

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN1 – The Prologue)

Jesus' Origins (1:1-5)

All four Gospels include some aspect of Jesus' origin and/or of Jesus' purpose in His earthly ministry. **Matthew's** genealogy reflects the rightful claim that Jesus had to the Messianic throne due to his linkage to David with whom God had made an everlasting covenant for an everlasting throne and kingdom (2 Sam 7:12-16). In addition, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham, thus demonstrating that Jesus was the means through whom God would fulfill His covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through Abraham (Ge 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12). The Messiah is referred to as a servant in Zechariah 3:8 and **Mark's** Gospel focuses upon this aspect of Jesus' purpose in His earthly ministry while mentioning nothing of Jesus' lineage. A servant's lineage is not noteworthy. **Luke's** Gospel emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man (His humanity) and traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam, the first man. Luke also provides many details about the birth and childhood of Jesus that are not mentioned by the other Gospel writers. **John's** Gospel emphasizes Jesus' existence prior to His earthly incarnation as a member of the eternal Godhead.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος ὁ λόγος ἦν μετὰ τὸ θεῖον ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός. (John 1:1 Greek)

John's use of the word "Word" (ὁ λόγος) *logos* to describe Jesus' origin is literally packed with meaning in several ways. First, John places the "Word" as in existence "in the beginning" (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος). This phrase immediately brings to mind Genesis 1:1 – "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The expression "in the beginning" does not refer to a specific moment in time, but it refers to a timeless eternity.¹ One could interpret this phrase in John 1:1 in this manner – "in eternity past prior to the creation of the cosmos there existed the Word." Next, the wisdom of John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is manifest by his choice of the word *logos* to describe Jesus. Here are some reasons that the choice of this word is amazing:

- The word *logos* refers not just to the sound of a word, but it carries with it the personality of the one who communicates the *logos*.²
- In Scripture, *logos* imparts creative power to the meaning of the word *logos* – "By the word [*logos* in the LXX] of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry hosts by the breath of His mouth." (Psa 33:6)
- Thus, by using the word *logos* to describe Jesus' origins, John is emphasizing the fact that Jesus possessed the same essence (personality) as God, was divine, and as God, He was the creative agent by which the cosmos was brought into being.
- John's audience would have consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. The Gentile world at that time, even though dominated by the Roman Empire, was influenced heavily by Greek culture and philosophy. Therefore, New Testament writers used the term "Greek" to refer to the Gentiles as opposed to the Jews. To the Jew, the word *logos* would reflect

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin and J.D. Douglas, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992).

² Ibid.

the personality of the one speaking the word since the Jewish mind expressed concepts poetically (witness the Psalms and the Proverbs). To the Greek, the word *logos* emphasized the rational, logical mind behind the universe (witness the relatively arithmetic nature of the Greek language and the prominence of Greek philosophers).³

- By the end of the 1st Century when John penned his Gospel account, it was clear that the new dispensation of the Church Age had been fully intercalated and this new spiritual entity was neither Jew, nor Gentile, but both Jew and Gentile. Thus, *logos* would have carried special meaning to both groups and would have spanned the dispensational divide between the two groups that many (e.g. the Judaizers) tried to continue to enforce.
- The word *logos* focused upon the universal significance of Jesus by virtue of its connection of Jesus to the act of creation. Jesus was not just the God-Man-Savior of the Jew or the Gentile, but of the entire world.
- The word order in the Greek focuses upon the superiority of Jesus to all created beings and the pagan deities – “καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος” – literally, “and God was the Word.” Jehovah Witnesses translate this phrase – “and the Word was a God.” This is an incorrect translation which is used to deny the deity of Jesus.⁴ Rather, this construction in the Greek ascribes all the attributes of divine essence to the “Word.”⁵

The position of the noun God in the Greek text marks it as a predicate, stressing description rather than individualization. The ‘Word’ was deity, one with God, rather than ‘a god’ or another being of the same class. This is the real meaning of the phrase. Unity of nature rather than similarity or likeness is implied. The eternal coexistence and Unity of the Word with God is unmistakably asserted.⁶

There is much more to be observed regarding John’s choice of words and Greek syntax in just the first verse of this Gospel. We cannot possibly explore everything to be noted in regard to John’s choice of words since this is a survey study; however, some of these observations are too important not to note.

- The first verse of John’s Gospel uses the imperfect tense of the Greek word for existence – ἦν (ἔσθιεν - impft. tense). The imperfect tense also focuses upon

³ “The term ‘Logos’ was used by the philosophers of the day to signify impersonal Reason which operated between God and the material creation as the mediating principle. But John shows the true Logos to be personal, the eternal Son of God who communicates God to man. Logos does not signify merely the name of a thing in a grammatical sense. It is that which embodies a conception or idea, a saying. The Ten Commandments are called in Greek, ‘hoi deka logoi,’ the decalogue, the ten words. Just as words are the means of communicating one’s thoughts to another, so Christ as the Word is the Revealer of God to man.” Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 14.

⁴ Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus is the son of God, but they believe that he was a created being who co-existed with God much as did the angels. (This is a newer version of the Gnostic heresy of John’s day where matter was viewed as evil and the higher up the creative chain, the less the existence of evil). In the opinion of Jehovah’s Witnesses, John could not have been so unreasonable to contend that someone (the Word) was with some other individual (God the Father) and at the same time be that other individual. On the other hand, Mormons believe that the universe is inhabited by different gods who procreate spirit children, who are then clothed with bodies on different planets. Elohim is the god of this planet. God the Father and God the Son are different gods. Lucifer was Jesus’ brother according to Mormon theology.

⁵ Marvin E. Vincent, *Word Studies of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), Volume II, 34-35.

⁶ Gaebelein and Douglas, editors, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*.

- continued existence. So, taken together, the Greek word and the choice of tense emphasizes the lack of origin of Jesus as the divine Son of God in preexistent state.
- This fact is further corroborated and emphasized by the fact that when John refers to the origin of Jesus' humanity in verse 14, he uses the aorist tense and middle voice of the Greek word – ἵκνωμαι – which means "to become." The aorist tense focuses upon the point in time in which Jesus took on human flesh and the middle voice indicates that the incarnation was His decision to submit to the Father's plan.
 - Jesus' pre-existence is also taught in 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:6ff; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:2ff; and John 17:5.
 - The phrase – "the Word was **with** God" – uses the Greek preposition "μετὰ" (with). This preposition focuses upon the equality of Jesus with God and carries the sense of being face to face or in the company of someone.⁷ In the ancient world, only parties of equal status or standing would sit across from each other at eye level.

An interpretive translation of John 1:1 based upon these facts might prove helpful at this point in our study. John 1:1, if interpretively translated, might read as follows:

In eternity past prior to the creation of the cosmos, the pre-incarnate and co-equal 2nd Person of the Godhead existed with God and shared the same essence as God. (Interpretive translation of John 1:1)

John 1:2 seems to be repetitious and it is. However, John had a specific purpose in mind when he added this seemingly redundant information after his statements in verse 1. In verse 2, John is unequivocally stating that the *logos* to which he referred was in fact a Person of the Godhead. The word *logos* in verse 1 is specifically stated to have co-existed in eternity past with God. Jesus Christ did not at some point in time begin a relationship with God the Father. His relationship with God the Father was eternal. There are not two Gods, but there are two different and distinct members of the Triune Godhead mentioned in these verses Who both possess the same essence.

John 1:3 establishes the role of the pre-existent Christ as the executor of God the Father's plan. It was the pre-existent Christ Who created the material universe. For similar affirmations by other writers of Scripture, see 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-17; and Hebrews 1:1-3.

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. (1 Co 8:6)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Col 1:15-17)

God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...(Heb 1:1-3a)

⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 711. See also, A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1932), Volume V, 4-5 and Gaebelien and Douglas, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

Jesus came to reveal the Father to man. John asserts that Jesus' role began even prior to man's creation with the creation of the material universe. Scripture asserts the revelatory nature of the created cosmos on several occasions (e.g. Jn 1:14, 18 cf. Psa 19:1-6; Rom 1:19-20).

John 1:4 uses the word "life" which is the Greek word ζῆ (zoe). John uses this word throughout the Gospel (e.g. 5:26; 6:57; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 17:3; 20:31). Many times John uses it to refer to spiritual life and many times to physical life or biological life. When referring to the spiritual life principle, John frequently adds the adjective "eternal" for clarification. Jesus is the source of life. John also equates life with light and in so doing, he draws from Isaiah 9:2 where Isaiah equates light with salvation – "The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light." "Light" is used in the Bible as symbolic of eternal truth; whereas, "dark" or the "night" is used as symbolic of death, the lie and the deceptive strategy of Satan.

John 1:5 builds upon the equation of life with light and the contrast with darkness in verse 4. The metaphorical contrast between light and darkness was a common concept in John's day. The scrolls at Qumran contain one scroll entitled *The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*.⁸ John uses the present, active, indicative of the Greek word φαίνομαι (phaino) which alludes to the eternal existence of this light.

⁸ Gaebelien and Douglas, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.