

John doesn't begin his account as the other gospel writers do, with the historical Jesus; instead, he opts to begin with the pre-historic, eternal Jesus.

- He does so by introducing the reader to “the Word” (Gr. *logos*), a title used only by John.
- He doesn't directly associate the name “Jesus” with the Word until the end of the prologue, but that partly seems to be the point: the eternal Jesus led up to the historic Jesus, whom John is going to point out are the same person.
- The reader's understanding of this point is going to set the stage for the rest of the narrative to follow.

John is leaving no doubt of his position that Jesus is God.

- If you've ever had to deliver a master's thesis, you know that you first have to write your findings and then you have to defend them. 1:1-18 is John's thesis statement concerning Jesus' divinity; the rest of the book will be his defense of this position.

The thoughts in the prologue all stem from John's first declaration:

- “In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

To accomplish this purpose, we need to see how the use of “logos” would have struck the earliest readers of the gospel: the early Christians of varying backgrounds.

- In the late 6th century BC, a philosopher named Heraclitus believed humanity had a faulty view of the universe because they only took the world at face value, with no consideration of the “why” of things.
 - *“The learning of many things teaches not understanding.”*
 - He believed that one needed to train their senses not only to experience nature through sight, smell, sounds, etc., but to also then consider why those things are the way they are and why nature behaves the way it does
 - (Much in the same way that if I am listening to someone speaking a foreign language, what they are saying will make no sense to me because I have no understanding of the meaning of their sounds).
 - To answer the question of “why”, Heraclitus proposed the idea of the *logos* or, the Word: a universal understanding of things that links them together and gives them purpose.
 - (Consequently, this is where we get the suffix “-ology” for fields of study. Ex: bio-logy, cosmo-logy, cosmeto-logy, etc.)
- 300 years later, the concept of *logos* was taken up by the Stoics, who developed the idea of the “seminal logos”: the driving force (or, the will) behind the creation and growth of the universe.
 - *“Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul... and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things that exist.”* – Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*
- Near the time of Christ, Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt, took this concept a step further, personifying the *logos* as a distinct entity who operated at God's direction to create and mediate with the world.
 - Thus, the *logos* is separate from God, but acts on His behalf to sustain the universe.
 - This entity never had a bodily form on earth, though.
 - Although *logos* is personified (much like “wisdom” is personified throughout the Proverbs), there is no earthly incarnation of *logos*.
 - *“And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both [heaven and earth], and separated that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Word is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf*

of the mortal race... neither being [God], nor yet created as [man], but being in the midst between these two extremities...” – Philo, Who is the Heir of Divine Things?

Now, let's look at John's use of *Logos*.

- First, lest we think that his concept of the *Logos* is derivative of Greek philosophy, keep in mind that the word of God as an agent of creation and sustenance had been stated in scripture long before Heraclitus arrived on the scene:
 - Gen 1:1-3 – *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.”*
 - Psalm 33:6 – *“The heavens were made by the word of the Lord, and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth.”*

Now, back to John 1:1-5.

- Here we have seven assertions regarding “the Word”. Let's look at these for a moment and see if we can determine the significance of each one to the overall point:
 - **“In the beginning was the Word...”** –
 - Obviously, the opening three words are familiar to us if we have read the creation account in Genesis 1, as we just mentioned.
 - John is making a clear connection to God, since the only thing that existed before creation was God Himself.
 - This is the God of Genesis. It is not a new god or a secondary one.
 - And like God, it is something that already was and continues to be.
 - The use of the term “was” doesn't indicate a one-time event.
 - The *Logos* didn't come into existence at the point of creation; rather, the *Logos* existed before creation took place.
 - **“...and the Word was with God...”** –
 - John now makes a distinction between the Word and God.
 - Not only did the *Logos* exist at the same time as God, He existed distinct from God.
 - *Pros*, the Greek for the preposition “with”, implies communion (literally, “towards God”), as of two parties meeting face-to-face on equal footing.
 - The *Logos* isn't subordinate to God. They are of equal mind, purpose and power.
 - **“...and the Word was God.”**
 - The Greek reads, *Theos en ho Logos* – lit. “God was the Word.”
 - Some translators have incorrectly rendered this phrase “the Word was divine.”
 - This drastically diminishes the meaning, making the *Logos* an agent whose nature is of God (divine), rather than God Himself (deity).
 - Others (namely the Jehovah's Witnesses), have rendered this with an indefinite article to read, “the Word was a God” - another means of diminishing the *Logos'* role.
 - John's statement is direct, though: the *Logos* is God. God is the *Logos*.
 - **“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”** –
 - John now directly references the *Logos'* active role in creation.
 - Since Genesis explicitly states, “In the beginning, God...” the implication is that the *Logos* must be equally involved in this description, especially as God speaks, “Let Us make...”
 - There is no inferiority, and there is no single one part of creation that the *Logos* was not involved in.
 - **“In Him was life...”** –
 - Just as the *Logos* is the origin of creation, He is also by extension the origin of life, both earthly and eternal, because He is life.

- Thus, it is by the Word that God “breathed into [man’s] nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature” (Gen. 2:3).
- This view of the Word as the source of life plays a large part in the purpose of John’s narrative.
 - As he’ll state later in 20:31: “...so that in believing, you will have life in His name.”
- **“...and the life was the light of men.”** –
 - There is a close connection, then, between “light” and “life.”
 - One merely has to look at nature to see that life (in the “macro” sense) can’t be sustained in the absence of light (hence the reason why light was the first creation of God).
 - Light allows us to discern the form of things, judge distance between objects, determine size and relation, etc.
 - As Paul states in Eph. 5:13: “Everything exposed by the light is made clear.”
 - The Word reveals what was previously unseen/not understood.
 - In this case, the Word came into the world to reveal the person and character of God to His creation (more in this in 1:18).
- **“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”** –
 - Other translations: “...but the darkness did not comprehend it.” (NASB, KJV)
 - Before we get to that difference, let’s ask the question: what is this darkness?
 - Darkness is a common image in the Old and New Testaments, most often as a metaphor for lack of knowledge or understanding, a place where sin thrives:
 - Job 37:19 – “Teach us what we should say to Him; we cannot prepare our case because of our darkness.”
 - Eph. 4:17-18 – “Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts. They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.”
 - In the spiritual sense, then, light gives understanding, provides discernment and allows us to overcome ignorance and error and “judge righteously.”
 - Now, regarding the translation of the latter part of verse 5: I don’t see these translations as mutually exclusive or differing in overall meaning.
 - The Greek word for “overcome/comprehended/apprehended” is *katalambano*, which means “to seize tight hold of, arrest.”
 - To master a given thing, we often say that one must have a complete understanding (or, grasp) of it. The darkness (ignorance, sin) will never fully comprehend the light (knowledge, righteousness), so it is, by nature, weaker and can’t overcome it.
 - Now, the light can be rejected for a time by one who chooses to cover it up, but in the end, the light will always conquer the dark.
 - Illustration: consider a cave where it is pitch black. If I shine a light in the blackness, the blackness diminishes some. The more light I provide, the more the blackness recedes. But the blackness can’t swoop in and diminish the light. Now, I can put an obstacle in front of my light or I can take the light to another location, but wherever the light is it will cause the darkness to recede if I let it shine.
 - Here, then, is the other function of the light: to expose what it hidden in the darkness.
 - Darkness and light cannot co-exist.
 - From the beginning, we read that when God created light on the earth, He “separated [it] from the darkness” (Gen. 1:4).
 - The light was made in such a way that it excluded darkness.
- With these in mind, let pause a second and get a sense of how these seven truths combine to form a composite image of Jesus, the Word.
 - Jesus is, and has always been, eternal.

- Jesus is on equal standing with deity...
- ...because He is deity.
- Jesus is the origin of all things.
- Jesus gives life to all things.
- Jesus gives direction/purpose to all things through revelation of God.
- Jesus' nature as the light is exclusive of darkness.
- Again, these truths are going to keep coming to the forefront of John's narrative. Each truth presented at the beginning of the book will show up in Jesus' words and actions.
 - Each miracle is a "sign" pointing to the veracity of His claim to be the Son of God and Savior of man.

1:6-9

- Having introduced the *Logos* as the light, John now moves closer to the historical setting by introducing the witness who was specifically tasked with preparing the way for the light: John the Baptist.
- Let's note some things from the text about John's task:
 - The most important characteristic is that he is sent from God.
 - John's arrival had been foretold in various places throughout the New Testament as a pre-cursor to the arrival of the Messiah:
 - Isa. 40:3 (which John will allude to later in the chapter) – *"A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert."*
 - Mal 3:1; 4:5-6 - *"See, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to His temple, the Messenger of the covenant you desire—see, He is coming," says the Lord of Hosts..."*
 - *"Look, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers..."*
 - In speaking of his appointment, John will later refer to the individual who set him to his task: "He who sent me".
 - Just as the OT prophets were directly spoken to and appointed by God, John has received a specific command: testify about the light.
 - His task wasn't as simple as just informing people about the light, but rather to act as a herald to the coming of the true light and in so doing, (note the emphasis) bring all men to belief.
 - Thus, John the Baptist's testimony has universal implications: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" and "make ready the way of the Lord" weren't simply instructions for those living at the time of Jesus' initial mission to earth. They are instructions for all who seek after the Lord.
 - John the apostle wants to make it very clear, though, that John the Baptist, as charismatic and zealous as he was, was not the light.
 - It is very possible that some attached more importance to John than he was meant to have (cf 1:19-25; 2:22-26), but John the apostle disavows this notion from the outset.

1:10-13

- The reaction of the world to His coming is ironically tragic:
 - Jesus, the Creator, showed open, universal control over the physical creation, which responded to His word and will, yet man, who was created in His image, did not know Him.
 - The implication seems to be that it did not want to know Him.

- The word “recognize/know” in the Greek is *ginosko*, which implies not just an academic knowledge, but a willful, familiar comprehension of the subject.
 - This “knowing” is a big theme for John in his writings.
 - This is the same word that he uses in his letters as evidence to his audience of the nature of true followers of Jesus: “This is how we have come to know (or, be familiar with) love...”
- “His own people did not receive Him” –
 - Could be a second reference to the world, or a more specific reference to His earthly kin, the Jews.
 - (Towards the beginning of His ministry, we certainly even have evidence of Jesus’ own family members doubting His claims to be the Messiah.)
- Lest we think His rejection total, though, John does tell us that some did “receive Him” (1:12a).
 - For John, there is a close connection between “receiving” and “believing (1:12b)” and the result is a new relationship with the Creator.
 - Thus, it is only by coming to the Father through the Word that one can become a child of God, with all the rights and privileges that come with that distinction.
 - Jesus will later make a distinction between those whose Father is God and those whose father is the devil (8:42-44):
 - *“If God were your Father, you would love me because I came from God... You are of your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.”*
- John goes on to say that this relationship isn’t validated by blood or by natural means, but rather it is conceived of, and sanctioned by, God Himself.

1:14-18

In the first five verses, John told us who was the “light of men.” The next thirteen verses why the light came into the world.

Now, in the last four verses of the prologue, John will tell us how the light came into the world.

It is here that the record of Jesus’ earthly life begins...

- It’s here that John’s use of *logos* is truly distinguishable from that of worldly philosophy: the Word came in the flesh.
 - Various Greek philosophies made a stark distinction between the fleshly realm and the spiritual realm, with no interaction between the two.
 - For John to imply that the all-powerful God had physical contact with the world, much less lived in it among His creatures, was absurd.
 - And yet, John speaks of the *Logos* “becoming” flesh.
 - “becoming” - This is the same word that will be used when Jesus turns the water into wine. First it is one thing, and then, by God’s will, it was another.
- Consider the imagery here, though.
 - The phrase “took up residence/dwelt among us” is literally “to pitch a tent,” or, in the Hebrew, “tabernacled.”
 - What significance does this have to the OT?
 - Where did God dwell among His people?
 - What descriptive phrase was used to describe His manifestation on the tabernacle?
 - (“His glory filled the tabernacle” – Ex. 40:34-38)
 - Why did God manifest Himself in such a visible way?
 - John uses this same image to describe the Word: “We observed His glory.”
- He once again circles back around to the testimony of John the Baptist:

- *“This was the One of Whom I said, ‘The One coming after me has surpassed (or, outranked) me, because He existed before me.’”*
- John highlights Jesus’ precedence in importance and His pre-existence (even though Jesus was six months younger in earthly terms, He was infinitely older in heavenly terms, as Jesus will note in 8:58).
- *“We have all received grace after grace from His fullness...”*
 - *“Grace after grace”* seems to imply an overflowing abundance. Jesus will use similar imagery when He speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well:
 - *“...the water I shall give him shall be a well of water springing up (overflowing) into everlasting life.”*
- Although the law of Moses was given by God, it did not have the “fullness” that Jesus could provide.
 - The law was given by a manifestation of God’s presence, providing a glimpse of God to the people through His statutes so that they could recognize sin and be His covenant people.
 - Jesus spoke of Himself in Matt 5:17 as the “fulfillment” of this law.
 - Up to this point, no one had seen God face to face (Ex. 30:18-23).
 - Jesus, who is mentioned here by name for the first time in the gospel, is the realization of God’s presence among men.