

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN1C – The Prologue)

A Quick Recap of Significant Points in Verses 1-13

- ❑ Verse 1 – The “Word” existed in eternity past with God and the “Word” shared the essence of God.
- ❑ Verse 2 – The “Word” is said to be “He.” “He” is Jesus Christ Who dwelt among men (v. 14).
- ❑ Verse 3 – The pre-incarnate Jesus created everything that was made.
- ❑ Verse 4 – The pre-incarnate Word possessed life eternal
- ❑ Verses 5, 10-11 – Spiritually blind men did not comprehend the light of life
- ❑ Verses 6-9 – John the Baptist bore witness to the Light
- ❑ Verses 12-13 – Those who believe in Him have been given the authority to become born again children of God

The Incarnation and Revelation (1:14-18)

In verse 14, John makes his fourth statement about the “Word.” In verse 1, John states “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In verse 14, John states that “the Word became flesh.” The use of the imperfect tense of the Greek word (*ei, ēmi*) in verse 1 emphasizes the eternal existence of Jesus as a member of the Triune Godhead. However, in verse 14, the focus is upon Jesus’ incarnation. Through His incarnation, Jesus entered the time/space dimension and resided with man. Paul describes the glories that Jesus set aside in becoming man in Philippians 2:5-9. Also, whenever I read Philippians 2, I cannot help but reflect upon the typology one finds in Moses’ life. When Moses gave up the glories of Egypt and demonstrated faithfulness by leading a complaining and rebellious people to their promised land, he typified the sacrifices made by the greatest of all men and leaders, our Lord Jesus Christ.

John’s choice of words continue to be packed with meaning and significance to his readers. In the phrase “He dwelt among us,” John uses the Greek word (*eske ēno ēsen*) which is the 3rd, person, singular, aorist, active, indicative of (*skenoō*). This Greek word could be translated “tabernacled” or “temporarily dwell” and would have recalled to the mind of the reader God’s presence with the nation of Israel in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34) as they made their way to the promised land.

John continues in verse 14 by indicating that he and others had beheld “His glory.” John is referring to the fact that through His life, His teaching, His sacrifice, His death, and His resurrection, Jesus displayed the glory of God, i.e. a perfect manifestation in human form of the unity of God’s attributes in action. In addition, there is a veiled allusion to the transfiguration of Jesus that was witnessed by John along with Peter and James (Matt 17:2-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36).

What do I mean by the “unity of God’s attributes in action” in reference to the Word become flesh in the form of a man – Jesus? Simply this – God’s attribute of love motivated Him to set aside His omnipresent nature as an infinite being, send His Own in the form of finite flesh in order to provide a means of satisfying His perfect righteousness. God displayed His omnipotent power over nature via a virgin birth and thereby put His sovereign plan into action so that His creatures might share in His eternal life. By an act of His justice, He judged the sins of the world as they were imputed to Jesus on the Cross as our substitute and thereby demonstrated the immutability and veracity of His omniscient word spoken through the prophets since and including the prophecy of Genesis 3:15.

Next, John uses another interesting Greek word to describe Jesus that is translated “the only begotten” in the NKJV and the NASV and “the One and Only” in the NIV. The NIV translation comes closest to the actual meaning of the Greek word (*monogene~~s~~s*) which might be better translated – “unique.” Jesus was not just God’s only Son – Jesus was the unique God-man. There has never been, nor will there ever be another like Him.

The phrase in verse 14 – “full of grace and truth” – denotes Jesus as the provider of salvation to mankind and the embodiment of perfect truth (cf. Jn 3:21; 4:24; 7:18; 14:6; 17:17-19; 18:37-38). John continues this theme in verse 16-17. Every believer receives the “fulness” of Jesus Christ at the moment of salvation – the full measure of God’s grace expressed to sinful man in the Person of Jesus Christ. The phrase in verse 16 “and grace for grace” should be translated – “and grace in exchange for grace.” This phrase refers to the grace of the Mosaic Law which was exchanged for the grace provision of the Son (Jn 1:17 cf. Rom 6:14; 8:3). As great as the Mosaic Law was to the nation of Israel, its usefulness had been exhausted. The writer of Hebrews expresses a similar concept in Hebrews 3:5-6a:

And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house.

The writer of Hebrews stresses the superiority of the Son to a servant. The servant can have authority to administer the law of the house correctly. However, the Son, Who is the ruler of the house has authority that surpasses the authority of the servant. This superior authority was demonstrated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when He made statements such as “you have heard that it was said...but I tell you” (Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44).¹

In verse 18, John makes a statement that again affirms the deity of Christ. No one has seen God for He is invisible Spirit (Jn 4:24 cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17). A human could not look at God and live (Ex 33:20, 22, 23). However, the pre-incarnate “Word” has an intimate relationship with the Father. He is face-to-face with God (Jn 1:1; 6:46; 1 Jn 1:2). Jesus Christ is the only God we will ever see.

The Testimony of John the Baptist (1:19-34)

Prior to studying this section and the rest of John, it might be helpful to have a brief review of the various factions within Jewish society with whom Jesus mainly dealt.

- Pharisees – a non-priestly group of uncertain origin, generally learned, committed to the oral traditions, and concerned with developing *Halakah* (rules of conduct based on deductions from the law). The Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were laymen in the sense that they were not priests; however, many of them were scribes (i.e. teachers of the law) and thus different from the elders. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees arose from the ranks of the scribes and priests of Israel after the Babylonian captivity (i.e. after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in 516 BC). The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul through a resurrection. They also believed in the existence of angels and the providential sovereignty of God.²

- Sadducees – arose from the ranks of the priests of Israel after the return from captivity and were viewed as more aristocratic in nature than the Pharisees. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection and did not believe in angels. They acknowledged only the written law (the Pentateuch) as binding and rejected the oral tradition developed over the

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

² Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 997-8.

centuries. As a result, on many occasions, the Sadducees took a stricter interpretation of the Law than did the Pharisees. The Sadducees put great stress upon human freedom and minimized God's sovereignty in relation to man's free will.³

- Sanhedrin – a Jewish council that arose during the Hellenizing period of Jewish history and was translated into a form of puppet rule under Rome. The Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6) and elders.⁴
- Elders – this group was mostly lay nobility and primarily Pharisees most likely.⁵
- Levites – this is a term used to refer to 1) all the descendants of Levi (Ex 6:25; Lev 25:32; Josh 21:3, 41); 2) just that portion of the tribe that was set apart for the service of the sanctuary and subordinate to the priests (Num 8:6; Ezra 2:70; Jn 1:19); 3) the priests (Josh. 3:3; Exek 44:15).⁶
- Scribes – this group probably had its origin as the king's secretaries under David and Solomon (2 Sam 8:17; 20:25; 1 Ki 4:3; 2 Ki 12:10). Later, Hezekiah supported the growth of a body of men whose task was to transcribe old records or to put in writing that which had been passed down orally (Prov 25:1). Under Hezekiah, the title "scribe" began to convey more significance than just the king's secretary. They began to be seen as a class of students and interpreters of the law who boasted of their wisdom (Jer 8:8).⁷

Verse 19 begins the larger of the two main sections of the Gospel of John – the public ministry of Jesus to the nation Israel. (The second of the two main sections of the Gospel of John is the private ministry of Jesus and this smaller section is centered around the Passion week). The miracle of the Incarnation required that witnesses establish its authenticity and testify to the unique nature of the God-man. John the Baptist is the first to do so relative to the public ministry of Jesus.

The "Jews" refer to the Jewish leaders or the Sanhedrin council who would have been responsible for examining anyone thought to be a prophet and to determine if that person was true or false. Those who were sent by the Sanhedrin were Pharisees (v. 24). In the first century, many were awaiting the Messiah Who had been promised by the Old Testament prophets. Those who were especially astute would have been aware of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 which established the future timeline of Jewish history to include the time at which the "Messiah shall be cut off" (Dan 9:26) – a reference to the death of the Messiah. The Jewish religious leadership was concerned about maintaining peace under the eye of Rome, so naturally they would have kept a close watch on all who might claim to be the Messiah. John quickly acknowledged that he was not the Messiah.

The Jewish leaders then asked John if he was Elijah (a reference to Malachi 4:5-6) or the "Prophet" (a reference to Moses' prediction that a prophet like himself would come – Deut 18:15 – in reality a prophecy concerning Christ, not a forerunner). Their questions were reasonable given these prophecies and given the Elijah-like nature of John's ministry. John had been in the desert until the day of his arrival to a position of prominence in Israel (Lk 1:80). John had appeared on

³ Ibid., 1109-12.

⁴ Ibid., 1126-28.

⁵ Ibid., 343-44.

⁶ Ibid., 770-73.

⁷ Ibid., 1141-43.

the scene suddenly and made it seem as if he had come down from heaven just as Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind without dying from the same wilderness (2 Ki 2:1-11).

When the Pharisees press John for an answer as to his identity, John quotes from Isaiah 40:3. In this prophecy, given close to the time at which the Jewish exiles would return from their Babylonian captivity, Isaiah calls upon the Jewish exiles to prepare for the coming King Messiah so that all may see the coming King. Isaiah uses the figure of preparing a highway in advance of the arrival of a king. The roads in that region were rough and often in a state of disrepair. Therefore, before the arrival of a dignitary or king, people would smooth out the road in order to expedite his travel. John the Baptist called upon his hearers to do just that (Matt 3:1-7). Jesus was looking for a prepared road via the humble nature of those prepared to receive the kingdom as taught by Jesus in such settings as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7).

Baptism was not new to the religious scene. Hebrews 9:10 informs us that Judaism had various baptismal practices which had been practiced for 1500 years prior to John's arrival. The Pharisees did not ask John what baptism meant, but why he was baptizing. John's baptism was one of repentance for the nation of Israel as a covenant people. "This covenant people had transgressed the covenant and John came to call them back to a place of fellowship with God within the covenant."⁸

"John drew his reference to untying the sandals of his successor from the practice of using the lowest slave of a household to remove the sandals and wash the feet of guests. John's witness, therefore, reflected the exalted nature of Jesus and placed the latter far above himself."⁹

⁸ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grace Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), 30.

⁹ Gaebelein and Douglas, editors, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.