

John 1:11a He Came Unto His Own

John 1:11 says “He came unto his own.” That statement is only 5 words in English; four words in Greek. It’s easy to skip right past that part of the verse and not even think much about it. The Gospel of John does not say much about Jesus’ birth; this is about the extent of it. But the implications of that little part of a verse are very important.

Today I’d like to look at that short statement—“He came unto his own.” The original language says “Unto his own he came.” εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν

The word “unto” (εἰς) can mean “in, into, unto, towards” or “for.”

The words “his own” (τὰ ἴδια) normally refer to something pertaining to oneself, one’s belongings, one’s own things, one’s own home. In fact, a very literal translation of John 1:11 would be, “unto his own things he came, and his own people did not receive him” (YLT).

What does it mean that Jesus “came unto his own”?

I. He came into his own place.

A. Often in the Bible, when the words “his own” are used, it’s referring to one’s own place, one’s home. Various characters in the Bible return to their own place using these same words.

B. What is Jesus’ place?

1. In one sense, his place is the world. Jesus is the creator of the world. John tells us that at the very beginning of his book.

John 1:1–3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Psalm 24:1 *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.*

When Jesus came into this world, he came into the place that he had made. The world belongs to him by virtue of creation.

2. His place was also his own land, the land of Israel. He was born in Bethlehem in Judah, in the land of Israel. That was his place. It was God's chosen place, the land that he selected for the Jewish nation.

By the way, the Jews have been in that land for about 3500 years. God promised Abraham that land; it's called "the Promised Land" because God promised it to Abraham and his descendants. Israel as a nation conquered that land, and then other nations conquered them. They could not hold that land because of their disloyalty and disobedience to God.

But the point is that the Jews had been there for centuries and they were in that land when Jesus was born. He came to his own land, the land of the Jews, the Promised Land.

Trans: When Jesus came unto his own, he came unto his own place.

- II. He came in his own period in time.

Galatians 4:4 *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, ...*

"Fullness" means "end, fulfillment; a time period." Jesus came when God's timetable had reached a particular pre-ordained point. This was all the result of God's planning.

- A. The timing of Jesus' birth extends to eternity past.

1. Jesus' arrival in Bethlehem was the culmination and fulfillment of a long line of prophecies and plans. God's plans for the event extend to eternity past.

1Pe 1:20 *[Jesus] was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,*

Re 13:8 *... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

2. Imagine all the planning and control of events that must have gone into fulfilling this plan—both means and end. The timing and place of Jesus' arrival was a remarkable demonstration of God's power, knowledge, and sovereignty. Jesus arrived at the particular time that God had planned for him to arrive.
- B. The timing of Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecy.
1. In the book of Daniel (9:25-26), the prophet tells us that the Messiah would arrive about 400 years after King Cyrus gave the order to rebuild Jerusalem. That decree was given sometime in the middle of the 400s BC.
 2. Faithful Jews, at least those who studied the prophets, should have been expecting the Messiah to arrive about the time that Jesus was born.
 3. God apparently revealed the timing to a man named Simeon (Luke 2:25f). Simeon came into the temple and recognized Jesus as the Messiah because the HSp had revealed to him who Jesus was.
 4. Further, a woman named Anna, whom the Bible calls a "prophetess," also recognized that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Luke 2:36).
- C. The timing of Jesus' birth was historically appropriate.
- Jesus arrived at a very providential time in history.
1. Alexander the Great had conquered the Mediterranean world and spread the Greek language throughout the region. The NT was written in Greek, the common tongue of most of the educated people in the Roman Empire.
 2. The network of Roman roads and the Roman peace (*pax Romana*) helped facilitate the spread of the message.¹

¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 8, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians* (Accompanying biblical text is author's translation.), New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 157.

3. The presence of Jewish synagogues throughout the Roman Empire provided a starting place for the Christian message to gain a foothold before spreading out among the Gentiles.
4. So the timing of Jesus' arrival was both prophetic and providential; it happened at just the right time—"the fullness of time."

App: Who controls time and the timing of events? Only God can do that. Only God stands outside of time yet acts within time and controls everything that happens in time. God is in control of world history, and "in the fullness of time," Jesus came into the world. He arrived at the right time.

III. He came unto his own people.

- A. We need to have a little grammar lesson here: The first "his own" (τὰ ἴδια) is in a certain grammatical form (neuter) that would be translated as "his own things." But the second "his own" (οἱ ἴδιοι) is in a different form (masculine) that implies "his own people." Jesus came unto his own people.

- B. Who were Jesus' people? The chosen people, the Jews. Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah for the Jewish people.

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

Matthew 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.

Mt 15:24 [Jesus] said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

John 4:22 ... salvation is of the Jews.

Jesus was the Jewish savior for the Jewish people.

- C. The Jewish people trace their roots back to Abraham. God promised Abraham:

Ge 22:18 *And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*

Ge 26:4 *And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;*

God gave similar promises to Isaac and Jacob. We find out that one of Jacob's sons, Judah, will be the tribe through which Messiah will come.

Ge 49:10 *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

- D. We find a bit later that the Messiah will come through the lineage of David.

Jeremiah 23:5–6 *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ...*

The NT refers to Jesus as the “son of David,” i.e., the offspring of David, over a dozen times.

- E. Jesus fulfilled all of these prophecies declared by the Jewish prophets for the Jewish people. If anyone claimed to be the Messiah, he would have to have this pedigree, this lineage. No one without this ancestral line could claim to be the Messiah. This was a very Jewish line of descent.
- F. The Gospel writers—Matthew and Luke—give us Jesus' genealogy, showing that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

When he came, he came “unto his own” – his own people, the Jews.

- G. Sadly, the second part of John 1:11 tells us that “his own received him not.”

1. His own *family* did not receive him. Mary, of course, believed in him, but the rest of his family did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection.
2. For the most part, the Jewish *people* did not believe in Jesus. They did not accept him as the Messiah. Many thousands believed in him during his ministry, and many thousands of Jews believe in Jesus today. But the nation of Israel as a whole—the Jews as a people—did not accept Jesus. They rejected him, persecuted him, abused him, and killed him.

Isa 53:3 *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Mk 6:4 *But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

John 19:15 *... The chief priests [said], We have no king but Caesar.*

Mt 27:25 *... all the people [said], His blood [be] on us, and on our children.*

Jesus' own people rejected him—they despised him, dishonored him, rejected him, and eventually killed him. Even today, most of the Jews do not accept Jesus as their Messiah.

- H. The results of that rejection were catastrophic for the nation.

Mt 23:37-38 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, [thou] that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chicks under [her] wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

Not many decades after Jesus said these words, the Roman army attacked the city of Jerusalem and left it a smoldering pile of rubble. Just as Jesus predicted, every stone built on the temple mount was cast down. Some of those stones still remain today at the base of the western “wailing” wall.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the nation of Israel did not exist for the next 1900 years. The Jews were scattered to the four corners of the earth, and many of them experienced great persecutions and attempted genocide.

- I. We believe that God still has a plan for the nation of Israel. The book of Romans tells us that “all Israel will be saved.” We believe that when Jesus returns, the nation of Israel as a whole will turn to Jesus in faith. We look forward to that day.

Trans: He came unto and for this own people.

IV. He came for his own purposes.

- A. As I mentioned the word “unto” can be translated and understood as “for” – “He came for his own.” This would then be a purpose statement—Jesus came for a specific purpose.
- B. And the Bible clearly states what that purpose was. He came to save the lost.

Matthew 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.

Luke 19:10 for the Son of Man has come (ηλθεν) to seek and to save that which was lost.

Lu 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

John 3:17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

1Ti 1:15 ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; ...

- C. Jesus’ highest purpose in coming unto his own was to save his own.

- D. Even the Jews' rejection of Jesus fit into God's overall purposes. It was necessary for Jesus to die for our sins, and the Jews' rejection of Jesus fit God's purposes. Jesus himself affirms that great truth:

Mt 16:21 ... Jesus began to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Lu 24:26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

Jesus knew very well that his own people would reject him. He knew that he would be despised and rejected of men. Before he was born in Bethlehem, he knew what his own people would do to him. Even when the crowds were cheering him and calling him their king, he knew that his own people would ultimately reject him.

- E. But that's not the end of the story.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

The Jews failed to receive their own Messiah. But God's invitation for salvation extends far beyond the Jews. Anyone can receive Jesus—"as many as (οσοι) received him." This word means "whoever." Cf. John 3:16—"whosoever believeth in him..."

His own people did not receive him, but we can become his own people through faith in Jesus. We can be among those who do accept him. What happens when we receive Jesus?

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

That's what happens when you put your faith in Jesus—you become the people of God. When we receive him by faith, God calls us his children.

And that happens *only* by faith—not by works (Eph 2:8-9) and not by family connections.

We have to decide which of these statements pertain to us—verse 11 or verse 12? Are we among those who do *not* receive him or among those who do receive him? Every one of us is in one of those categories; you can't straddle the fence.

Jesus comes to us; he invites us to follow him. What will be your response? When he comes to you, will you receive him? That's the most important question of all—what will you do with Jesus? Will you accept him or reject him? That's the big question that we must face, especially at this time of the year. What do we do with that little baby in the manger? What do we do with the message of the Gospel?

Jesus “came unto his own” – his own *place*, at his own time *period* in time, to his own *people*, and for his own *purposes*.

Jesus claims all of these as “his own.” That means that Jesus—as God—is sovereign; he's in control of it all. None of this happened by chance; none of it was the result of random coincidence. All of it happened according to the “determinate council and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). It all happened according to God's purpose and plan.

Christmas is a celebration of the fact that Jesus “came unto his own.” It's a great tragedy that Jesus' own people did not receive him. But even though they didn't, we can receive him; anyone can receive Jesus through repentance and faith. And if we do, we become the children of God. That's very good news, and it's a message worth celebrating.