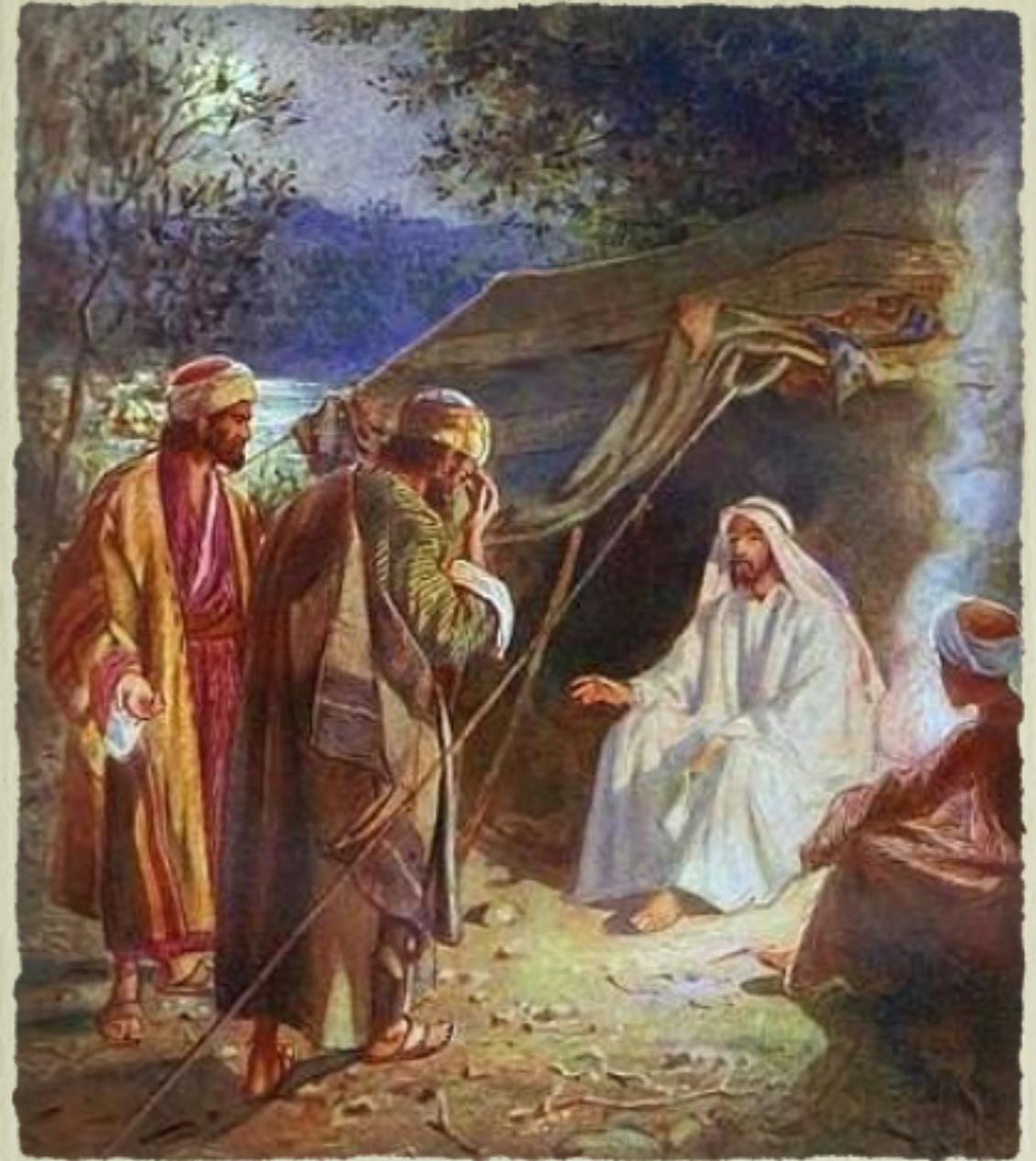


## 04. Act I : John 1:19-51



John the Baptist Prepares the Way, [LumoProject.com](http://LumoProject.com)



# Act I Scene 1 : The testimony of the Baptist (1:19-31)



John the Baptist Prepares the Way, [LumoProject.com](http://LumoProject.com)

# The theatre in Ephesus



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As in John's Gospel, the opening scene in Mark's Gospel focuses our attention on John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-8). As in John's account reference is made to Isaiah when the Baptist speaks of himself as 'the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his path's straight' (Mark 1:2-3; see Isaiah 40:3). Like John, Mark has the Baptist asserting that he is 'not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of the sandals' of the one coming after him (Mark 1:7). Matthew and Luke each has a prologue. Like Mark they both begin the Gospel with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-19), each offering his own interpretive commentary.

## John 1:19-21

This is the testimony given by John when **the Jews** sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed,

“I am not the Messiah.”

And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

‘I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes’ (Malachi 4:5).

“Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.”

‘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’ (Deuteronomy 18:18).

## John 1:22-24

Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

‘Those who sent us’ have already been identified as ‘the Jews’ (1:19), a term used throughout John’s Gospel to speak of those Jews who did not become disciples of Jesus. In verse 24 they are identified as ‘the Pharisees’, the only group that survived the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70AD, and the leaders of the Jews who opposed and rejected the early Christian community.

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said (see Isaiah 40:3).

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

## John 1:25-28

‘They asked him, “Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?”

John answered them, “I baptise with water.

Among you stands one whom you do not know,

the one who is coming after me;

I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising. ’

## John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

‘Lamb of God’ is the first of a series of ‘titles’ that appear in Chapter One. It is likely that the title alludes to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus on the occasion of the Jewish Passover. In his way of giving himself in love even unto death and in God’s embracing of Jesus in the resurrection, God is revealed as love – the only thing that can release us from ‘sin’, from what blocks us from welcoming grace.

## John 1:30-31

This is he of whom I said (see John 1:15), ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptising with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Mark follows his introduction to the Baptist with a scene which invites us to witness Jesus' Baptism.

'In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. Just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased".' (Mark 1:9-11).

This experience of being overwhelmed by God's love is the key to Jesus' ministry. Jesus was convinced that God intends every person to experience God's special love for each, and his teaching and healing ministry had this one inspired focus.

Matthew repeats Mark (see Matthew 3:13-17) as does Luke (see Luke 3:21-22).

## Scene 2. The Baptist witnesses to Jesus' Baptism.

John 1:32-33

And John testified, “I saw **the Spirit** descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is **the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.**’

Here is a second title that needs to be understood in the light of Jesus' resurrection. It is the glorified Jesus who ‘**baptises with the Holy Spirit**’ (see Luke's account of Pentecost in Acts 2).

## John 1:34

I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Mark opens his portrait of Jesus with the words: ‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus **the Messiah**, the **Son of God**’ (Mark 1:1).

John concludes his Gospel in much the same way: ‘These 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 20:31).

The title ‘**Son of God**’ can be understood as a declaration that Jesus is the promised Messiah – a title that could only be safely applied to Jesus in the light of his complete offering of himself in love on Calvary, and God’s embracing Jesus in the resurrection. One of John’s major aims is to argue for a proper understanding of this title (see especially John 5 and 10).

Mark introduces Jesus' first four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, straight after his account of Jesus' Baptism, the period of testing in the wilderness and his summary of Jesus' preaching (see Mark 1:16-20). Jesus calls the tax-collector, Levi, in Mark 2:13-14.

When Jesus appoints twelve, a further seven are named: 'Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him' (Mark 3:18-19). Apart from Judas, none of these seven is mentioned again.

Matthew is content to reproduce Mark. Luke does the same except for his special portrayal of Jesus' first meeting with Simon' (Luke 5:1-11).

John offers us an account of the calling of disciples that, like a number of other accounts in his Gospel, have the feeling of coming from an eye-witness who, though unnamed, was an early disciple himself, called later by the authors of the Gospel 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23) - the person whose closeness to Jesus and whose memories provide the authority for this Gospel.

## Scene 3. The Baptist introduces his disciples to Jesus

John 1:35-39

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, ‘Look, here is the Lamb of God!’ (see John 1:29).

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ Jesus first words!

They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’

He said to them, ‘Come and see.’

They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about the tenth hour (four o’clock in the afternoon).

## Scene 4. Disciples gather to Jesus (1:40-51)



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- Andrew introduces Simon (John 1:40-42)

‘One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).’



Was the other unnamed disciple of the Baptist (John 1:35) and companion of Andrew the one who is later called ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (John 13:23)?

The Synoptic Gospels associate the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah with Caesarea Philippi’ (see Mark 8:29, Matthew 16:16-18, Luke 9:20).

- Jesus calls Philip (John 1:43-44)

‘The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.’

According to Mark, Andrew and Peter had a house in Capharnaum

‘As soon as they left the Capharnaum synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew’ (Mark 1:29).



- Philip invites Nathanael (John 1:45-46)

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Nathanael, who comes from Cana (John 21:2), is mentioned only in John’s Gospel.



- Jesus and Nathanael (John 1:47)

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

Jacob who was called Israel by God deceived his brother Esau into handing over his rights as the firstborn son of Isaac. He also deceitfully deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing that should have gone to Esau.



- Jesus and Nathanael

John 1:48

Nathanael asked Jesus, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

John’s focus is on Jesus’ special ability to see: insight that flows from his unique relationship to God as God’s ‘**Son.**’

John 1:49-50

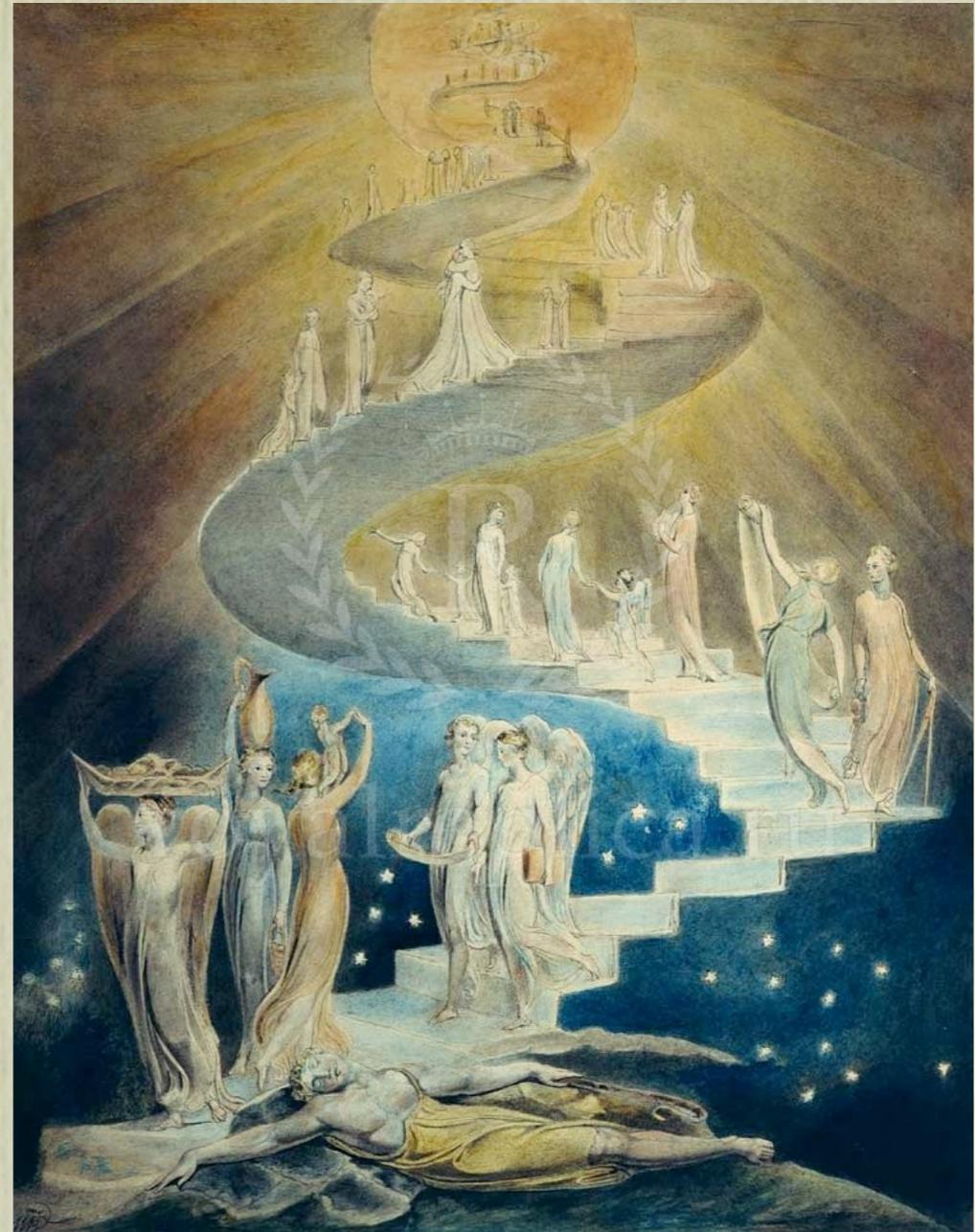
Nathanael replied, “**Rabbi** (see John 1:38), **you are the Son of God!** (see John 1:34). **You are the King of Israel!**” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

‘**King of Israel**’ is another title, related to ‘**Messiah**’.

## John 1:51

‘Jesus said to him, “Very truly, I tell you (plural), you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”’

The allusion is the Jacob’s ladder: ‘Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder. It reached to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.’(Genesis 28:12. At Bethel).



William Blake (1757–1827), *Jacob's Ladder, or Jacob's Dream* (1799-1806), pen and grey ink and watercolour on paper, 39.8 x 30.6 cm, The British Museum, London. Courtesy of and © Trustees of the British Museum.

John is taking us to the heart of who Jesus is: his continuous and intimate communion with God.

In his account of the gathering of Jesus' disciples, John has highlighted a number of titles used by the early Christian community of the glorified Jesus. The final title used of Jesus in this compendium of early Christology is the title '**Son of Man**'.

In the New Testament, apart from Acts 7:56 and Apocalypse 1:13 and 14:14, the title 'Son of Man' is found only in the gospels and only on the lips of Jesus. In John's Gospel it occurs twelve times. By placing it here at the conclusion to this passage, and by placing it on the lips of Jesus, John is wanting us to see in it his understanding of the true identity of Jesus, and the proper way to understand the titles used by others earlier in this passage. It avoids the misunderstandings that the other titles could carry, and it best conveys Jesus sense of himself and his mission.

We find ‘**Son of Man**’ in the Old Testament as an idiomatic way of speaking about a human being (Psalm 8:4 and frequently in Ezekiel).

There is a quite specialised use, however, in the Book of Daniel (7:13-14), and it is to this text that we must turn to discover the meaning of the expression as found here in John. The Book of Daniel was written at the time of the persecution of the Jews by the Syrian king, Antiochus IV (c.165BC). The invading army seemed to be winning, but the author of the Book of Daniel gives expression to his faith in God’s providence in an imaginative portrayal of the last judgment.

‘The court sat in judgment and the books were opened’. Daniel sees ‘One like a **Son of Man** coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One [God] and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.’

Who is this 'Son of Man'? For the author of the Book of Daniel it is certainly not the Syrian king, in spite of his pretensions to power. The explanation of the vision makes it clear that it is the heavenly counterpart or representative of the ordinary, downtrodden and persecuted people of God who will ultimately prevail and who will be exalted by God in the final judgment. The text reads: 'The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them' (Daniel 7:27).

In identifying himself as the ‘**Son of Man**’ Jesus is declaring that he comes from heaven: he comes from God. He is declaring also his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, the victims of injustice in all its forms. In this there is already a hint that this solidarity is expressed by suffering with and for the oppressed. The Word truly ‘became flesh’ (John 1:14). Belief in Jesus as the Son of Man is at the heart of Christian faith (see John 9:35).

The title Son of Man plays an important role also in the Synoptic Gospels (see especially Caesarea Philippi [Mark 8:30-38], Jesus’ Transfiguration [Mark 9:7-9] and his trial [Mark 14:61-62]). As we shall see, John especially develops the idea of Jesus coming from God to reveal God’s judgment now in offering us eternal life. His keeps our attention focused on the cross, of which the ladder in this scene is a symbol.

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