



# JOHN 1

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

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## The Book of Mormon offers a second witness to John's testimony

This is needed as biblical scholars have debated the authorship and timing of the writing of the Gospel of John for centuries. As it stands alone in many of its ideas and prophecies, scholars find a myriad of ways to interpret it. Yet, the Book of Mormon answers much of that debate. For example, the authorship is identified by the resurrected Lord in 3 Nephi 28:6. The authorship of the Book of Revelation is given by an angel to Nephi as well (1 Nephi 14:24–25). Doctrines found in the Gospel of John are also confirmed in the Book of Mormon (e.g. the Godhead is defined differently the trinity, compare John 17:11 with 3 Nephi 11:27 and 36; or premortality John 1:1–4, Rev 12:19, and Alma 13:3). I will point out these and other clarifications offered in the Book of Mormon as we study the text of John 1.

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# INTRODUCTION

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John's Gospel stands on its own without much shared source material from the other three "synoptic" Gospels. One of the major differences between John and the other Gospels is that it records three years of Jesus' ministry—counted by three Passovers (the synoptic gospels have everything telescoped into one Passover). The first half of John's gospel covers Jesus' ministry all over Palestine. The last half includes the last week of Jesus' life (with an extended account of the Last Supper, passion, trial, death, resurrection), and His 40-day ministry.

GOSPELS	EXCLUSIVE INFORMATION	COMMON INFORMATION
Mark	7%	93%
Matt	48%	52%
Luke	59%	41%
John	92%	8%

## Authorship

John means "Jehovah is Grace". Traditionally (and probably originally), the author was the beloved apostle, a "Son of Thunder," brother of 1<sup>st</sup> James, possible cousin of Jesus and nephew of virgin Mary.<sup>1</sup> He has influential Jerusalem connections (John 18:15); and according to Bishop Irenaeus (AD 180), John was also a priest and wrote the Gospel in Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> The author claims to be an eye witness (John 13:23; 3 Nephi 28:6), although he never mentions his name nor the name of Jesus' mother (and his culture never spoke the name of God out of respect). Tradition records that Domitian, the 8<sup>th</sup> Caesar, tried to kill John several times (by dipping him into boiling oil, etc.) before banishing him to the isle of Patmos. Revelation 1:9 claims that John wrote book of Revelation there (also see 1 Nephi 14:24–28). In AD 96, John was released from his isle imprisonment and returned to Ephesus. We believe he is still working to build the Kingdom of God on earth.



*St John the Evangelist by Vladimir Borovikovsky (ca. 1804). Image via Wikimedia Commons.*

## Theme

To show Jesus as the messenger of His Father (with 41 “I AM” avowals). It is known as *The Spiritual Gospel*.

## Sub-Themes

1) Higher Law vs. Lower Law (i.e. dark vs. light); 2) Godly Love (used 75 times throughout the gospel); 3) Rejection (of Jesus, and of the old Law in favor of a restoration); 4) Old Testament themes (Sabbath, etc.).

## Text

The text is made up of 7 discourses and 7 miracles (the number seven is used symbolically to mean: complete, whole, perfection). John wrote to baptized disciples who seek a higher understanding of the Gospel. He carefully constructed his account to teach a specific message. John prepared his gospel more as a teaching tool of theology or gospel principles, rather than a history or biography. We find some doctrinally powerful JST changes that are not mentioned in our KJV Bibles (JST John 1:1–34 in the Bible appendix, but not all the JST changes are there).

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# PROLOGUE

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## Outline

- 1:3–9 Relationship with Light
- 1:10–13 Agency
- 1:14–17 Grace for Grace

These verses have been identified as: “a jewel in the crown.”<sup>3</sup> Note the parallels with the book of Genesis, as John begins a *new* covenant on the foundation of the old covenant. Look for creation themes in the prologue.



*Messier 106 by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr.*



## John 1:1–2

Note the JST adds [*in italics*]: “In the beginning was the *gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the Word*, and the Word was with [*cut—God, and the Word was God*] *The Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was God.*” I see multiple possibilities for what is meant by “in the beginning,” including: Genesis, premortal life, our second estate, and John’s telling of Jesus’ story. All have important symbols of beginnings.

**Jn 1:1** In the KJV text, the first use of “was” is written in the Greek imperfect tense, to specify an ongoing, continuous state. A more complete translation with this tense would be “*In the beginning, the Word already existed as the Word in a timeless state*” (i.e. is eternal). The original text speaks of the Godhead that Joseph restored.



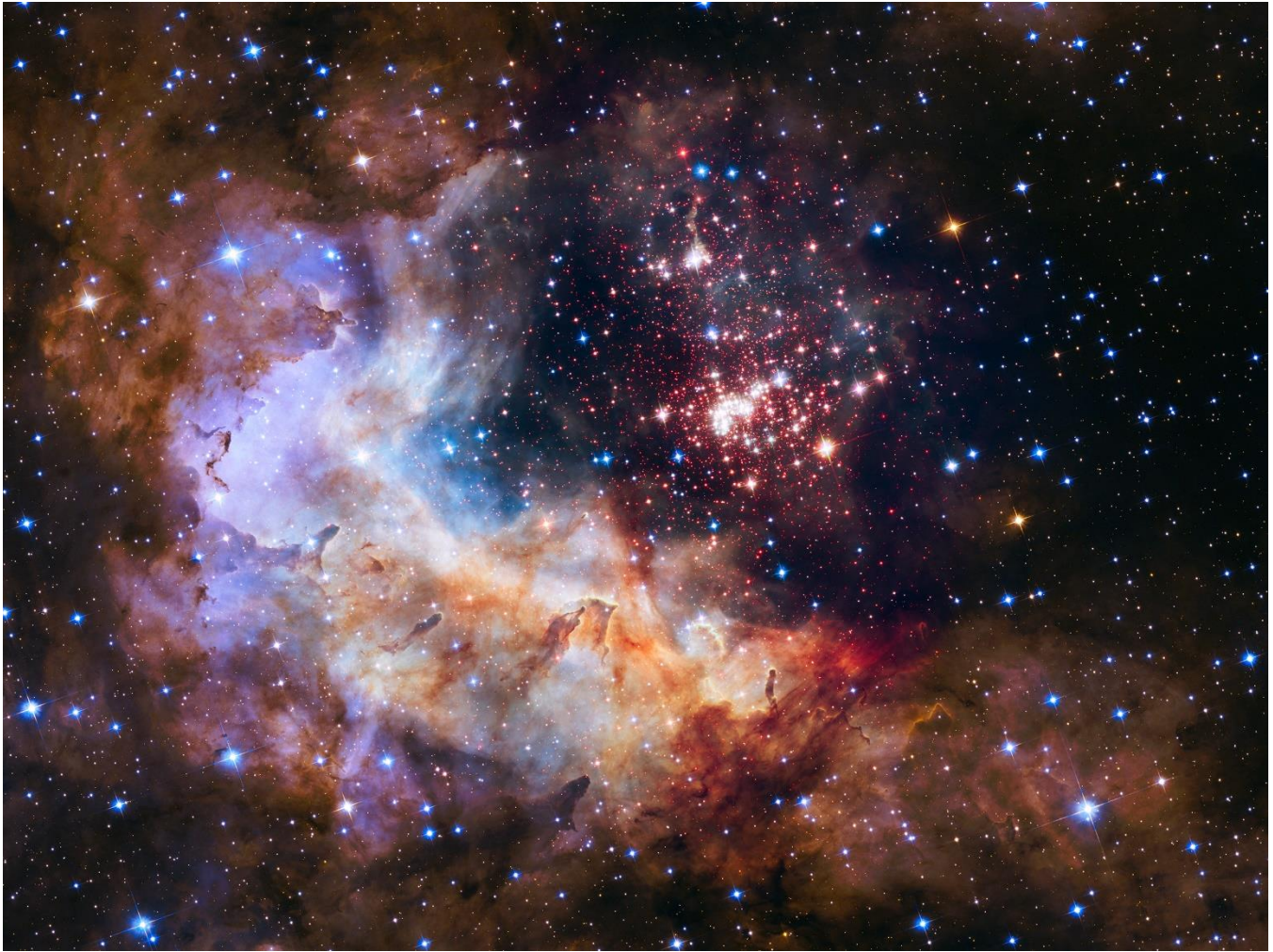
*Messier 104 The "Sombrero Galaxy" by NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via flickr.*

**Jn 1:1** “*word*” or “*logos*” has 3 pages of definitions in my Greek Lexicon. Hugh Nibley translated this verse: “In the beginning was the *Logos* {counsel, discussion} and the *Logos* [counsel] was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it. . . .”<sup>4</sup> *Logos* is used as a dynamic Divine force which creatively accomplishes His work on earth. John 1:14 identifies *Logos* as the Son. John portrays Jesus as with God from the beginning interacting with God as an expression of the Father’s will and “messenger of salvation” (D&C 93:8; John 14:9–11).

**Jn 1:1** “*was with God*” In Greek the word order is reversed, which suggests a separate personality but nearness towards God. The absence of a direct article suggests the *logos* had already achieved the same attributes and character of Godhood. This verse testifies of a premortal existence and a separate Godhead.

**Jn 1:2** In the KJV an extra “the” is missing from the original: “The same was in the beginning with [the] God” which emphasizes the distinct separate nature of the two beings. Was John trying to clarify this misunderstood doctrine of the Godhead already? (Sadly, the Corinthian saints had a problem with it.)

## John 1:3–9 Relationship with Life and Light



*Westerlund 2 by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr.*

**Jn 1:4 JST** “In him was the [cut life] *the gospel*; and *the gospel was the life*, and the life ...” We find images from Genesis again (i.e. life, light, darkness, coming forth of a man from the presence of God), but not in the same way. John’s spiritual account of the creation and mortal tabernacle show how men become begotten of God and receive his authority and new life through Him.

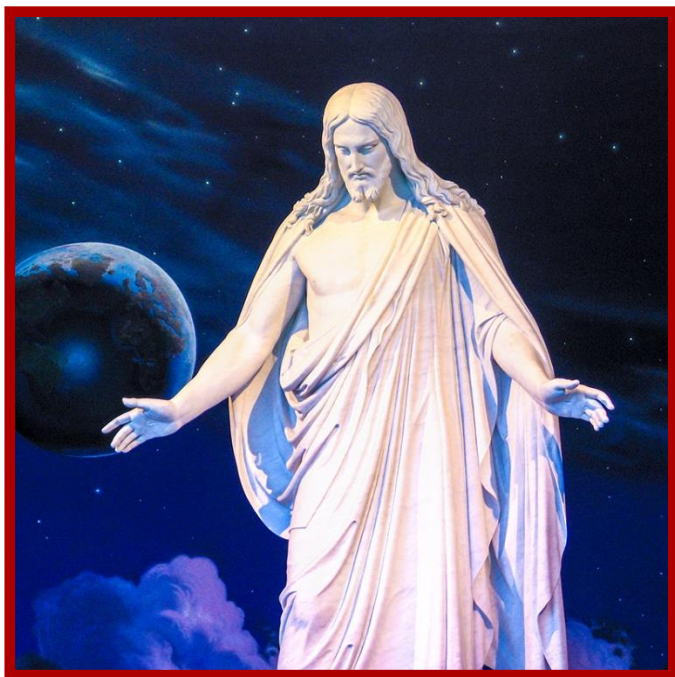
**Jn 1:5** John identifies *logos* with the light which identifies the rivalry between *the Word* and the Prince of Darkness. He personifies the individual Jesus as light to encapsulate the struggle between good and evil. The opposites of light and darkness, are shown to emphasize that darkness (including: death ignorance, selfishness, etc.) which did not and cannot overtake the Light. The word “*comprehend*” in Greek means to seize with hostile intent, to overtake (also John 12:35). The word “*shineth*” is in the timeless present tense; while *comprehended* is used for a given point in time. This can also be translated that there was a time when the darkness attempted to overtake the light (i.e. war in heaven). John uses “*The Light*” to define our Savior’s victory over darkness.



**Jn 1:7** JST “The same came *into the world* for a witness...of the Light, to bear record of the gospel through the Son, unto all, that...” John the Baptist (JBpst) is the example of a ray of light shining in the darkness; JBpst reminds humanity of the Light.

**Jn 1:9** The source of Light is also the Creator in some inestimable way (see D&C 88:7, 45, 87). Christ is our light within and without.

## John 1:10–13 Rebirth of our use of Agency



Replica of Christus by Bertel Thorvaldsen. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

**Jn 1:10–11** These two verses introduce the theme of rejection. The first half of John’s Gospel (chps. 1–12) speaks of darkness or evil forces rejecting Jesus. The Greek definition for “knew” and “received” additionally means: perceive, recognize, acknowledge, and accept. The true light of the world came into the world—which He had created—but the world of darkness, evil and sin, did not know its Creator. Even with prophets and prophetesses past and present testifying of the Messiah’s coming, they did not recognize Him and rejected Him.

**Jn 1:12–13** Yet some did believe. The second half of John’s Gospel deals with the salvation of these believers, the new chosen people that Jesus calls “His own” (John 13:1). Those who are born again, God

called His children. In the beginning God breathed the spirit of life into Adam; now He breathed His Spirit of new life on His disciples. We need a *new personal creation* to be born again and replace the old creation rejected by God.

## John 1:14–18 Process of Grace to become His sons and daughters to partake of His Fullness

**Jn 1:14** This describes the relationship between the God of the Old Testament (OT), Jehovah, as the Word, Jesus. The phrase “dwelt among us” is also translated “in our midst” or, “became flesh and set up his Tabernacle in our midst.” This was the sign from Sinai, God’s pact with Israel! They saw visible light over the Tabernacle representing the presence of God. And inside the Tabernacle’s Holy of Holies, the mercy-seat, was a place for God to dwell among His people. John explains that the God of the OT is *not* found in the temple now, but in the *flesh* as Immanuel, “God with us.” In the new covenant, Jehovah or the Word receives a body of flesh and blood.

“Full of grace and truth.” Exodus 34:6 uses a version of this favorite description for God. John uses it to characterize God’s new covenant. In John’s Gospel we find Jesus replacing old institutions with a new restored version of grace and truth in the higher law, Temple, and feasts.

**Jn 1:15** JBpst interrupts the poetry of the text to testify of Jesus’ Eternal place. If you don’t know the doctrine of the premortal life (John 1:1–4), it can sound like a riddle. Jesus is the Firstborn, and first in spirituality.

**Jn 1:16** The JST reads: “*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, [cut—and grace for grace] even immortality and eternal life, through his grace.*”

The word “Grace / *charis*” is also translated “favor, thanks, and pleasure,” but usually means the divine power of salvation. Just as Jesus’ new creation is to replace the old, now the new covenant replaces the old covenant.

**Jn 1:17** JST “For the law was given [cut by] *through* Moses, but [cut grace] *life* and truth came through Jesus Christ. *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.*” This is a perfect example of John’s theme of His Higher Law vs. the Lower Law. The JST here explains that the higher law or law of Christ’s gospel gives power for exaltation. What powerful doctrine! Embracing Jesus’ teachings and ordinances will provide the opportunity for exaltation or life with God.

**Jn 1:18** The JST clarifies, “*And no man hath seen God at any time; except he hath born record of the Son; for except it is through him no man can be saved.*” The JST teaches that every time the Father appears, “he hath borne record of the Son.” The process of receiving God’s grace allows all repentant humans to see God (John 6:46; Rev 22:3). For OT examples of people seeing God see Gen 28:13 (Jacob); Ex 4:1 (Moses); Isa 6; Ezek 10; Daniel 7:13.

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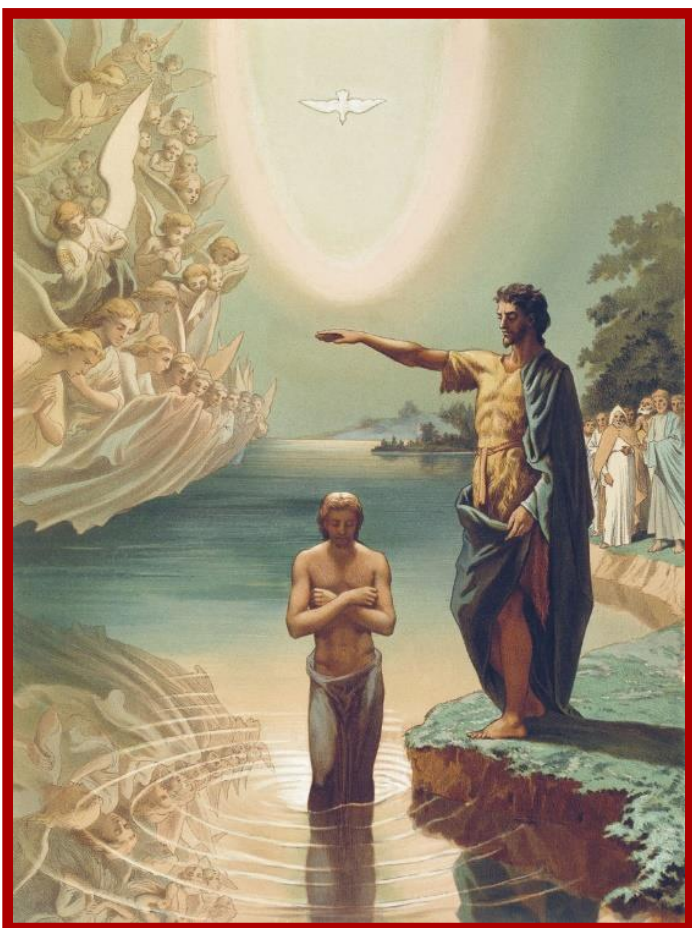
## II. JOHN THE BAPTIST

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John the Baptist (John 1:19–27) preaches repentance near the River Jordan, testifying that the Messiah is Coming

At eight-days-old an angel ordained JBpst for his mission (D&C 84:24–28). JBpst began preaching in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius’ reign (Lk 3:1). Many scholars calculate this as a sabbatical year (a year to let the land rest, Lev 25:5). This would have enabled farmers to have time to travel to hear JBpst preach (God’s timing is the miracle).

**Jn 1:20–22** The Jews were anticipating multiple future great prophets. The JST adds a little clarification to these questions about Elias. The role of Elias is multifaceted; check out the Bible dictionary definitions. Here it is probably the Greek spelling of the name Elijah who would come again to restore keys. The reference to “that prophet” (Deut 18:15–18) is usually accredited to two people. Either the future prophet and Promised Messiah ben Judah, or a prophet sometimes referred to as “messiah ben Ephraim or Joseph” the restorer.<sup>5</sup> Many Jews saw JBPst as a prophet, but wanted to know which one—what was his role? JBPst disclaimed the traditional roles. Other Zealots at that time led many Jews into the political arena and some wondered if JBPst were doing the same. Politically and spiritually Israel was ripe for a revival or restoration. Most of the Jews lapped up anything new and expected their Messiah soon, but they disputed what kind of a Messiah. The majority hoped for a conquering king.



*Baptism of Christ by Grigory Gaagarin. Image via Wikimedia Commons.*

**Jn 1:23** JBPst quotes Isaiah 40:3, claiming to fulfill this significant prophecy. This is one of the rare passages that all four gospels quote. It reinforces that the early Christian church felt JBPst’s message was very important.

**Jn 1:26** The word baptism is significant. There were lots of washings including mikvah immersion baths in the Jewish tradition. A Greek dictionary describes *baptizo* as: “1) to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); 2) to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one’s self, bathe; 3) to overwhelm” and then adds, “Not to be confused with *bapto*” which was only a dip.

The clearest example of the meaning of *baptizo* comes from a Greek recipe for making pickles. The poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C., used both words *bapto* and *baptize* in his text.

To make a pickle, the vegetable should first be

‘dipped’ (*bapto*) into boiling water and then ‘baptized’ (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary; and the second (baptizing the vegetable) produces a permanent change. When used in the NT, this word more often refers to our union with Christ than to our water baptism. Mark 16:16 reads “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” The mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with God, a real change, like the cucumber to the pickle!<sup>6</sup>



**Jn 1:27** This idea of unlacing shoes has cultural significance. Foot washing was a job left for children or slaves/servants. With half the population of Jerusalem as slaves, plus women and children who shared similar duties, there were plenty of people to wash feet. Even when a master teacher (like Socrates or Gamaliel) had disciples who wanted to perform all the servant's responsibilities to spend more time with their teacher (helping him dress, eat, wash, etc.), the foot care was too menial and filthy of a task and was to be left for slaves/servants/children/woman alone. JBpst tells his disciples that he is not even worthy to begin to start a slave's task for Jesus.

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## III. BAPTISM OF JESUS

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*Baptism of Christ by Lambert Sustris (1591). Image via Wikimedia Commons.*

### John 1:28–34

One of 6 events that each of the four Gospels record (1) baptism, (2) cleansing of the temple, (3) healing royal official's son; (4) feeding 5,000; (5) triumphal entry; (6) passion.

**Jn 1:28** JST moves this verse to fit in after vs. 34. In the NT, only John tells us the location of the baptism—Bethabara (and Nephi!) or possibly Bethabara, house of the ford" the ancient ford of the Jordan on the road to Gilead. It is the important point where Joshua divided the Jordan River and the children of Israel entered into the promised land, also where Elijah and Elisha parted (2 Kings 2:1–8). Certainly, Jesus' baptism was the greatest parting of these waters! Elder Nelson asked, "Is it significant that this sacred ordinance was performed in virtually the lowest body of fresh water on the planet? Could he have chosen a better place to symbolize . . . that He literally descended beneath all things to rise above all things? Could it be that Christ chose this location . . . as a silent commemoration of the crossing of those faithful Israelites . . . as a symbol that baptism is a spiritual crossing to the kingdom of God?"

**Jn 1:29** The use of the title "Lamb" is the perfect OT symbol for the Passover or Pascal lamb (Exodus 12:22–24) so that Alma and Paul both use it as well (2 Kings 2:68; and undoubtedly several other good Jews who saw Jesus as the great and last sacrifice for all mankind).

**Jn 1:30** This pre-existence theme in the NT is seen clearest (only?) in John. The restored church is the only Christian denomination to teach a premortal life for mortals.

**Jn 1:31** John doesn't mention anything about Jesus' and JBpst's births. None of the Gospels ever mention anything about the birth narratives outside of Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. Here JBpst sounds as if Elizabeth and Zachariah never took John to see Jesus; with annual Passover gatherings this is unlikely. The JST crosses out the word "not" here and again in verse 33. Even with just the English, we can read it as referring to a spiritual knowledge or witness that came from the Spirit. It sounds as if JBpst had instruction from heaven.

**Jn 1:32** Jesus fulfilled the prophecy by JBpst seeing Jesus' baptism with the Spirit descending. The Holy Spirit, or in Hebrew *Shekhinah*, was frequently depicted in the form of a dove in rabbinic literature. "The medium was the message and it couldn't have been lost on a Jewish audience. It was clear evidence the heavens were open again."<sup>7</sup> In the *Teaching of the Prophet J. Smith* we read, "[JBpst] had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descending in the form of a dove or rather in the 'sign' of the dove, in witness of that administration...The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world as a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage and does not confine itself to the form of a dove, . . . but the sign of the dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence."<sup>8</sup> The sign or form of the dove is also found in Abraham, facsimile 2, figure 7. Signs and tokens are best understood in the Temple.

**Jn 1:33** JST "And I knew him [cut not; but he that] *for he who* sent me to baptize with water . . ."



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## IV CALLING DISCIPLES

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### John 1:35–51 Disciples come to Jesus from JBpst as Jesus manifests himself

**Jn 1:35** Following John's number of days adds to his message. This is the third day he mentions (1:29). Count up John's days because he uses numbers to testify as well as words.

**Jn 1:36–38** Only in John's Gospel do we learn some of Jesus' disciples were first JBpst's disciples. The two listed were Andrew and another unnamed disciple, probably John the Beloved (as the author is nameless).

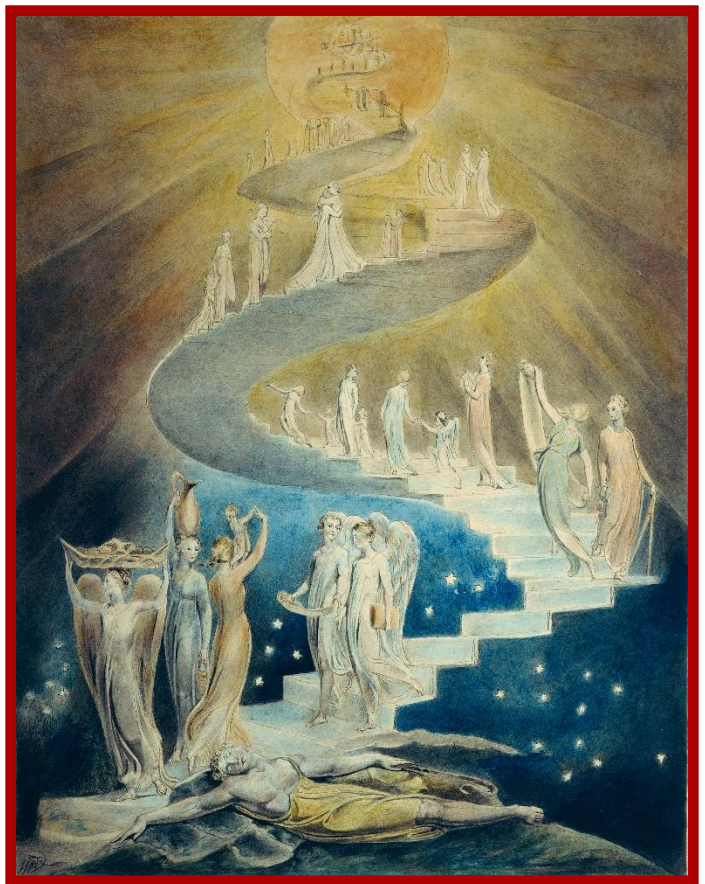
**Jn 1:38–39** The dialogue "what seek ye" and "come and see" is our modern missionary message. These are also the key phrases we need to implement in becoming disciples of Christ.

**Jn 1:40–41** Simon Peter. As the exciting news spreads it is important to remember that Christ is the Greek form of Messiah (Hebrew) or in English "the Anointed One." There were many "anointed ones," but the title "Messiah ben Judah" usually referred to the Promised Savior and Redeemer of the world.

**Jn 1:42** JST adds at the end of the verses *"a seer, or a stone. And they were fishermen. And they straightway left all and followed Jesus."* Jesus gives new names to many. This name is inimitable in that there is only one other with the name Rock. Jesus gives wonderful names, "sons of thunder, Beloved, Rock," always lifting the one as he goes. The name Peter (*petros*) means "small rock"; Christ is using a subtle word play here.

**Jn 1:43–44** Most of these disciples are all friends from the same town, Bethsaida ("house of fish").

**Jn 1:45–50** Nathanael acknowledges Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel.



*Jacob's Dream* by William Blake (1805). Image via Wikimedia Commons.



**Jn 1:48–49** Elder McConkie sees this experience as “Jesus here exercises his powers of seer-ship from the fragmentary account. It is apparent that Nathaniel had undergone some surpassing spiritual experience while praying or meditating or worshipping under a fig tree. . . The guileless Israelite, seeing this manifestation of seership was led to accept Jesus as the Messiah.”<sup>9</sup>

**Jn 1:50** “The Son of man” is interpreted by LDS usually to be the Son of God (Moses 6:57; “Man of Holiness is my name”). “Son of man” is used to refer to the prophet Ezekiel himself and many times humans in the OT, but in the NT it always means Christ. Most Christians see it as emphasizing the humanity of Jesus or Adam’s seed. ❖

Header Image: Butterfly Nebula by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel according to John 1–XI* (NYC: Doubleday, 1966), xcvi; Also compare Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40 with John 19:25.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *History*, V 24:3

<sup>3</sup> Kent P. Jackson, Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (SLC, UT, Deseret Book: 1986), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Nibley, “Beyond Politics,” *BYU Studies*, 1974; 15:1.

<sup>5</sup> Alan J. Avery-Peck, ed., *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and modern*, David Mitchell, “Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud” (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005: 77–90). ISBN 9004144846.

<sup>6</sup> King James Bible Dictionary, G907. Also, James Montgomery Boice, *Bible Study Magazine*, May 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 5:481.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, ed, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 160. The original scribe’s spelling reads, “. . . Holy Ghost is a personage in the form of a personage — does not confine itself to form of a dove — but in sign of a dove.” Edited spelling taken from, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:134.