

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

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

LESSON VII : THE PRE-EXISTENT STATE OF JESUS THE SON OF GOD - PART 2

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John 1:1-18	related passages
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JOHN'S PROLOGUE {vss 6 - 18}

v6 John ("Jehovah has been gracious") is mentioned at this point to introduce the Word's entrance into the world, and as an example of the constant shining of the light mentioned in v5. "John" in the gospel of John always refers to John the Baptizer, which provides us another indication that the apostle John was the author of this gospel narrative. If the apostle John was the author, it is understandable that he would humbly omit references to himself; if the apostle was not the author, it would be extremely odd that another could write of the ministry of Christ and fail to mention this apostle by name.

sent from God : "sent" means here "sent with a commission", from the Greek word *apostellō*, the word from which we get our word "apostle". The purpose of John's commission is given in vss 7,8.

v7, 8 the apostle here clarifies the purpose John the Baptist had been given from God, first generally (he came for a witness) then particularly (to bear witness of the Light), then it's final objective is given (that through him all men might believe).

There is evidence some at the time of the apostle's writing was elevating John the Baptist to an unwarranted position, one which the apostle wanted to stress that John the Baptist never claimed for himself. Some even questioned if John was indeed the Christ (vss 19,20). It's believed the apostle wrote this while in Ephesus, and compare what John is writing here with what Paul found in Acts 19:1-7. Hendriksen points out what John is saying here in tabular form:

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>John</i>
was from all eternity - v1	came - v6
is the Word (logos) - v1	is a mere man - v6
is Himself God - v1	is commissioned by God - v6
is the real Light - v8	came to testify concerning the real Light - v8
is the object of our trust - v7	is the agent through whose testimony men trust in Christ - v7

witness : from the Greek word *marturian*, from which we get our English word "martyr". It's basic meaning is "to give competent testimony concerning that which one has himself seen, heard, or experienced". Another important concept in John's gospel; mentioned 14 times in noun the form as "witness, testimony" (not mentioned Matt, 3 times in Mark, 1 time in Luke). The verb form "testify" occurs 33 times in John (once in each Matt and Luke, not mentioned in Mark). For both the noun and verb form, that is more than anyplace else in the NT. John is emphasizing that the facts concerning Jesus are amply attested.

through him might believe : the question arises, "through whom: Jesus or John?" I believe it to refer to John the Baptist because the apostle John nowhere else says we are to believe *through* Jesus but *in* Jesus, i.e., Jesus is the object of our faith. In addition to this, John is the subject of vss 7, 8, not Jesus.

believe in Jesus : synonymous expressions are "to receive, to confess, to come to Jesus" (Matt 10:32,40; 11:28; 18:6) and Jesus Himself makes it plain that He viewed Himself as the object of faith and trust, so that an unwillingness to accept Him meant everlasting punishment (Matt 7:22,23; 25:31-46). Paul as well stresses the necessity of faith in Christ alone for eternal deliverance from our sins (Rom 3:22,25; Gal 2:16,20; 3:22,26; Phil 3:9; Col 1:4; 2:5; et. al.).

v9 the apostle makes it clear to certain who misinterpret John's purpose: John was not the Light but merely a reflector, "John testifies concerning the Christ like the moon testifies concerning the sun."

the true light : "true" not as opposed to "false", but in the sense of "real, ideal, genuine" as opposed to that which was symbolic, imperfect, incomplete. Jesus was the Light which answered to all the pictures of the Light given in the OT.

which lighteth every man : explained various ways (as given in Hendriksen, *John*, of which I agree) :

- the Light (Christ) gives spiritual illumination in the highest and fullest sense to every human being without exception. This may be rejected at once since the word of God nowhere teaches all will be saved.
- the Light (Christ) gives spiritual illumination which renews both heart and mind to men, some of which lose it

again. This may be rejected at once since although not everyone will be saved, the ones who do receive salvation remain saved (10:28). The Quakers used this verse to teach every man has a “day of visitation” and that to every man God gives sufficient grace.

- **the Light (Christ) gives illumination of reason and conscience to every human being without exception.**

Although this is held by many conservatives and does contain an element of truth which cannot be denied, it does not agree with John’s immediate context. John here is referring to the Light as being *the life of God in Christ (and therefore Christ Himself) made manifest to the world by the preaching of the gospel*, and not referring merely to our natural understanding and reasoning.

- **the Light (Christ) gives spiritual illumination to every man who is saved; in the sense that there is not one saved that does not receive his illumination from Christ.** Defensible but not as preferable as the last alternative.

- **the Light (Christ) gives spiritual illumination to every person that hears the gospel; i.e. He imparts a degree of understanding spiritual matters to all who hear the message of salvation.** This does not necessarily result in salvation, and in fact most reject the message and illumination. Some, due to the sovereign saving grace of God do receive the word and obtain eternal life. Note the following:

- this agrees with the verses to follow (vss 10-13) in which the gospel is presented to two circles, one of which is wide and rejected by most; the other of which is narrow and effectual. The verses are teaching that “many are called, but few are chosen.”
- This interpretation also agrees with the preceding verses which shows the light as shining in the darkness, but the darkness not accepting it (vs 5).
- John also uses similar phraseology in other places of his gospel (see 3:19; 12:35,36,46), not in the sense of “birth” but of appearance among men.
- Another passage which coincides with this teaching is Heb 6:4-8 in which the same verb that is translated here “lighteth” is translated in vs 4 as “enlightened”. In the Hebrew’s passage it is clear that there is an “illumination” which does not necessarily result in salvation. This also provides a warning to the unsaved: one cannot sit back and rest upon the fact that God is working on your heart; “I am getting convicted so I know one day I will be saved, I can enjoy the world as long as I want for now!” That’s not so. The Lord can bring someone to an understanding of that person’s needs and still not bring him into a saving knowledge of Christ. *If you’re still not saved, don’t play with your soul. Trust Christ now while His Spirit is working.*

that cometh into the world : how one interprets this phrase is dependent to a large degree on how the first part of the verse is interpreted:

- one interpretation is to connect this phrase with “every man” and is so taken in KJV, among others. On the surface the phrase seems redundant, because what other kind of men are there than those who “came into the world?” But some state this was a Rabbinical saying to refer to “every person without exception.” This then would force the preceding phrase “that lighteth every man” to mean that Christ illuminates the conscience and reasoning of every person, having no bearing on the eternal destiny of the individual.
- the other interpretation is to connect this phrase with the Light, and is so taken in NIV, among others. The sense is therefore “the true Light which enlighteneth every man was coming into the world”; i.e., that at the time when John the Baptist was witnessing, the true Light was dawning on the world. This would allow the foregoing interpretation to stand. Jesus as being pictured as “coming” into the world is used elsewhere by the apostle (6:33,50). “From the first He was (so to speak) on His way to the world, advancing toward the Incarnation by preparatory revelations. He came in type and prophecy and judgement.” [Wescott, *John*]

Personally I can see both sides of the argument and am not entirely comfortable with either interpretation. (1) If the phrase “every man which cometh into the world” was a Rabbinical saying, then that would make more sense than limiting the “every man” to those who hear the gospel. The Light spoken of here would then by necessity be limited to affecting one’s conscience, since scripture does not teach “all men without exception are brought to the brink of conversion by the Spirit, then they are allowed to decide,” or “all men are brought to the Light but some lose that standing,” or even worse, “all without exception will be saved.” Those teachings conflict with the doctrines of man’s depravity and the work of the Spirit in saving God’s chosen people. (2) In contrast, I do agree that John’s context favors the interpretation that the Light is the influence of the gospel (or the work of Christ through the gospel). “Every man” would then be limited to “every person that hears the gospel,” and the “coming into the world” must refer to Christ’s appearance to mankind. If I had to choose, I would favor this interpretation above the one which limits the light to man’s conscience only.

It should be noted that either interpretation is not a question of which Bible version or which Greek manuscripts are correct, but rather a question of the construction of the Greek sentence. In this particular instance where there is liberty with the Greek construction, a commentator’s opinion is as authoritative as a translator’s opinion because the passage may be translated to reflect one’s personal belief.

This is a good example of how I view Bible study. As mentioned before, I view commentaries as my “teachers” which I turn to when I’m in need of understanding. As one would ask the Pastor a theological question, I “ask” my commentators. *Although I value the teachings I receive from books, they are not infallible.* I take everything I learn from them as their *opinion* as I lay it beside what the word of God says. Then I make my decision as to the meaning of a given passage through:

- **(1) meditation upon what I read in the word of God**
- **(2) meditation upon what I am being taught**
- **(3) prayer, depending upon the Holy Spirit to give me wisdom in the understanding of a passage.**

An example might be that Brother Tom and Brother Gene would have differing opinions on a certain passage. The above steps would still hold true: *look to the word of God, consider each of the opinions, and pray that the Lord would lead.*

Arriving to a peace concerning a particular passage does not always come rapidly. Some theological decisions may take years of studying prior to settling on one side or another. Sometimes, as in the above passage, I am not comfortable with any interpretation I have studied. Passages like this I leave in the hands of God, realizing that although I don’t have the answers, He does. One day I may settle on a given interpretation; maybe I won’t. God didn’t give us His word just to satisfy our curiosity. Of course *there will be passages we’ll question because to fully understand the word of God would be to understand God Himself.* We should not be disappointed with not having all the answers, for *there is growth in studying* whether we come to the conclusion that would satisfy our desire or not.

Perhaps that is why I am “open minded.” The word of God is complex, and *the more I study, while becoming more confirmed in what I know, the more there’s a growing realization of how little I do know.* No single person has all the answers, and the people to be most afraid of are those who are apparently not aware of that fact.

When one spends time studying and comes to settle on certain interpretations, there will always be someone who will say “You’re following man and not God.” Since we will run into that, let’s look at a few points:

- **(1) learning from others is all part of the growth processes the Lord intended.** God left us pastors and teachers, friends and family, schools and colleges (“other men”) to bring us to a knowledge of Christ and Christian teaching (Eph 4:11-14; 1 Tim 3:2). In fact, that’s one of the main purposes of our assembling ourselves together as a church (Mt 28:19,20). Paul told Timothy to “pass on the faith” by taking that which he had learned and teaching others, who would then teach others, and so on (2 Tim 2:2). So even the person criticizing you has received his teachings from someone else. When one accuses you of “following a man,” they are merely stating the fact that they do not agree with your understanding of a passage. Since some have a tendency to blindly think they are always correct, the logic follows: *they are following God and you must be following a man.*
- **(2) learn from others as the Lord leads.** Since the Lord left people to teach us, we must avail ourselves of their knowledge and wisdom. *Seek out those you respect spiritually and “pick their brains.”* That would include good commentaries and other research materials. Be leery of those who tend to be very vocal with their “depth of scriptural understanding.” Experience has taught me that *the ones who know the most often say the least, and the ones who are always forcing their opinion are often doing so because no one ever asks for their opinion.*
- **(3) let us not be too quick to condemn Christians who disagree on minor points.** None of us are 100% doctrinally pure; that’s just part of being human. A brother who is in error is not necessarily from Satan. *By being gracious and longsuffering with others, the Lord may be pleased to bring an erring brother to a knowledge of the truth through us.* That will probably not happen if we are more offensive than the doctrines we hold (I am talking about Christians, not cults as Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, the Way, etc).

On a personal note: I went through a phase when I abhorred books and “learning from men”, and I was dedicated to just studying nothing but God’s word and letting the Spirit lead. While that may *sound* spiritual, it was in fact an excuse for laziness and lack of discipline. We learn nothing else in life that way: math, languages, music, etc. There is so much of the Word of God that is not understandable without a knowledge of the background, the history concerning that era, when one of the books of the Bible was written and how it correlates to the other books of the Bible, the customs, the importance of the original languages, and on and on. The Bible is a mass of confusion without the basics, and those are things we *must* learn from others.

v10 world : the sum of mankind apart from God, created by the Word but alienated from the life of God by sin. That the world here does not refer to birds and trees is evident by the clause *“and the world did not acknowledge Him.”*

knew : more than just an intellectual assent but “to come to know, to recognize, to understand, to acknowledge as one’s own” (cp vss 5,11). The mass of mankind as His creation failed to recognize Him.

v11 the apostle moves from the universal action of the Word to His special action. Not only didn’t the world receive Him, but even His own people, specially prepared, failed to accept Him. Two different forms of the same word is used in this verse to bring out a definite message: the first **his own** is neuter, and could be translated “His own home, His own property” (cp 16:32; 19:27; Acts 21:6 where “his own” and “their own” is the same word). The second **his own** is masculine, translated “His own people”. “There can be no reasonable doubt that this phrase, and ‘hoi idioi’ (His own people) which follows, describe the land and the

people of Israel as being, in a sense in which no other land and people were, the home and the family of God, of Jehovah.... Creation and mankind were His, and not unvisited by Him; but in 'the world' and in humanity one spot and one people were in a peculiar sense devoted to Him. The land of Israel was 'ta idia' (His own home), and the children of Israel were 'hoi idioi' (His own people). The Word came to the holy land and to the holy nation, and they 'received Him not.'" [Wescott, *John*] Note in Zech 2:11,12; Hos 9:3; Jer 2:5,7; 16:18 God speaks of His land, and in Ex 19:5,6a; Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; 32:9; Ps 135:4 the people is peculiarly the Lord's. An interesting thing concerning these passages is that the OT is making reference to the LORD, which we know as referring to Jehovah Himself; yet these same promises is now being applied to Jesus.

received : contains within the word the sense of "receiving that which has been handed by another", as distinct of "taking". The word in this verse is different than the word in the next verse. The prophets of Israel, now through John their representative, "offered" Jesus to the people as the promised Messiah, but the leaders of the Jews refused to acknowledge Him as King. Used of welcoming into a home (cp 14:3); those who belonged to Him "gave Him no reception, gave Him no welcome" (Isa 1:2,3).

v12 although rejected by the nation, the rejection is qualified by the personal belief of some. **received** here has the sense of taking that which is within reach, as anxious to make it his own.

As many as ... to them was a common Aramaic idiom. This transcends Jewish boundaries, the "whosoever will" of both Jews and Gentiles.

power : not mere ability but legitimate rightful authority which includes the idea of power (authority in 5:27; power in 10:18; 17:2; 19:10,11). Note this is not inherent within man but given by God.

v13 not of blood : plural, "bloods"; various explanations why it is plural: the blood of two parents, the blood of many distinguished ancestors, etc. The general idea the apostle presents here is one of progression, beginning here with "physical descent", e.g. as from Abraham (8:36-40; Lk 3:8). The Jews felt they were accepted by God merely by being Jews, descendants of Abraham.

nor the will of the flesh : the sexual fleshly desire of man and woman

nor of the will of man : the procreative urge of the male. This is not the general word for mankind here (male and female), but rather "man" in the strictest sense of the word.

v14 the Word was made flesh : we must maintain distinct truths with what's being said: (1) that by becoming flesh, the Word did not cease to be what He was before, and (2) the term flesh must not be taken to exclude the rational soul of man; i.e. Jesus was only God in an appearance of a man but not truly human. **Jesus was truly human and subject to all the conditions of human existence, but He never ceased to be God.** We believe:

- **the Lord's humanity was complete.** He was not "the soul of God in the body of a man" [Apollinarianism]
- **the Lord's humanity was real and permanent.** He did not just temporarily appear in the form of man, remaining foreign from humanity itself. [Gnosticism]
- **the Lord's human and divine natures remained without change.** He was 100% human and 100% divine. This combination did not form a unique third existence. [Eutychianism]
- **the Lord's human and divine natures were united in one Person,** and the acts or deeds He did cannot be separated to one or the other natures. [Nestorianism]

dwelt among men : literally "tabernacled", which speaks of several things: (1) although the Word assumed the human nature permanently, His habitation in its weakened condition was temporary, since a tent is easily set up and taken down, and speaks of the brevity of His life / ministry ; (2) although His dwelling here on earth was temporary, this speaks as well in opposition to the Christophanies of the OT in which He would appear momentarily; and (3) to the Jew especially, the parallels with the Shekinah glory in the tabernacle would be obvious, when God dwelt among His people in a different form.

beheld : more than looking quickly or staring absent-mindedly; but rather *examining with care, studying it, viewing and considering it thoughtfully* (1:32; 4:35; 11:45; Acts 1:11).

His glory : *the glory the eyewitnesses saw in Jesus was what could be expected with respect to One who is the only begotten from the Father.* As the Lord manifested His glory in the wilderness (Ex 16:10; 24:16; 40:34), in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:11), and to the prophets (Isa 6:3; Ex 1:28; Acts 7:55), so Christ's glory shown in different events of His life. Possibly a direct reference to the transfiguration, which deeply impressed the "inner circle" of James, Peter and John. Note Peter's reference in 2 Pet 1:16-18. (James was martyred before he could leave any writings)

Note also that this is further indication of the author's identity: this verse cannot be taken in any other manner except that the author was one of the "we" who beheld His glory, an eyewitness of the human Jesus.

only begotten of the Father : (1:14,18; 3:16,18) not as all believers are children of God, because then *only begotten* would have no meaning. Not in the sense that He was the Messiah, since vs 1, 18 states this is a condition which has existed for all eternity. Not in the sense of a paternal sonship, accomplished when Jesus was born, because this would be different than that spoken of in vs 18. The reference that makes the most sense is that Jesus was the only begotten Son of God from all eternity, prior to His

incarnation.

full of grace and truth : grace for when He spoke, He had nothing but unmerited favor for the guilty, truth for He Himself was the final truth in contrast to all the shadows that had preceded Him.

v15 it was natural in John's day to refer to the elder as deserving of honor, this being John the Baptist since he was older than Jesus and began his public ministry prior to Jesus. John the Baptist states this is in error, since Jesus only appeared to be behind John. In reality, Jesus existed prior to John; again, making a reference to Jesus' pre-existence.

v16 while the previous verse was a statement made by the Baptizer, vs 16-18 is probably the apostle speaking again, signified by "we" in this verse. The importance is that whether or not we have seen Jesus in the flesh, we all can attest the reality of His gifts. Our individual needs are met in Him.

fullness : used only here by John but several times by Paul (Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col 1:19; 2:9). The meaning is that the whole sum of the divine attributes exist together in Christ. **have all we received :** Christians receive from Christ what is necessary according to our position and our work, as a divine spring.

grace for grace : "Each blessing appropriated became the foundation of a greater blessing." "One manifestation of the unmerited favor of God in Christ is hardly gone when another one arrives."

v17 for the law was given by Moses : here the law was an addition to the essential scheme of salvation (Gal 3:19; Rom 5:20). There was nothing wrong with the law, either morally or ceremonially. But it was preparatory in character, revealing man's sin and picturing his deliverance.

but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ : On the other hand, the gospel "came" in due course of the divine plan, the natural issue of all that had gone before. The two things the law could not provide (grace, full pardon for sins; and truth, the reality to which all the types pointed) was furnished by Christ.

through Jesus Christ : the Person is at last fully named; this is the Word, the Life, the Light, the one before the Baptist.

v18 John finishes his prologue with an explanation as to why the gospel of Jesus is truth, as well as showing the inherent limitations of human experience. "It is impossible, so far as our experience yet goes, for man to have direct knowledge of God as God. He can come to know Him only through One who shares both the human and divine natures, and who is in vital fellowship both with God and with Man. In Christ this condition is satisfied." [Wescott, *John*]

no man hath seen God : the word "God" is without the article (used as in vs 1 to refer to the nature of God); the sense is that no one has ever seen God as to His true Nature, "God as God". In the OT people did see Theophanies, and Moses saw Him pass; but none has ever seen God in the fullest sense (Ex 33:20; Deut 4:12; John 5:37; 6:46; 1 Tim 1:17; cp Jn 14:8,9).

which is in the bosom of the Father : the image is one of the closest and most tender of all human relationships. This is used in scriptures as a child with its mother, a husband and wife, and even friends reclining side by side at a feast (as with the Last Supper).

He hath declared [Him] : "to expound, to interpret, to reveal a mystery". The verb is said to be used constantly by the classical writers of the interpretation of divine mysteries. Note there is no object to the verb (the KJV has "Him" in italics). It could literally be taken as "He made declaration" (Acts 15:14).

SUMMATION OF JOHN'S PROLOGUE

From eternity past, prior to creation, was the One that was to reveal God in the fullest sense. He was face to face with the Father, in closest intimate communion. And He was God, having the same essence as the Father and the Spirit. He was not created, but every individual thing was created through Him. In Him was spiritual life, the fullness of God's essence, the source of all other life. That fullness shined and continues to shine as light, but fallen mankind did not apprehend or lay hold of Him.

God sent John the Baptist with a commission to give testimony concerning what he saw and heard concerning Jesus, that men could believe through his testimony. John was not who prophecy was portraying, but was sent to give testimony concerning the genuine, the real anti-type of the OT prophecies. That was the true Light that was just now making His appearance to mankind that gives spiritual illumination to every person who hears the message of the gospel. [alternate rendering: That was the true Light that gives at least a degree of illumination to each and every person's conscience that was ever born, without exception.] Jesus was among mankind as His creation, but fallen man refused to acknowledge Him. He came unto His own property and His own people, but even they gave Him no welcome. But to any person who would reach out and receive Him, to those same persons He gave the authority and right to become God's children. These were not born because of their physical descent, nor from the physical desires of men and women, but they were born spiritually by the sovereign will of God.

This revelation of God took upon Himself humanity while remaining to be Divine, and "tabernacled" among

mankind, full of grace and mercy towards lost mankind, Himself being the final Truth in answer to the OT shadows. We who were close to Him studied and considered Him carefully, and saw through Him the glory as one would expect from the One who was the eternal Son of God. Even John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus that although naturally John was older and in the ministry before Him, Jesus was worthy of the higher honor since He was eternally the Son. All of who God is, the sum of His attributes, was within Jesus, allowing all of His followers to receive that which we need. As soon as one manifestation of His grace goes, there is another to meet our needs. Because even though Moses gave the law in all it's perfection, that which the law could not provide was found in Jesus. No one has ever seen God in the fullest sense except for Jesus, eternally intimately close to God. It is Jesus who expounds and reveals God to us.