

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON VI : THE PRE-EXISTENT STATE OF JESUS THE SON OF GOD - PART I

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John 1:1-18	related passages
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JOHN'S PROLOGUE {vss 1 - 5}

It's well agreed that v1-18 forms a prologue to the entire book of John. In this prologue, some sentences are joined together by linking key words, joining the sentences like overlapping shingles (note also the symmetry of style in v1, 10) :

In Him was LIFE

And the LIFE was the LIGHT

And the LIGHT shines in the DARKNESS

But the DARKNESS comprehended it not.

He came to HIS OWN

But HIS OWN RECEIVED Him not

But as many as RECEIVED Him, etc.

v1 in the beginning : referring probably back to the initial point of creation (Gen 1:1). In both places "the beginning" is the initial moment of time and creation; but while Moses dwells on that which starts from that point, tracing the record of divine action *from* the beginning, John lifts our thoughts *beyond* the beginning and dwells on that which "was" when time began its course. John is emphasizing here that *the Word existed prior to the beginning of creation; i.e. the Word existed from all eternity.*

the word (ho logos) : John introduces Jesus as "the logos" or "the Word", a term unfamiliar to us but common among the recipients of his gospel, obvious because he took no time to explain himself. The term was used by both the Greeks and the Jews, although what each held was different:

- To the Greeks, the Word was a term used to describe not only the spoken word but the word still in the mind, and may be described as "the divine reason" (in the sense of 'the reasoning of the mind', not as an explanation). It is used as early as 500 BC by a philosopher by the name of Heraclitus. "When they applied it to the universe, they meant the rational principle that governs all things." [Leon Morris, notes on the gospel of John in *The NIV Study Bible*] I take this to be somewhat equivalent to today's "Let the Force be with you!", an impersonal power in the material universe.
- To the Jews however, the Word of God was already represented in the OT as a Person. The Targums (the Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew scriptures; cp Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible paraphrase, a translation originally done for Taylor's children) used the term "the Word" in connection with the Lord. The action of God is constantly referred to "His Word" (memra), e.g. "the Lord protected Noah by His Word", Gen 7:16; the Lord "made a covenant between Abraham and His Word", Gen 17:2; at Bethel Jacob made a covenant that "the Word of the Lord should be His God", Gen 28:21; Moses at Sinai "brought forth the people to meet the Word of God", Ex 19:17. The Word as directly descriptive of Jesus is found only in Jn 1:1, 14; 1 Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13.
- Which is John's meaning here? Some state that John was solely referring to the Semitic sense of the term, others state he meant both. Hendriksen says this of Philo's Greek philosophical usage: "John's doctrine is not dependent on that of heretics nor on that of speculative philosophers like Philo, a prominent Alexandrian who flourished in the first century A.D. One never knows what to make of Philo's Logos. He employs the term no fewer than thirteen hundred times! but the meaning is never very definite. It is described now as a divine attribute, then again as a bridge between God and the world, identical with neither but partaking of the nature of both." [Hendriksen, *John*] My personal opinion is that he was using the term in the Semitic sense, and would by no means support the Greek philosophical meaning to "the Word" as just an abstract force. But by using the term in a narrow sense that the Jews would have understood, he also knew it would be familiar with all groups of people, giving him a starting point and common ground on which he could talk with his hearers. To John, Jesus "... was not just the communicator but the communication itself. He did not merely tell God's truth. He was the truth (John 14:6)." [Kent, *Light in Darkness*] "A word serves two distinct purposes: a. it gives expression to the inner thought, the soul of the man, doing this even though no one else is present to hear what is said or to read what is thought; and b. it reveals this thought (hence, the soul of the speaker) to others. Christ is *the Word of God* in both respects: he expresses or reflects the mind of God; also, He reveals God to man (1:18; cf. Matt 11:27; Heb 1:3)." [Hendriksen, *John*] "The Bible is primarily concerned with God's revelation of Himself to man; and the revelation is given through the phenomena of the natural world, through events in human history, and in direct messages heard by

those chosen to receive them and passed on by them to others. No clear distinction, however, is drawn between what God says and what He does. As Emerson rightly remarked, ‘Words and deeds are quite indifferent modes of the divine energy. Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words.’ God’s words, to be sure, are always effective; and in what He does He never fails to reveal who He is. He speaks and it is done. By His word the heavens are made. He says ‘Let there be light’, and there is light. He sends forth His word and the ice melts; again, He sends forth His word and the people are healed. His word goes forth and what He intends it to do is done; His word comes to the prophets and at once they are constrained to proclaim it. (See Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6; 147:18; 107:20; Isa 55:11; Jer 1:4-9).... It is significant that the same Hebrew word *dabhar* is used both for ‘word’ and ‘event’, and this usage is found in the New Testament as well as in the Old. The Christian gospel is so bound up with Jesus of Nazareth, the climax of biblical revelation, that the message in which it is proclaimed is equated with Him. Thus Peter can say ‘*The word* which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ ... *that saying* ye yourselves know ...*even Jesus of Nazareth.*’ (Acts 10:36-38) [Tasker, *John*]

and the Word was with God : literally “the Word (logos) was face to face with God”. The NT uses the preposition ‘pros’ in this manner more than 600 times, to indicate motion or direction toward a place, or as here, close proximity. The meaning here is friendship, intimacy; the Word existed in the closest possible communion with the Father, and He took supreme delight in this fellowship (1 Jn 1:2; Jn 17:5). Note this makes the incarnation more clearly an act of incomprehensible love and condescension (Phil 2:6-8).

and the Word was God : “God” is placed first in this phrase in the Greek, emphasizing the full deity of Christ. The word “God” is without the article in the Greek: “It is necessarily without the article... inasmuch as it describes the nature of the Word and does not identify His Person. It would be pure Sabellianism to say ‘the Word was the God’. No inferiority of nature is suggested by the form of expression, which simply affirms the true deity of the Word.” [Wescott, *John*] “Jehovah’s Witnesses miss the point of the passage altogether when their *New World Translation* renders ‘the Word was a god,’ for John is not demonstrating that Christ is some semi-deity but that he is no less than very God in essence. There are four other places in John 1 where *theos* appears without the article (vss 6, 12, 13, 18), and not even the *New World Translation* renders these ‘a god.’” [Kent, *Light in Darkness*]

v2 He Himself was in the beginning face to face with God : to emphasize and clarify, John once more states what he just had stated, that Jesus was eternally (prior to any act of creation) enjoying full loving fellowship with the Father.

v3 all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made : John first makes the statement positively, then negatively to again emphasize and state Jesus’ deity in such a manner to refute any that deny such. Two things are here emphasized:

- that Christ Himself was not created. He was eternally. Note four times in verses 1,2 the imperfect tense is used in the Greek (denoting past continuing action).
- that all things were created through Him. Everything finds its source in God the Father, but creation is spoken of as being *through* Jesus (1 Cor 8:6). “**All things**” is not used in the sense of “all things collectively, i.e. everything” but rather “all things one by one, all things without exception” (Col 1:16). Note here the verb tense is aorist (denoting a single past event rather than an on-going, continuous events).

v4 In Him was life : “Life” is one of the great concepts of John’s gospel, found 36 times while no other NT book uses it more than 17 times. Not “through Him” but “in Him” (cp 5:26; 6:48, 53; 11:25; 14:6). “Was” not in the sense that it used to be but no longer is”, but rather “from all eternity and throughout the entire old dispensation”. In what sense is “life” used here?

- not physical life since God is Spirit (4:24) and is not physical in any sense. He does sustain all life including our physical existence, and John does refer to that (v3, 10); but this is not John’s meaning here. This becomes more obvious in the next few verses when John equates “life” with “the light of men”.
- In the following verses, the life / light shines in the darkness and is not accepted by sinful men (v5); John the Baptist bore witness to that light (v6, 7) although it must be understood that John the Baptist was not that light (v8) but that the light was the One rejected by the world and accepted by God’s children (v9-13; 8:12; 1 Jn 2:8).

The “life” and “light” is therefore spiritual and is sometimes interchanged with the term “everlasting life” (5:24) resulting in close fellowship with God in Christ (17:3). “Life” here in v4 is therefore a reference to the fullness of God’s essence, all of who God is: holiness, truth, love, sovereignty, etc. This is another expression of Jesus’ deity, Him having life, the fullness of the Godhead dwelling within from all eternity.

v5 and the light shineth in the darkness : note the change from the past tense (Greek: imperfect tense) to the present tense, denoting continuous action. Not only did the light shine in the OT dispensation (v4b; Ps 36:9) but it continues to shine and is shining today.

but the darkness comprehended it not : “darkness” here is a reference to fallen mankind, darkened by sin and unbelief, and is synonymous with the world in v10. The translation here could be interpreted two ways:

- “*did not overcome, did not overpower, did not put out or extinguish*” : this is an acceptable translation, and is so translated in the RSV, expressing a truth found elsewhere that *sinful men hate God* (3:19, 20; 12:35; Rom 1:18, note

'hold' has the sense of 'hold down, suppress'; Eph 6:12). Kent prefers this rendering because John always uses this word in the hostile sense in his other passages, 6:17; 8:3,4; 12:35. [Kent, *Light in Darkness*]

- “*did not comprehend, apprehend, lay hold of, possess*”: this is the sense of the KJV, NIV, others; and would fit the parallelism of v5 “the darkness did not comprehend Jesus”, v10 “the world did not acknowledge Him”, and v11 “His own did not receive Him”.

Note some believe John to directly attack the teachings of a heretic in John's day by the name of Cerinthus (who's teachings are still with us today; “when the canon of scriptures were closed, so was the canon of heresy”). Cerinthus taught that Jesus was merely human, the son of Joseph and Mary by natural birth, but that He was more just and wise than anyone else. At His baptism, the Christ in the form of a dove descended upon Him, leaving on the night of His suffering. It was therefore Jesus the human that died and not the Christ. An interesting story concerning Cerinthus is related that once when John was to bathe in the public bathhouse at Ephesus, he saw Cerinthus inside. John immediately ran out without bathing, exclaiming, “*Let us flee, lest even the bathhouse fall down because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.*” We don't know if John directly had these teachings in mind when he was composing his gospel or not. If he did, that reason was subordinate to the reason he gives in 20:30,31 as to why he wrote. Directly or indirectly however, John does a marvelous job proclaiming the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ here and throughout his gospel.

A question must be asked to those who would deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ: ***what more could John have said if he had wanted to teach that Jesus is God the Son and the Son of God?*** How much plainer could John have written? John made statements, then made the statement again in the negative, then he would repeat himself again! ***If John is not here teaching that Jesus is Divine, what is John saying? If Jesus is not the eternal Son of God, would John have written in such a fashion?*** The burden of proof is on those who deny that Jesus is what orthodox Christianity has always taught: that ***He is the eternal Second Person of the Trinity; having the fullness of the Divine Essence and glory dwelling within; being of the same essence of the Godhead and not just a similar substance; being the Creator of every individual thing that was ever created, Himself being uncreated. Of all mankind, Jesus is alone worthy of our adoration and worship, as is the Father and the Holy Spirit.*** That is orthodox Christianity's view on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and none could express it better than the apostle John has in these opening verses of his gospel.