**[[@Page:1]]** COMMENTARY (noticed that for commentaries to work you must have [only Page & Bible milestones](http://community.logos.com/forums/p/35093/268092.aspx#268092))

I. The Prologue (1:1-18). **[[@Bible:jn 1:1-18]]**

All four Gospels begin by placing Jesus within a historical setting, but the Gospel of John is unique in the way it opens. The Book of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus that connects Him to David and Abraham. Mark starts with the preaching of John the Baptist. Luke has a dedication of his work to Theophilus and follows that with a prediction of the birth of John the Baptist. But John begins with a theological prologue. It is almost as if John had said, “I want you to consider Jesus in His teaching and deeds. But you will not understand the good news of Jesus in its fullest sense unless you view Him from this point of view. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, and His words and deeds are those of the God-Man.”

The prologue contains many of the major themes of the Gospel which are later reintroduced and developed more fully. The key terms include “life” (v. 4), “light” (v. 4), “darkness” (v. 5), “witness” (v. 7), “true” (v. 9), “world” (v. 9), “Son” (v. 14), “Father” (v. 14), “glory” (v. 14), “truth” (v. 14). Two other key theological terms are “the Word” (v. 1) and “grace” (v. 14), but these important words are used in John only in this theological introduction. “Word” (*Logos*) does occur elsewhere in the Gospel but not as a Christological title.

*A. The Logos in eternity and time (1:1-5).*

1:1**[[@Bible:jn 1:1]].** As far back as man can think, **in the beginning … the Word** was existing. The term “Word” is the common Greek word *logos,* which meant “speaking, a message, or words.” “Logos” was widely used in Greek philosophical teaching as well as in Jewish wisdom literature and philosophy. John chose this term because it was familiar to his readers, but he invested it with his own meaning, which becomes evident in the prologue.

**The Word was with God** in a special relationship of eternal fellowship in the Trinity. The word “with” translates the Greek *pros,* which here suggests “in company with” (cf. the same use of *pros* in 1:2; 1 Thes. 3:4; 1 John 1:2). John then added that **the Word was God.** Jehovah’s Witnesses translate this clause, “The Word was a god.” This is incorrect and logically is polytheism. Others have translated it “the Word was divine,” but this is ambiguous and could lead to a faulty view of Jesus. If this verse is correctly understood, it helps clarify the doctrine of the Trinity. The Word is eternal; the Word is in relationship to God (the Father); and the Word is God.

1:2**. [[@Bible:jn 1:2]]** The Word has always been in a relationship **with God** the Father. Christ did not at some point in time come into existence or begin a relationship with the Father. In eternity past the Father (God) and the Son (the Word) have always been in a loving communion with each other. Both Father and Son are God, yet there are not two Gods.

1:3**. [[@Bible:jn 1:3]]** Why is there something rather than nothing? That is a great question in philosophy. The Christian answer is God. He is eternal, and He is the Creator of **all things.** And the Word was the agent of Creation (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). All Creation was **made** by the Word in relation with the Father and the Spirit. John stressed the work of the Word. He came to reveal the Father (John 1:14, 18); and the work of revelation began in Creation for Creation reveals God (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20).[[1]](#footnote-1) **(you can hover over this footnote & L4 shows its info)**

1:4**[[@Bible:jn 1:4]].** Life is man’s most important asset. To lose life is tragic. John affirmed that in the ultimate sense, **life** is **in** Christ. Man’s spiritual and physical **life** come from Him. (For John’s teaching on life, cf. 5:26; 6:57; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3; 20:31.) Jesus, the Source of “life” (cf. 11:25), is also **the light**

**[[@Page:2]] of men** (cf. 8:12). Light is commonly used in the Bible as an emblem of God; darkness is commonly used to denote death, ignorance, sin, and separation from God. Isaiah described the coming of salvation as the people living in darkness seeing a great light (Isa. 9:2; cf. Matt. 4:16).

1:5**[[@Bible:jn 1:5]].** Light’s nature is to shine and dispel **darkness.** Darkness is almost personified in this verse: darkness is unable to overpower light. By this, John summarized his Gospel record: (a) **Light** will invade the dominion of **darkness.** (b) Satan the ruler and his subjects will resist the light, but they will be unable to frustrate its power. (c) The Word will be victorious in spite of opposition.

*B. The witness of John the Baptist (1:6-8).*

1:6**[[@Bible:jn 1:6]].** In addition to the eternal Word, **a man** came on the stage of history: **his name was John.** This John did not author this Gospel but was the great forerunner of Jesus known as John the Baptist. He **was sent from God,** which was the secret of his importance. Like the Old Testament prophets he was equipped and commissioned by God for special ministry.

1:7**[[@Bible:jn 1:7]].** The word **witness** (both as a noun [*martyria*] and verb [*martyreō*]) is important in this Gospel (cf. v. 15, 32, 34; 3:11, 26; 5:31-32, 36-37; 18:37; 19:35; etc). (See the chart with the comments on 5:33-34.) John the Baptist was sent for people’s benefit to be an additional pointer to the truth of Jesus, the Revealer of the Father. People in sin are in such darkness that they need someone to tell them what is **light.** John’s goal was that **all men might** come to trust in Jesus.

1:8**[[@Bible:jn 1:8]].** John the Baptist was great, but **he … was not the Light.** Some evidence suggests that the movement begun by John the Baptist continued after his death and even after the death and resurrection of Jesus (4:1; cf. Mark 6:29; Luke 5:33). Twenty years after Jesus’ resurrection (cf. Acts 18:25; 19:1-7) Paul found about 12 disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus. A Mandaean sect still continues south of Baghdad which, though hostile to Christianity, claims an ancestral link to the Baptist.

*C. The coming of the Light (1:9-13).*

1:9**[[@Bible:jn 1:9]].** This has been called the Quaker’s text because of that group’s erroneous use of it and their stress on the “inner light.” The words **was coming** (*erchomenon*) may refer to every man (as in the niv marg.) or to Christ, **the true Light** (as in the niv text). The latter is preferred, for it suggests the Incarnation.

Christ **gives light to every man.** This does not mean universal salvation or general revelation or even inner illumination. Instead, it means that Christ as the Light shines (*phōtizei*) on each person either in salvation or in illuminating him with regard to his sin and coming judgment (3:18-21; 9:39-41; cf. 16:8-11).

1:10**[[@Bible:jn 1:10]].** **The world** (*kosmos*) means the world of men and human society which is now in disobedience to God and under the rulership of Satan (cf. 14:30). The *Logos* came among people in the Incarnation, but mankind **did not recognize** its Maker (cf. Isa. 1:2-3). The failure to recognize (*egnō,* “know”) **Him** was not because God’s nature was somehow “hidden” in people, as some suggest. Rather, it is because of human ignorance and blindness, caused by sin (John 12:37).

1:11**[[@Bible:jn 1:11]].** In some ways this is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. The *Logos* went to **His own** home **but** He had no welcome. Jesus went to **His own** people, the nation Israel, but they as a whole rejected Him. In rejecting **Him,** they refused to accept Him as the Revelation sent by the Father and refused to obey His commands. Isaiah long before had prophesied of this Jewish national unbelief: “Who has believed our message?” (Isa. 53:1)

1:12**[[@Bible:jn 1:12]].** That unbelief, however, was not universal. Some **received** Jesus’ universal invitation. **To all who** accepted Jesus as the Revealer of the Father’s will and as the Sacrifice for sin, **He gave the right to become children of God.** The word “right” (*exousian*) is a needed improvement over the KJV‘s “power,” and “children” (*tekna*) is better than the KJV‘s “sons.” People are not naturally children of God but can become so by receiving the gift of the new birth.

**[[@Page:3]]** 1:13**[[@Bible:jn 1:13]].** The new birth does **not** come by **natural descent** (lit., “of bloods”), **nor** is it the result **of** a **human decision** (lit., “the will of the flesh,” i.e., the natural human desire for children), nor is it the result of **a husband’s will.** The birth of a child of God is not a natural birth; it is a supernatural work **of God** in regeneration. A person welcomes Jesus and responds in faith and obedience to Him, but the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit is “the cause” of regeneration (3:5-8).

*D. The Incarnation and revelation (1:14-18).*

1:14**[[@Bible:jn 1:14]].** **The Word** (*Logos*; cf. v. 1) **became flesh.** Christ, the eternal *Logos,* who is God, came to earth as man. Yet in doing so, He did not merely “appear” like a man; He became one (cf. Phil. 2:5-9). Humanity, in other words, was added to Christ’s deity. And yet Christ, in becoming “flesh,” did not change; so perhaps the word “became” (*egeneto*) should be understood as “took to Himself” or “arrived on the scene as.”

“Flesh” in this verse means a human nature, not sinfulness or weakness. In the Greek the words **lived for a while among us** recall God’s dwelling with Israel in the Old Testament. The word “lived” is *eskēnōsen,* from *skēnē* (“tabernacle”). Much as God’s presence was in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34), so Jesus dwelt among people.

**We have seen** most naturally implies that the author was an eyewitness. **His glory** refers to the unique splendor and honor seen in Jesus’ life, miracles, death, and resurrection. **The one and only Son** (*monogenous;* cf. John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) means that Jesus is the Son of God in a sense totally different from a human who believes and becomes a child of God. Jesus’ sonship is unique for He is eternal and is of the same essence as **the Father.** The glorious revelation of God which the *Logos* displayed was **full of grace and truth,** that is, it was a gracious and truthful revelation (cf. John 1:17).

1:15**[[@Bible:jn 1:15]].** **John** the Baptist gave a continuing testimony to Jesus. The present tense of the Greek verbs **testifies** and **cries out** stresses this. Jesus was younger and began His ministry later than John. But John said that because of His preexistence (and thus His true nature) **He … has surpassed me.**

1:16**[[@Bible:jn 1:16]].** The Word made flesh is the source of grace (*charin*), which is the sum total of all the spiritual favors God gives to people. The words **we … all** refer to Christians and include John the author. Because of **the fullness of His grace … one blessing after another** (*charin anti charitos,* lit., “grace in place of grace”) comes to Christians as waves continue to come to the shore. The Christian life is the constant reception of one evidence of God’s grace replacing another.

1:17**[[@Bible:jn 1:17]].** The greatness of the old dispensation was the giving of **the Law** by God **through** His servant **Moses.** No other nation has had such a privilege. But the glory of the church is the revelation of God’s **grace and truth … through Jesus Christ** (cf. v. 14).

1:18**[[@Bible:jn 1:18]].** The statement **No one has ever seen God** (cf. 1 John 4:12) may seem to raise a problem. Did not Isaiah say, “My eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty”? (Isa. 6:5) God in His essence is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). He is One “whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). But John 1:18 means, “no one has ever seen God’s essential nature.” God may be seen in a theophany or anthropomorphism but His inner essence or nature is disclosed only in Jesus.

**God the only Son** is literally “the unique God” or “the only begotten God” (*monogenēs theos;* cf. *monogenous,* “the one and only” in v. 14). John was probably ending his prologue by returning to the truth stated in verse 1 that the Word is God. Verse 18 is another statement affirming Christ’s deity: He is unique, the one and only God. The Son **is at the Father’s side,** thus revealing the intimacy of the Father and the Son (cf. the Word was “with God,” vv. 1-2). Furthermore, the Son **has made … known** (*exēgēsato,* whence the Eng. “exegeted”) the Father. The Son is the “exegete” of the Father, and as a result of His work the nature of the invisible Father (cf. 4:24) is displayed in the Son (cf. 6:46).

II. Jesus’ Manifestation to the Nation (1:19-12:50).

**[[@Page:4]]** This major part of John’s Gospel describes the public ministry of Jesus to the nation Israel. It is a “book of signs,” a narrative of seven of Jesus’ miracles that point to Him as the Messiah. Along with the signs are public discourses explaining the significance of the signs and two long private interviews (chaps. 3-4).

*A. Jesus’ early ministry (1:19-4:54).*

1. early testimonies to jesus (1:19-34). **[[@Bible:jn 1:19-34]]**

*a. John’s first witness (1:19-28).* **[[@Bible:jn 1:19-28]]**

1:19**[[@Bible:jn 1:19]].** As in the Synoptic Gospels, the ministry of John the Baptist was so influential that the authorities in **Jerusalem** decided to investigate him. **The Jews** is the author’s title for the city’s leaders. The **priests and Levites** went **to ask** about his baptism and what he claimed for himself.

1:20-21**[[@Bible:jn 1:20-21]].** John said, **I am not the Christ** (i.e., the Messiah). (See comments on vv. 40-41 about the meaning of the title “Messiah.”) This was his confession, as stressed by the repetition of the verb (in Gr.) **confessed.**

Interestingly in response to their questions John’s answers were progressively shorter: “I am not the Christ” (v. 20); **I am not** (v. 21); **No** (v. 21). He did not want to talk about himself, for his function was to point to Another. John had an Elijah-type ministry. He appeared on the scene suddenly and even dressed like **Elijah.** He sought to turn people back to God as Elijah did in his day. And Malachi had predicted that Elijah would return before Messiah’s coming (Mal. 4:5). Therefore many speculated that John was Elijah. **The Prophet** was expected because of Deuteronomy 18:15 (referring to Christ; cf. John 1:45). Some wrongly understood that the coming “prophet” was to be distinct from the Messiah (v. 24; 7:40-41).

1:22-23**[[@Bible:jn 1:22-23]].** **John replied** that he was not any of the expected prophetic figures. He explained, however, that his ministry was described in the Old Testament. He was **the voice** (*phōnē*), while Jesus is the Word (*Logos*). John’s function was one of preparation, and it was carried on in **the desert.** (On the meaning of John’s quotation from Isa. 40:3, see the comments on Matt. 3:3.)

1:24-25**[[@Bible:jn 1:24-25]].** The **Pharisees** were an important sect of Judaism. They numbered about 6,000 and were most influential. They held a strict interpretation of the Law and embraced many oral traditions. The Pharisees were the only minor group to survive the Jewish war of a.d. 66-70, and their teachings formed the basis for Talmudic Judaism. Their question to the Baptizer was, in essence, “Since you have no official title, **why** are you baptizing?”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Notes**:

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1. Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jn 1:1–3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jn 1:4–25). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)