

## The Revelation of God's Glory John 1:1-18

**Introduction** – Did you hear about the new discovery of the world's largest volcano? It is approximately 1,500 km from Japan, located in the Pacific Ocean. This volcano is bigger than Great Britain!

### The Gospel of John

1. The **purpose** of John is stated at the end of the book (John 20:30-31)
2. John 1:1-18 is one of the most important passages about Jesus Christ
3. John 1:1-18 contains the main themes in the Gospel of John
4. John 1:1-18 is filled with many Old Testament backgrounds, themes, and quotations
5. The Old Testament word of God is fulfilled in Jesus the Word of God
6. The Eternal Word is the Uncreated Light whom John says is God's Son
7. John 1:11-12 anticipates how John's Gospel will unfold: belief and unbelief
8. The word 'darkness' in John is not merely the opposite to 'light' but sinful unbelief
9. John is making the shocking claim that God's Glory dwells most fully in Jesus
10. John 1:1-18 is asserting that God's revelation comes to a climax in Jesus Christ

### I. The Word is Eternal (1:1-5)

#### A. The Word is eternally begotten not created (1:1-2)

##### 1. The Word has no beginning (1:1) John 17:5; Colossians 1:17

- a. All four Gospels begin with a beginning. But why does the Gospel of John begin with the phrase, "In the beginning?" **F.F. Bruce** answers, "It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis. In Genesis 1:1 'In the beginning' introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of the new creation. In both works of creation the agent is the Word of God." John 1:1 is so beautiful and wonderful that it led more than one early Church Father to say, "John's paradoxical combination of "was" with "in the beginning" leaves us contemplating nothing short of eternity and infinity" (Chrysostom). **There is no beginning for one begotten without beginning** (Augustine). Some think Jesus was a kind of divine creature (or lesser god) to claim that Jesus is not equal to God the Father. Instead of translating the Greek phrase, "*The Word was God*", they say "The Word was a god." "However there are four reasons to reject this. **First**, John was a monotheistic Jew and would have never wanted to write that another person was "a god." **Second**, If John had placed a definite article before the word "God" this would have so equated the two persons in the previous clause about "the Word being with God" that it would have obliterated the distinction altogether. **Third**, In Greek syntax structure, it is common for a definite nominative predicate noun preceding a finite verb to be without the article (this is a grammatical rule called "Colwell's Canon). **Fourth**, if John had really wanted to say that Jesus was divine but not equal to God the Father, there was a Greek word for this, *theios* "divine", but John did not use this word.
- b. **John is teaching us that the Word is eternal and shares the same substance (essence, or nature) with the Father although they are different persons.** In terms of the preexistence of the Word what we say about the Word is the same that we say about the Father. The Word is Eternal. **Cyril of Alexandria** says that John anticipated those who would deny the deity of the Son, and so he ensured the establishment of the Son's divinity by confessing him as God.

##### 2. The Word is a Person distinct from the Father yet one with Him (1:2)

- a. Actually this point is made in both verses 1 and 2. In verse one the phrase, "and the Word was *with* God" parallels here the statement in verse 2. What does this mean? The phrase about the Word being "with God" tells us that although the Word is God, the Word is also **distinguished** from God. The first two verses of John's Prologue are not only important for establishing the deity of Jesus Christ, but are significant to helping us understand the doctrine of the **Trinity**. All three members or persons of the Trinity are equally God, but the Son is not the Father, and the Father is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Son. Each is a **uniquely distinct person** yet at the same time **one in essence**. There is no human or earthly analogy that can explain the Mystery of the Trinity, but one of the best analogies I've ever read is from the early Church Father Basil who used the

rainbow as a faint analogy of this great Christian Mystery. The Greek word behind the translation of the term “Word” in verses 1-2 is **Logos**. *Logos* was a very *familiar word* to both Greeks and Jewish peoples. Greek philosophy (Stoicism and Philo), Jewish Wisdom literature, and the OT all have a clear concept of “Word” (Logos). For the Greeks Logos meant ultimately “Reason”. In Jewish wisdom literature Logos referred to personified wisdom. However, neither of these options seems to be behind why John chose the term Logos. Although it is very possible that John was somehow contextualizing the Gospel message with a familiar Greek concept, the best reason for why John chose the term Logos is because this was a major Old Testament concept. **First**, John is deliberately echoing the opening words of Genesis in the first verse of John. **Second**, many of the themes in John 1:1-18 (the Prologue) are also found in Genesis 1 (light, darkness, and life). **Third**, the end of John’s Prologue (vv. 14-18) draws an important parallel between the wilderness days of the Old Testament and Jesus. **Fourth**, John adapts Isaiah 55:9-11 for his basic Christological framework.

- b. Even within the creation account of Genesis 1 we read several times of God’s Word, Consider Genesis 1:3, And God said, Let there be light,” and there was light. What God says happens. His powerful Word speaks creation into existence. God speaks and things come to pass (Genesis 1:3, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30). Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 55:10-11.

## **B. The Word is the source of all Life and Light (1:3-5)**

### **1. The Word is the Creator of all things (1:3)**

- a. John has proven to us that the Word is Eternal, now he proves His divinity from His works. John’s statement here about the Word being the Creator sums up the teaching of Genesis 1. **Paul agrees with John when he says in Colossians 1:16**, *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him (also Hebrews 1:2).*
- b. John has not yet told us about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. At this point he is teaching us that the Word created everything, therefore everything in creation owes its existence to the Word. From the smallest living organism in the darkest and deepest part of the ocean to the vastness of the billions of galaxies – the Word by His Word made it all.

### **2. The Word is Uncreated Light (1:4-5)**

- a. **D.A. Carson** and many other scholars understand that the terms “life”, “light”, and “darkness” are practically universal religious symbols (this is not John’s point). There is a parallel here with John’s statement in 5:26. Carson goes points out that the “relationship between God and the Word in the Prologue is identical with the relationship between the Father and the Son in the rest of the Gospel. Both 1:4 and 5:26 insist the Word/Son shares in the self-existing life of God. Later Jesus will make the claim that He is both the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) and the life (11:25; 14:6). He wants us to understand an **important distinction**. He says, “Nevertheless there is a difference between this passage and the rest of the Gospel where we read about “life” and “light.” Later John uses these terms to refer to salvation (resurrection life, spiritual life). **Light is necessary for life to exists – this is true in creation and salvation. However**, we should know at this point that that the theme of “darkness” in John’s Gospel is not just the opposite of light. **D.A. Carson points out**, The “darkness” in John is not only the absence of light, but positive evil (3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46). John gives us a clue that Jesus is the light of the new creation. God sent this Uncreated Light, at the Incarnation, into the world many people rejected it (3:20).
- b. Perhaps the better explanation of the phrase, **“the darkness did not comprehend”** it (the light) is to say, **“the darkness did not welcome the light.”** In the first creation, when God created the light, the light of the day dispels all darkness of night. When the created light of the sun shines, there is no darkness. But when the Light of the new creation first shined in the Incarnation, darkness was still present with the Light. Light is victorious and will conquer darkness. When John writes that the darkness did not comprehend the light this may sound confusing to us. But John is already hinting that the darkness fought hard to reject God’s light. This will become an explicit statement in verses 10-11 and increasing clear throughout the rest of the Gospel of John.

## II. Jesus is the True Light for the World (1:6-13)

### A. The Light of Jesus shines in the darkness (1:6-9)

#### 1. John the Baptist is the first of many witnesses (1:6-8)

- a. John the Baptist appears in all four Gospels. John the Baptist is the first great witness to the entrance of salvation Light into this world, but he is not the most important (5:36). John is giving us the first witness. Many others will follow. The theme of "witness" pervades the entire Gospel of John (Andreas Kostengerger).
- b. Is your life a faithful witness to Jesus?

#### 2. The light of Jesus shines for our salvation (1:9)

- a. Universal language emphasizes the global nature of the light of Jesus.
- b. **F.F. Bruce** helpfully says, "He is the light 'which enlightens every human being' in the sense that the illumination which he has brought is for all without distinction." If people refuse to come to the Light of Jesus and if they chose to remain in the darkness of sin, it is not because there is no illumination available for them, but because they deliberately prefer the darkness (F.F. Bruce). Isaiah 9:2; 42:6-7; 49:6; John 12:46.

### B. John reveals how people respond to the Light (1:10-13)

#### 1. To reject Jesus is to remain in the darkness of sin (1:10-11)

- a. John is filled with irony. What John says here is a **tragic irony**. John already told us that the Eternal Word is the Creator of this world. In this sense the Eternal Word who is the Uncreated Light not only owns everything, but everything and everyone owes his or her existence to the Word. Notice what John is saying here: **First** and **generally** in verse 10, people in this world did not welcome Him when he came. Mankind is given knowledge of God, but throughout history continues to reject this revelation. These verses and many other tells us that long before the Incarnation, the Word already revealed Himself before this final and special "*coming into the world*." This world is God's world and yet John is helping us come to terms with the sad reality that just as people rejected God's revelation in earlier stages of history, so too many people rejected God's greatest revelation of Himself in the Word at the time of the Incarnation. Yet, in spite of this rejection by our sinful world, the world remains the object of its Creator's love. God's purpose for sending His Son into the world was not to condemn the world.
- b. **Second** and **specifically** in verse 11, Israel of all the peoples of the earth, rejected the Eternal Word who was born Jewish. Throughout redemptive history, Israel received special revelation from God because God has granted to Israel a unique covenant status among all the nations of the world. **No other nation received such privileged status (Deuteronomy 4:7; Psalm 147:20).** God revealed Himself in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament. The Old Testament has a few "bright spots" of faith, but overall it is often a sad story of how God's very own people rejected Him over and over again. As John writes he is thinking not only of what happened in those earlier days of Israel's history; but he also has in mind what happened when the Eternal Word was made flesh in the Person of Jesus and came to His own, but many rejected Him.

#### 2. To receive Jesus is to trust Him for salvation (1:12-13)

- a. We noted in the beginning of today's study that several scholars believe verse 12 is the central focus of John's Prologue. Whether it is the central verse (I'm not sure), we must recognize its importance when contrasted with the previous two verses (vv. 10-11) and when read from John's purpose stated in chapter 20:30-31.
- b. In verses 12-13, John gives us a preview of this new spiritual birth that he is so eager for peoples of the earth to receive. Spiritual birth means membership in God's family. Spiritual birth means to be a spiritual partaker/participate in the covenant community. To enter God's family one must receive the Word. **Verse 12 is the positive response** which balances the negative response to God's revelation in Christ mentioned in verse 10, but especially verse 11. Verse 12 speaks of the human responsibility to believe the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, then in verse 13 John immediately balances human responsibility to believe with divine sovereignty.

### III. The Eternal Word Became Human (1:14-18) [Climax of the Prologue]

#### A. Marvel at the Miracle of the Incarnation (1:14)

##### 1. God's tabernacle Glory Presence now resides in Jesus (1:14a)

- a. The powerful Eternal Word was born into frail humanity. The thought of this was offensive to the Greeks and Gnostics and blasphemous to the Jews. This is connected to the OT ( **Exodus 25:8**, *And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.* We know that this sanctuary was first a tent called a tabernacle. **In Exodus 33:7, Moses sought the Lord in the tent of meeting.** Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.
- b. **Exodus 40:34-35**, *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* **Later** when **Solomon** finished the temple we are told that the Glory of God's Presence came and dwelt three (1 **Kings 8:10ff**). John tells us that that the Glory of God revealed at the Incarnation was a greater glory presence than anything previous to this redemptive event.

##### 2. Jesus is the unique Son who is true God and true man (1:14b)

- a. Don't forget that John just told us that if we believe we will become children (son and daughters) of God. Today God has many children throughout the world. We call these children, Christians. However, we are children of God by **adoption**. Jesus is the unique, eternal Son of God because he shares the same essence with the Father. We are back to the truth of the eternal generation of the Son. Jesus is God's unique Son. The Son shares in the same nature with the Father. Jesus is True God and true man.
- b. In verse 14 John explicitly connects the Eternal Word to the Incarnation specifically to the only Son from the Father. This whole passage is simply Christology at its best. The phrase "grace and truth" comes from the Old Testament describing God's covenant steadfast love and faithfulness to his people (**Exodus 34:6 and 33:18-19**). Exodus 34:6, The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love and faithfulness**. By using this phrase, John is telling us that when the Word became flesh, God's covenant mercy of faithfulness and steadfast love was manifested to the greatest degree! The coming of Jesus as God's unique, one and only Son proclaims God's great faithfulness.

#### B. The Revelation of God's Glory climaxes in Jesus Christ (1:15-18)

##### 1. Jesus fulfills and surpasses all Old Testament revelation (1:15-17)

- a. John briefly returns to John the Baptist as a key witness the glory of God in Christ just to make sure no one would ever mistakenly think that John the Baptist is the Word. Although John was older than Jesus, he powerfully testifies that Jesus was far greater.
- b. John is not saying that only law was given through Moses and only grace is given through Jesus. John is not making that sharp a contrast because there was definitely grace presence in the Mosaic times. Grace is not entirely new in the coming of Jesus, but God's climax of revealing grace comes to its greatest fulfillment in the Incarnation because this launched the new creation into reality. Grace and truth both came through Moses and Jesus, but the point of this is to express the greater comparison between Moses and Jesus. Grace and truth are revealed to its fullest measure in the coming of Jesus Christ to this world. This is an example of a comparison of degrees not a contrast of total opposites.

##### 2. Jesus the Son of God best reveals the Father (1:18)

- a. Moses once asked to see God (**Exodus 33:18-19**), Isaiah 40:3-6, Mark begins His Gospel by quoting Isaiah, telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's long revelation of Glory.
- b. In Jesus of Nazareth we see the face of God.