he probably had died some years before).

The village of Cana was located about nine miles north of Nazareth. It was here in this obscure place that Jesus performed the first of seven miracles recorded in John's gospel. And we should note that it was done in the context of a joyous occasion. John the Baptist was something of a loner; but Jesus enjoyed being with people. His presence at this wedding celebration not only indicates his approval of the marital relationship but also refutes the notion that gloom is a sign of godliness. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living."

In 2:3 Mary, who was probably aware of her son's power by now, may have felt that this large gathering was a perfect time for him to reveal his identity as the Messiah. So in an effort to also

keep the hosts from embarrassment at the lack of refreshments, she asks Jesus to take appropriate action.

But in 2:4 Jesus firmly reminds Mary that he is not under her authority, and that her timing is not right. This incident certainly refutes the Catholic claim that Mary was without error and, therefore, is worthy of worship. It is foolish for anyone today to pray to Mary in order for her to "command her Son" to fulfill our wishes, for Jesus here flatly refuses to work a miracle at the snap of her fingers.

Jesus' words in 2:4 must have enlightened Mary without offending her, for she told the servants to do whatever he might command. Such words came from one who trusted Jesus completely, even though she did not understand. And with each of us there are those times when the best advice that can be given is simply, "Do whatever Jesus tells you."

John explains to any Greek readers that conscientious Jews always washed their hands and cooking utensils both before and after eating, so as to be ceremonially clean (Matt. 15:1-11; Mark 7:1-9).

Paul Butler says of verse 10, "It was, and is, a common practice to pass off an inferior wine when men's taste becomes blunted by even a small amount of drinking. It is obvious that the ruler was not drunk. He recognized the difference in the juice instantly. It is only the perverse mind that could imagine Jesus condoning drunken revelry, let alone using his power to furnish men something destructive to their physical and spiritual well-being" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 69-70).

The Greek word for wine (*oinos*) may mean either fermented or unfermented. It is unwise, however, for any Christian today to drink alcoholic beverages. I know of one outstanding Christian leader who, upon the advice of his doctor, began taking a "nightcap" to relax him each evening. Less than three years later his career was ruined, and one person was killed, when he was so "relaxed" that he rammed another car from behind and was convicted of drunken driving and manslaughter. But even if one could drink and not get drunk, his example may cause a weaker person to sin (Romans 14:13-23).

While useful and productive in themselves, the miracles were "signs" (John's favorite term) which were intended to point beyond themselves to the authority of Jesus. As Burton Coffman notes, "Compared with the first great miracle wrought by Moses, in which water was changed into blood, this sign resembles that



one . . . ; but it also contrasts dramatically. Moses' sign impoverished; this one enriched. This was a source of joy, that one a source of revulsion and disgust. That changed water into something worse; this changed water into something better. The superiority of Christ over Moses, so starkly visible here, was to appear in all the miracles that followed. Moses' miracle was a curse, this a blessing" (*Commentary on John*, p. 67).

In 2:12 John adds a brief postscript to the previous week's activity. The focal point of Jesus' ministry now shifts to Capernaum, the new base of his operations from now until the end of his public ministry in Galilee (7:9-10).

Capernaum was located on the northwestern edge of Lake Galilee, probably where Tell Hum is today. In the time of Jesus it was large enough to be called a "city" (Matt. 9:1). It was one of the places where the Romans maintained a tax-gathering station (Matt. 9:9). And it had a synagogue which had been built by a pious Roman centurion (Matt. 8:8). But because most of the citizens here coldly rejected Jesus, he warned that the city would be destroyed (Matt. 11:23). And it was!

The New Testament offers ample evidence that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus (2:12; 7:3; Matt. 12:46-50; 13:55-56; Mark 3:31; 6:3; Luke 8:19; Acts 1:14; I Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:9). Since Jesus had at least two sisters and four brothers, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary's "perpetual virginity" is false. John does not mention Mary again until the crucifixion.

### Thought Stimulators on John 1:19-2:12

1. How did John the Baptist describe his own role?
2. How did John the Baptist compare himself with Jesus?
3. Where did John the Baptist immerse people?
4. In what sense is Jesus "the Lamb of God"?
5. What event convinced John the Baptist that Jesus was the Son of God?
6. What was the purpose of the baptism that John performed upon the Jews who believed his message?
7. Why did John the Baptist immerse Jesus?
8. Why is it dangerous to delay obeying Jesus?
9. Who was Andrew?
10. Whom did Andrew bring to Jesus?
11. What was the name which Jesus gave to Simon Peter?
12. Whom did Philip bring to Jesus?
13. Where did Jesus perform his first miracle?

14. Why is it best for Christians not to drink alcoholic beverages?
15. Sometimes one hears a Christian say, "I'm going to convert somebody someday!" It can't be done. God is the one who converts, *through* us. "Somebody" is not listed in any phone book or directory. And "someday" is not on the calendar. Complete these lines: "I want God to convert \_\_\_\_\_ through me by \_\_\_\_\_."
- (person's name) (date)