

Lesson #2: John's Prologue part 1

"The opening verses of John's Gospel present the most profound statement on the person of Christ found anywhere in Scripture."

F.F. Bruce

Out of the gate, it can be seen that the Gospel of John is unique. The prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18) stands apart from the other Gospels because it opens not with a manger, genealogy, or prophetic background, but with a sweeping vision of eternity: "In the beginning was the Word." While the Gospel of Matthew traces Jesus to Abraham, the Gospel of Luke to Adam, and the Gospel of Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, John reaches before creation itself to reveal Christ as the eternal Logos who was with God and was God. John does not start with a historical event centered in Israel but rather starts with an ontological definition centered in the eternal God.

The prologue functions almost like a theological overview, introducing the great themes that will unfold throughout the Gospel, which are light and darkness, belief and unbelief, glory, grace, truth, new creation, and the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Its poetic and meditative style gives it a hymn-like quality that many scholars believe portrays the worship and theological reflection of the early church. In just eighteen verses, John presents one of the most profound Christological statements in all of Scripture.

And as John writes, he is clearly using known language to the Jews who are familiar with the Torah in order to trigger reflection on Old Testament phrasing that is now being fulfilled in New Testament manifestation. Starting his gospel with "In the beginning was the Word" is an obvious connection to the first words in Genesis 1 — "In the beginning, God". John makes the connection to the old creation in order to proclaim the beginning of the new creation. His purpose, as we will find out, is to make bold proclamations about Christ and the eschatological transition from the old covenant age to the beginning of the new covenant age.

In sum, chapter 1:1–12, John unfolds a grand vision of who Jesus is and why he came into the world. The passage begins by identifying Jesus as the eternal Word who was with God and was God, establishing both his deity and his eternal existence before creation. John emphasizes that all things were made through him, showing Christ not only as Savior but also as Creator and source of life itself. This life is described as the light of humanity, shining into the darkness of a fallen world, a darkness unable to overcome or extinguish it. The introduction of John the Baptist highlights the role of witness and testimony, as he points people away from himself and toward the true Light. John then presents the tragedy of rejection: although the Word entered the very world he created, many did not recognize or receive him, including many among his own people. Yet the passage turns to hope and grace in verse 12, declaring that those who do receive Christ and believe in his name are given the right to become children of God.

This movement from eternity, to creation, to revelation, rejection, and finally adoption introduces where this gospel is headed.

As can be seen then, the first part of the prologue is not only a profound revelation of Who Jesus Christ is, it is also the beginning of a theological crisis in the midst of Judaism. "*The Word was with God and the Word was God*" sets the stage for a radical challenge of understanding Who God is. There is a God called Word Who was with God. Oh my, we are now out of the gate on a journey towards a further unveiling of Who the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fully is. The Old Testament had shown a progression of knowing who the Elohim, a general term for God in that time, of Israel was. He is an Elohim who is El Shaddai (God Almighty) to the Patriarchs and then revealed centuries later as Yahweh to Moses at the burning bush. Now through the appearance of Christ, we are confronted with another revelation of who this Yahweh is, and it involves the shocking reality of multi-persons!

Lesson #2 Questions

6. What are some key differences between the beginning of John and the synoptic gospels?
7. How is John 1:1 connected to Genesis 1:1?
8. What do we learn about Christ that predates his birth?
9. How can the Word be God and be with God?
10. What is the parallel meaning of John 1:1-3 and the process of making the Genesis 1 days?

In your own words, describe the incarnation as articulated in the Bible.

Lesson #3 John's Prologue Part 2

*"The greatest and most mysterious work of divine wisdom and grace is the Incarnation of the Son of God."
— John Owen, Christologia*

The second part of the prologue to the Gospel of John presents the incarnation with striking clarity in John 1:14: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Here, the eternal "Word" (Logos), who is identified earlier in the chapter as fully divine, does not merely appear human but truly becomes human. The phrase "became flesh" emphasizes the fullness of this reality: God the Son entered into real human existence, taking on a physical body, human limitations, and life within history. This is not a temporary disguise or symbolic presence, but a genuine union of divine and human natures in the single person of Jesus Christ.

John tells that the incarnation happened, but Luke tells us how:

"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'" Luke 1:30-35 ESV

It is worth noting that this language from Luke is uniquely paralleled with the language about the Tabernacle in Exodus 40:35:

"And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it (overshadowed in the Septuagint), and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

The angel Gabriel tells Mary, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."* Because *episkiazō* is the same word used for God's glory cloud filling the Tabernacle in Exodus 40, this signifies that Mary's womb is becoming the new dwelling place of God's presence.

Another etymological observation is that John chooses the Greek word *sarx* in John 1:14 to articulate what it was that the Logos Word became. He does not use *soma*, which means body, nor *anthropos*, which means man, but rather he uses *sarx* to seemingly emphasize that not only did the Word become a "man" but a man with the broken, weak flesh of all mankind. Flesh here seems to have a double meaning in much of the scriptures, alluding to mankind that is fallen and inclined to death. Jesus actually had a body that could be tempted to sin, suffer pain, and even die. And in this "flesh," he actually suffered and overcame sin and death. So the Word became flesh like the fallen Adam race. What a great savior and thus full salvation we have!

The verse also says that He “dwelt among us,” a phrase that echoes the Old Testament idea of God *tabernacling* with His people. Just as God’s presence filled the tabernacle in the wilderness, now His presence is personally embodied in Jesus. In fact, Jesus said in John 2, “tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days”, which they later understood that he was talking about His body as the true temple of God, John 2:19-21. The invisible God is made visible, approachable, and knowable. John continues by saying, “we have seen His glory,” indicating that in the life, works, and character of Jesus, the glory of God is revealed, not in fire on a mountain, or in a material Temple, but shockingly in weak human form. Also to be noted is that the Presence of God dwelt in the Tabernacle and later Temple, thus the Presence of God dwelt in a “place”. But now the Presence of God dwells not in a place but rather in a “Person”. The incarnation, then, is God coming near through humanity to humanity. There is a dwelling place of God, and His name is Jesus Christ! *“The humanity of Jesus is the temple of God’s self-revelation”*, T.F. Torrance.

Finally, John describes this incarnate Word as “full of grace and truth,” highlighting the character of God revealed in Jesus. The incarnation is not only about God entering the world, but about what He brings, which is grace that restores and truth that reveals reality as it truly is. Through Moses, the law came, but now through Christ, the greater Moses, grace and truth have come. In Jesus, God’s faithful love and perfect revelation meet. The incarnation therefore stands at the heart of the Christian message: God does not remain distant but comes into human life to make Himself known, to redeem, and to dwell with His people in a personal and transformative way.

And now the theological crisis has reached a fever pitch in this prologue. For not only is there a Word that is God and with God, but now that Word of God became flesh! Now there is a Man joined into deity! What do we do with this? How are we now to perceive God? The ramifications are radical and communicate volumes about the very being of God and His radical redemptive reach to us in love.

Lesson #3 Questions

11. Why is John 1:14 considered to be one of the greatest verses in the Bible?
12. What does the word incarnation mean?
13. What did Gabriel say would happen to Mary in Luke 1:35 and how does that parallel the Tabernacle story with God's Presence?
14. What is the Holy Spirit's role in the incarnation?
15. Why is the incarnation essential to our salvation?

Describe in your own words the incarnation.