

§ 002

IN HIS INTRODUCTION JOHN PICTURES CHRIST AS THE WORD (LOGOS)

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

⁶ *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

⁹ *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. ¹*

John 1:1-18

Introduction

1. The Gospel of John opens with one of the most elevated statements about Jesus found in the New Testament.
 - Only the texts of Col 1:15–20 and Heb 1:1–13 come close to approximating the profound view of God's Son presented in John 1:1–18.
 - These first eighteen verses of the Gospel, which have a wonderful poetic ring, have been labeled by scholars with the unpoetic title "The Prologue."

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version.* 2001 (John 1:1-18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

2. But in spite of its poetic ring, the reader should be forewarned that this Prologue is one of the most complex _____² statements in the Bible.
- An entire seminary semester's course could be taught on these eighteen verses.
 - Study of this text takes time, but those who ponder these magnificent words will learn that God will reward his children who diligently and prayerfully seek for understanding.
 - The reader is welcomed to an intellectual, spiritual, and life-challenging pilgrimage with an evangelist who continues to call us to new dimensions of believing.
3. Both the nature and the function of this Prologue have been debated by scholars.
- J.T. Sanders argued that it is poetry.³
 - R. Brown likened it to a hymn in four strophes (vv. 1–2; vv. 3–5; vv. 10–12; vv. 14–16) with some interspersed prose comments that enhance John's goal of introducing Jesus to the reader.⁴
 - C.F. Burney earlier thought that one could recover an Aramaic hymn lying behind the Greek of all except v. 12 of the hymn and the Greek prose reflections on John the Baptist.⁵
 - C.K. Barrett was content to settle for calling the text poetic prose while R.A. Culpepper posited a chiasmic structure.⁶
 - Whatever one may call the form of the passage, it is a masterful statement with a poetic sound.
4. In terms of style and theology scholars in this century have likewise strongly debated the existence and kind of a foundational document (*Grundschrift*) that may have stood behind the Prologue.⁷

² **theological**

³ J.T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 20–24.

⁴ R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 1.3–4. See also R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 1.226, who regards vv. 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16 to have been from the original hymn.

⁵ C.F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 40–41. See also S. Brown, "From Burney to Black: The Fourth Gospel and the Aramaic Question," *CBQ* 26 (1964): 323–39, and M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928).

⁶ C.K. Barrett, "The Prologue of St. John's Gospel," in *New Testament Essays* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 27–48. My former colleague Alan Culpepper sought to show that the Prologue was chiasmic in structure with v. 12 at the center. The suggestion is at least intriguing. See his "Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1980): 17.

⁷ For a discussion of these issues see Schnackenburg, "Logos—Hymnus und johanneischer Prolog," *BZ* 1 (1957): 76–82.

5. The reason scholars have sought for such a foundational document is that the Prologue contains some of the most tightly reasoned patterns of theological reflection in the New Testament and because it contains a number of terms whose particular meanings appear only here in the entire Gospel—for example, “Word” (*logos*) as a title, “fullness” (*plērōma*), “grace” (*charis*), “only Son” (*monogenēs*), and “tent” or “tabernacle” (*skēnōn*).
6. In trying to deal with these factors, J.A.T. Robinson firmly concluded that, with the exception of verses concerning John the Baptist, the Prologue was added by another writer.^{8 9}
7. John seems to organize his introduction around four significant happenings, each referred to by a use of the Greek verb *egeneto*: the creation (1:3), the coming of the forerunner John (1:6), the incarnation of Christ (1:14), and the crucifixion of Christ (1:17). These four reflect the progress of the gospel as it moves toward its climax in the person of Christ.¹⁰

Commentary¹¹

1. The Prologue functions as an introduction to the Fourth Gospel, much as an overture functions as an introduction to an opera.
 - Or, to change the imagery, the Prologue is like the foyer of a theatre, where various scenes from the drama to be enacted inside are placarded.
2. It appears to have been carefully crafted with a _____¹² structure, which can be best seen by setting out its content as follows:

^a In the beginning was the Word,
 and the Word was with God,
 and the Word was God.
 He was with God in the beginning.
 Through him all things were made;

⁸ See J.A.T. Robinson, “The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John,” *NTS* 9 (1962–63): 120–29.

⁹ Borchert, G.L. (2001, c1996). *Vol. 25A: John 1-11* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (100). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁰ Thomas, Robert L., and Gundry, Stanley N. *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 29.

¹¹ Kruse, C.G. (2003). *Vol. 4: John: An introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (59-75). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹² **chiastic**

without him nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life,
and that life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness,
but the darkness has not understood it..

^b There came a man who was sent from God;
his name was John.
He came as a witness to testify concerning that light,
so that through him all men might believe.
He himself was not the light;
he came only as a witness to the light.

^c The true light was coming into the world
that gives light to every man
He was in the world,
and though the world was made through him,
the world did not recognize him.
He came to that which was his own,
but his own did not receive him.

^d Yet to all who received him,
to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God—
children born not of natural descent,
nor of human decision
or a husband's will,
but born of God.

^{c1} The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory,
the glory of the One and Only,
who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

^{b1} John testifies concerning him.
He cries out, saying,
This was he of whom I said,
'He who comes after me has surpassed me

because he was before me.'

^{a1} From the fullness of his grace
we have all received
 one blessing after another.
For the law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
No-one has ever seen God,
but God the One and Only,
 who is at the Father's side,
has made him known.

1. In this chiasmic structure the first and last paragraphs (*a* and *a*¹), the second and second last paragraphs (*b* and *b*¹), and the third and third last paragraphs (*c* and *c*¹) all correspond to one another.
 - So in paragraph *a* the Word is introduced as the one who was in intimate relationship with God and who came as light into the world (to make God known).
 - This has its counterpart in paragraph *a*¹, where the Word made flesh is described as the one who is 'at the Father's side' and who has made him known.
 - Paragraph *b* speaks of John (the Baptist) who came to bear witness to the light, and this corresponds to paragraph *b*¹, where once again John's witness to Christ is the subject.
 - Paragraph *c* speaks about the true light coming into the world and this has its counterpart in paragraph *c*¹, where we are told that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
 - Later paragraphs, while having clear parallels with their corresponding earlier paragraphs, do not just repeat what was said in those earlier paragraphs; rather, using different terminology, they extend it.

2. Within chiasms it is generally the _____¹³ paragraph that contains the most significant statement.
 - Paragraph *d* stresses that the purpose for the Word becoming flesh and bringing life and light into the world was that those who receive him, those who believe in his name, might become children of God.
 - This corresponds to the stated purpose of the Gospel: 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this

¹³ central

book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (20:30–31).

3. The Prologue introduces the reader to the 'Word' (Logos).

- Though the idea of the Word/Logos sounds strange in modern ears, it would have resonated with ancient readers of the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.
- Parallels can be found:
 - (1) in the Old Testament ideas of God's creative and sustaining word, the word of God spoken through the prophets, later Jewish personification of wisdom as the agent of God in creation;
 - (2) in Stoic ideas of the logos as divine reason pervading and giving order to creation and relieving human ignorance;
 - (3) in Philo's writings where the word logos is used extensively to denote the mind of God, the agent of creation and the mediator between God and the creation;
 - (4) in rabbinic speculation in which the logos was identified with the pre-existent Torah; and
 - (5) in the Gnostic writings in which a heavenly emissary bridges the spiritual and material worlds.
- All these parallels reveal that when the evangelist chose to identify Jesus as the Logos, he was using a term in wide circulation, but which meant different things to different people.
- More important than these parallels for our understanding of the Word/Logos is what the evangelist himself says about him in the Prologue.

A. The Word as he was in the beginning (1:1–5)

This opening paragraph of the Prologue (*a*) describes the _____¹⁴ of the Word in a number of brief but highly significant statements.

1. The first statement, *in the beginning was the Word*, echoes the opening words of Genesis, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...' (Gen. 1:1).
 - As God was in the beginning prior to the creation of the world, so too was the Word.
 - This implies something to be stated explicitly shortly: that the Word partakes of divinity.
2. The second statement, *and the Word was with God*, is susceptible to two interpretations.

¹⁴ person and work

- It may simply mean that the Word was with God in the beginning, just as Proverbs 8:27–30 says Wisdom was with God at creation.
 - Alternatively, it could mean that the Word was faced towards God,¹⁵ in intimate _____¹⁶ with God.
 - The final paragraph of the Prologue (*a*¹), which balances this first paragraph and extends its meaning, makes just this point when it describes the Son (= the Word) as the one ‘who is close to the Father’s heart’.
3. The third statement, *and the Word was God*, on first reading might suggest a unitarian understanding of God, the Word being simply equated with God.
- But the original language (*kai theos ēn ho logos*) will not allow such an interpretation.¹⁷
 - To read the text in that way also overlooks the stress on the relationship existing between the Word and God (being ‘with God’ and being ‘close to the Father’s heart’).
 - Relationship implies different _____¹⁸ and this moves us away from unitarianism (one God, one person) towards trinitarianism (one God, three persons—Father, Son [=the Word] and Spirit).
 - As the Fourth Gospel unfolds it becomes clear that this is what is intended. Jesus, the Word incarnate, claims to be one with God, but that involves being in relationship with God.
 - So when the Prologue says ‘the Word was God’ it is not saying that the Word and God constitute an undifferentiated unity, but rather it is saying, in words aptly coined by Moloney, ‘what God was the Word also was’.¹⁹
4. Two key ideas stated separately in verse 1 are brought together and repeated in verse 2: *He was with God in the beginning*, i.e. the Word was in _____²⁰ relationship with God and he was in that relationship at the very beginning.
5. The evangelist explains the work of the Word in the beginning: *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

¹⁵ The preposition used (*pros*) has as one of its meanings ‘orientation towards’ someone or something.

¹⁶ relationship

¹⁷ Barrett explains it succinctly: ‘*Theos*, being without the article, is predicative and describes the nature of the Word. The absence of the article indicates that the Word is God, but is not the only being of whom this is true; if *ho theos* had been written it would have been implied that no divine being existed outside the second person of the Trinity’ (*Gospel*, p. 156).

¹⁸ persons

¹⁹ Moloney, Francis J., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Liturgical Press, 1998), 35.

²⁰ intimate

- Genesis 1:1–31 tells how God brought the universe into being by his creative word.
- The evangelist picks this up when he says that it was ‘through’ the person of the Word that God brought all things into being, or, putting it negatively, without his agency God brought nothing into being.
- This teaching is also found in Colossians 1:16–17 and Hebrews 1:2.

6. Further explaining the role of the Word in creation, the evangelist says, *In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*
 - Because the Word shares in deity, he shares in the _____²¹ of God (cf. 5:26).
 - The evangelist does not make clear how the divine life in the Word illuminated human beings.
 - Some suggest it relates to our creation in the image of God so that we participate in the light of reason in a way lesser created beings do not.
 - Others suggest it refers to the light of general revelation, whereby the character of God is reflected in creation itself to be understood by human beings (cf. Rom. 1:19–20).
7. The first paragraph concludes with the statement *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*
 - Again the allusion is to the Genesis creation account in which darkness covered the face of the earth.
 - God said, ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1:3), and the darkness gave way to the light.
 - The evangelist, while alluding to Genesis, foreshadows the coming of the light of God into the world in the person of the incarnate Word.
 - Through him light shone among the Jewish people.
 - He entered their ‘darkness’, and ‘the darkness has not understood it’.
 - The verb which the NIV translates as ‘understood’ (*katelaben*) could also be rendered ‘overcame’ (NRSV).
 - This is in line with the way the verb is used elsewhere in John (8:3–4; 12:35).
 - Understood in this way the evangelist is foreshadowing the repeated futile attempts of ‘the Jews’ to extinguish the light, Christ.

B. The ministry of John (the Baptist) (1:6–8)

²¹ **life**

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

1. Paragraph *b*, which focuses upon the ministry of John, begins, *There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.*
 - Unlike other Gospels (cf. Matt. 3:1; 14:2; Luke 7:20, 33), the Fourth Gospel never uses the expression ‘John the Baptist’.
 - It does not need to, because no other John is mentioned in this Gospel.
 - John, the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve, is not mentioned by name.

2. The evangelist describes John as a man ‘sent from God’.
 - He is thus depicted as a _____.²²
 - Frequent reference is made in the OT to prophets being sent by God (2 Chr. 24:19; 25:15; Jer. 7:25; 25:4, 5; 28:9; 35:15; 44:4; Baruch 1:21).
 - The Jewish crowds regarded John as a prophet (Matt. 21:26/Mark 11:32/Luke 20:6), and that is how Jesus also described him (Matt. 11:9/Luke 7:26).

3. John’s role is described: *He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.*
 - John’s role was to bear witness to the light that came into the world through the Word.
 - In the Synoptic Gospels John appears as one who preaches repentance and baptizes those who heed his call.
 - In the Fourth Gospel, however, there is no mention of his preaching of repentance, nor any actual descriptions of his baptizing ministry (neither his baptizing of the crowds nor his baptizing of Jesus, even though there are references to the fact that he did both).
 - The reason for this might be that the evangelist wanted to emphasize John’s role as witness.
 - The purpose of John’s witness, though sadly not its result, was ‘so that through him all men might believe [in Christ]’.

4. After saying John came as a witness to the light, the evangelist adds, *He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*
 - Why he felt it necessary to add this statement has been the subject of speculation.
 - Acts 19:1–4 reports that when Paul came to Ephesus on his third missionary journey:
 - There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’
 - They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’
 - So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’

²² prophet

- ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied.
- Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’

5. It has been suggested that the reason the evangelist says that John ‘was not the light’ is that when he wrote his Gospel there were still people in Ephesus who were disciples of John, and the evangelist wanted them to know that it was Jesus who was ‘the light’, not John.

- Some have even said that there is an anti-Baptist polemic in the Fourth Gospel, but this is going too far.
- This Gospel repeatedly portrays John positively as a faithful witness to Christ (e.g. 10:41) and the evangelist’s main reason for including so many references to John (6–9, 15, 19–37; 3:22–30; 4:1–2; 5:31–36; 10:40–42) was that he might add to the strength of the witness concerning Christ.
- John ‘was not the light’, but he was an important witness to the light.

C. The true light comes into the world (1:9–11)

1. This third paragraph (c) opens with the words *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

- The phrase ‘coming into the world’ (*erchomenon eis ton kosmon*) could refer either to ‘the light’ (so NIV, treating *erchomenon* as neuter) or to ‘every man’ (so AV, treating *erchomenon* as masculine).
- The NIV alternative is to be preferred because the following verses (10–13) speak about the reception accorded to true light when it came into the world.

2. The evangelist uses the word ‘true’ (*alēthinos*) in several other places to denote what is true or genuine (4:23: ‘true worshippers’, 6:32: ‘true bread’, 15:1: ‘true vine’, 17:3: ‘the true God’), and he uses it here to stress that _____²³ not John, was the ‘true light’.

- The evangelist does not say *how* the true light was coming into the world; readers must wait till 1:14 to find that out.
- What he does say here is that the true light ‘gives light to every man’.
- As this Gospel unfolds we find that the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ is ‘the light of the world’, and that through his person and teaching he brought the light to bear upon all those with whom he came into contact.

AV Authorized Version

²³ the Word

- The next two verses indicate that though he brought light into the world it was not welcomed by many of those who witnessed it.
3. Looking back on the time when the Word came into the world, the evangelist says, *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*
 - The Word was the agent of God in creation (3), so it may be said ‘the world was made through him’.
 - There is a great irony here, for the Word came into the world he had made and yet the people of the world did not know him.
 4. This tragic irony is deepened in verse 11: *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*
 - When the evangelist says ‘he came to that which was his own’, he uses an expression, *eis ta idia*, found in two other places in the Gospel, where it means ‘to one’s own place/home’ (16:32; 19:27).
 - However, it is used in 1:11, not in the sense that he came to his own home, which would mean heaven, but into the world that was created through him and was therefore his property.
 - When he says that ‘his own (*hoi idioi*) did not receive him’, he means the Jewish people by and large did not receive him.
 - The rejection of the Word/Jesus is a recurring theme throughout the Gospel.

D. Those who receive the Word become children of God (1:12–13)

1. Unlike the previous three paragraphs of the Prologue, this fourth paragraph (*d*) does not have a corresponding one balancing it in the chiasmic structure of 1:1–18.
 - Verses 12–13 stand at the centre of the chiasmic structure and therefore receive the greatest emphasis.
 - In fact, what is said in these verses encapsulates the _____²⁴ of the Gospel as a whole: that those who encounter the Word/Jesus through this Gospel might believe in him and become children of God, enjoying the eternal life that is the portion of those who believe.
2. Turning his attention from those who did not receive the Word to those who did, the evangelist says, *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

²⁴ purpose

- To 'receive' him means, as this verse indicates, to _____²⁵ in his name.
- To believe in a person's name is to believe in the person, because the name stands for the person.

3. Receiving him involves accepting the teaching and revelation of God he brought.

- Repeatedly this Gospel speaks about those who receive or do not receive Jesus' testimony (3:11, 32–33; 5:34; 12:48; 17:8).
- To those who received him he gave the 'right to become children of God'.
- The word translated 'right' (*exousia*) can mean either 'power' or 'right', and it is used in both senses in this Gospel (1:12; 5:27; 10:18; 17:2; 19:10–11).
- Here in 1:12 the NIV renders it 'right', while the NRSV opts for 'power'.
- The NIV's rendering, 'the right', is to be preferred, for it is Jesus as the Word who gives the right to become children of God.
- The next verse, 1:13, says 'the power' to do so comes from God.

4. When the evangelist describes those who believe as 'children' of God, he uses the word 'child' (*teknon*).

- He reserves the word 'son' (*huios*) for Jesus himself.
- In this way he maintains a _____²⁶ between Jesus as the 'Son' of God, and believers as 'children' of God.
- In this respect the evangelist differs from the apostle Paul, who is willing to speak of believers as 'sons [and daughters]' of God (Rom. 8:14, 19; 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:26; 4:6–7).

5. Those who believe are further described as *children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God*.

- A person has to be 'born' to be a child of God.
- But this birth is 'not of natural descent' (lit. 'of bloods').
- In the ancient world procreation was understood to take place through the mixing of bloods (of the father and the mother).

6. Here it is denied that natural procreation is the way people become children of God.

- This is reinforced by the words that follow, which deny that children of God are born 'of human decision' (lit. 'of the will of flesh [*sarx*] or of a husband's will'.

²⁵ believe

²⁶ distinction

lit. Literally

- In John the word ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) often means ‘human being’ (1:14; 3:6; 8:15; 17:2), so to be born of ‘the will of the flesh’ means to be born because of the desires of human parents as the NIV indicates.
- Those who become children of God, the evangelist says, are ‘born of God’.
- In this context he does not offer any explanation of what this means.
- For that we must wait until chapter 3, where Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit, something as mysterious as the wind, and yet occurs in conjunction with belief in Jesus.

E. The coming of the Word into the world (1:14)

1. This fifth paragraph (*c*¹) balances the third paragraph (*c*), and explains *how* the Word came into the world: *The Word became flesh*.
 - He entered the world by becoming flesh (*sarx*), i.e. by becoming human.
 - The Word did not cease to be the Word, but in the incarnation he changed his mode of being the Word.
 - How the Word who ‘was God’ could become human is not explained.
 - This became the subject of much debate in the early centuries of the church.
2. However, the evangelist was not interested in explaining *how* the Word became human.
 - He was more concerned to explain what the consequences of this were.
 - The first of these was that he *made his dwelling among us*.
 - The expression ‘made his dwelling’ translates one word (*eskēnōsen*), which, rendered literally, means ‘pitched a tent’ or ‘tabernacled’.
 - The allusion is to the time when God’s presence was localized in the tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel (Exod. 40:34–38).
 - The evangelist is saying that the Word becoming flesh and living among us is like God tabernacling among the tribes of Israel, or, put in other words, the presence of God was localized in Jesus the incarnate Word.
3. The second consequence of the Word becoming human is that the evangelist could say *we have seen his glory*.
 - The reference to ‘glory’ is also an allusion to God’s presence in the tabernacle.
 - Exodus 40:34–35 tells us that when Moses completed the construction of the tabernacle, ‘Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.
 - Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.’

- As the glory of God was once present in the tabernacle, so it was now present in the Word made flesh.
4. Moreover, the evangelist, including himself among the eyewitnesses, says ‘we have seen his glory’, and then describes two aspects of the glory they saw.
- First, it was *the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father*.
 - He uses a special word (*monogenēs*) when he describes the Word as ‘the One and Only’.
 - It stresses the uniqueness of the Word who came from the Father.²⁷
 - The evangelist indicates here, as he stresses repeatedly throughout the Gospel, that this unique one whose glory they saw came ‘from the Father’ into the world (5:36, 37, 43; 6:42, 57; 8:16, 18, 42; 12:49; 13:3; 14:24; 16:28; 17:21, 25; 20:21).
 - He was the one who came ‘from above’ (3:31) and as such was the only one who could make the Father known (18).
 - Second, the glory the eyewitnesses saw was *full of grace and truth*.
 - The expression ‘grace and truth’ (*charis kai alētheia*) is found only twice in the NT, here and in 1:17.

²⁷ **Additional note: *Monogenēs***

The word *monogenēs*, rendered ‘the One and Only’ in 1:14 by the NIV, is in some other translations rendered ‘only begotten’. That the word should be translated as ‘the One and Only’ is confirmed by its usage elsewhere in the NT, where it is found a total of nine times. It is found three times in the Gospel of Luke: once to describe the ‘one and only son’ of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12), once to describe the ‘one and only daughter’ of Jairus (Luke 8:42), and once to describe the ‘one and only son’ of the man who sought Jesus’ help for his demon-possessed boy (Luke 9:38). It is found once in Hebrews, where Isaac, whom Abraham was about to sacrifice, is described as his ‘one and only’ son (Heb. 11:17)—in Abraham’s case his one and only son by Sarah. In each of these cases the expression is used to add poignancy to a story by highlighting the fact that it was the person’s ‘one and only’ child who was in dire need, was threatened or had died. The stress is not upon the fact that the person was begotten of the father or mother concerned but upon the fact that the father or mother had only one child and that that child was the one who was so sadly affected. It is found once in 1 John 4:9, where the author emphasizes the fact that the one whom God sent into the world was his ‘one and only’ Son. Once again the emphasis is not that Jesus was ‘begotten’ of God but that God had only one Son, and this ‘one and only’ Son he sent into the world that ‘we might live through him’.

In the Gospel of John *monogenēs* is used in three other places and in each case it is used in relation to Jesus as God’s Son. In 1:18 we are told that ‘No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (*monogenēs*), who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.’ And in 3:16 we find, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only (*ton monogenē*) Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ Finally, in 3:18 we read, ‘whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only (*monogenous*) Son’. In each case *monogenēs* denotes not that the Son was ‘begotten’ of the Father but rather his uniqueness as the ‘One and Only’ Son of God. (Kruse, C. G. (2003). *Vol. 4: John: An introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 71-72).

- It is almost certainly the evangelist's rendering of a similar expression 'kindness and faithfulness' (*eleos kai alētheia*) that is used frequently in the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew expression *hesed we'emet* (e.g. Josh. 2:14; 2 Sam. 2:6; 15:20; Pss. 24:10 [ET 25:10]; 60:8 [ET 61:7]; 83:12 [ET 84:11]; 84:11 [ET 85:10]; 88:15 [ET 89:14]).
 - The expression is used in Exodus 34:6–7, a passage in which God makes his glory known to Moses: 'And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (*hesed we'emet*), maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."'
 - The 'love and faithfulness' that constituted the glory of God proclaimed to Moses is now found in the Word incarnate.
 - What was *proclaimed* to Moses by the Lord as he passed by has now been *seen*, embodied in the incarnate Word, by the eye-witnesses.
5. The word 'grace' (*charis*), which the evangelist uses as his equivalent for the Hebrew, *hesed*, is found in only three places in John, all of them in the Prologue (14, 16, 17), and all of them in descriptions of the Word become flesh.
- Central to the glory of God revealed in the incarnate Word is his grace.
 - As the Gospel of John unfolds, the grace of the Word incarnate in Jesus is seen again and again: he provides abundance of wine at the wedding feast of Cana (2:1–12), heals the official's son (4:43–54), causes the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda to walk (5:19–30), feeds the five thousand (6:1–15), gives sight to the man born blind (9:1–6), and restores Lazarus to life (11:38–44).
 - His grace is seen most importantly in laying down his life for his people (10:11, 15), in giving eternal life (4:14; 6:27; 10:28; 17:2) and sending the Holy Spirit to those who believe (15:26; 16:7).
6. The Hebrew word *'emet*, for which the evangelist substitutes the Greek word *alētheia*, translated 'truth', has the root meaning of 'reliability'.
- God is reliable both in his words and actions.
 - He can be depended upon to carry out what he promises, and his words are always true.
 - When the evangelist says the Word incarnate was 'full of grace and truth', he is affirming that the reliability of action and word predicated of God may also be predicated of the Word.

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament)
ET English translation

- The Word is reliable and truthful, he speaks the truth (8:45–46), testifies to the truth (18:37), and embodies the truth about God and his plan for salvation (14:6).

F. The testimony of John (the Baptist) (1:15)

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1. This verse constitutes the sixth paragraph (*b*¹) of the Prologue, which balances the second paragraph (*b*).
 - In paragraph *b* we are told that John was sent from God to bear witness to the light, though it is stressed that John himself was not the light.
 - In this paragraph (*b*¹) the evangelist explains the content of John's testimony: *John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."'*
2. To indicate that John was making an important public proclamation the evangelist uses the verb 'to cry out' (*krazō*) as he does in three places later in the Gospel when introducing important public declarations (7:28, 37; 12:44).
 - John refers to Jesus as the one 'who comes after me', referring to the fact that Jesus' ministry began after his.
 - The Fourth Gospel does mention a period in which the ministries of Jesus and John overlapped (3:22–24),²⁸ but essentially John's ministry was preparation for the ministry of Jesus, which was to follow.
 - In this sense John could say 'He ... comes after me'.
3. Even though John's ministry preceded that of Jesus, John emphasized that 'he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'.
 - He said the reason why Jesus surpassed him was 'because he was before me'.
 - This cannot mean that Jesus surpassed John because he was older than him.
 - The indications from the Gospel of Luke are that the reverse was the case: Jesus was six months younger than John (Luke 1:24–31).
4. The statement that Jesus was 'before' John could be read in the light of the opening verses of the Prologue (1:1: 'in the beginning was the Word'), suggesting that Jesus was 'before' John because of his pre-existence as the Word.
 - While the NEB interprets 1:15 in this way ('before I was born, he already was'), there are no indications that John was aware of Jesus' pre-existence as the Word.

²⁸ The Synoptic Gospels speak of Jesus' public ministry taking place after John had been thrown into prison (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14); only John's Gospel lets us know that there had been an earlier ministry of Jesus, which overlapped John's ministry.

NEB New English Bible

- It may be that John meant only to say that Jesus ‘surpassed him’ because he was always greater than him (even though he was born six months later).
- The evangelist may have introduced a note of ambiguity into the way he has reported John’s words so that his readers will recognize that John spoke better than he knew.
- Later in the Gospel the evangelist points out that Caiaphas spoke better than he knew when he said ‘it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish’ (11:50–52), as did Pilate when he insisted on referring to Jesus as ‘the King of the Jews’ (18:39; 19:14–15, 19, 21–22).

G. The Word makes the Father known (1:16–18)

1. The last paragraph (*a*¹) of the Prologue balances the opening one (*a*).
 - It does in part pick up themes from paragraph *c*¹ when it speaks of receiving of the fullness of the grace of the Word and the relationship of that grace to the grace of God that came through Moses.
 - But paragraph *a*¹ returns to the themes of the opening paragraph when it speaks of the Word being at the Father’s side and making him known.
2. In verse 14 the evangelist spoke about seeing the glory of the incarnate Word, a glory that was ‘full of grace and truth’.
 - Here in 1:16 he speaks not about seeing that grace but of receiving it: *From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*
 - Using the first-person plural, ‘we’, the evangelist identifies himself with others, and so we hear the testimony of the first witnesses coming down to us across the centuries.
 - They experienced ‘the fullness of his grace’ as ‘one blessing after another’ (*charis anti charitos*), which literally translated would read ‘one blessing instead of another’, or ‘one blessing replacing another’.
3. What the witnesses meant by ‘one blessing after another’ is explained by the words *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*
 - The blessing replaced was the law given by God to Israel through Moses.
 - What replaced it was the grace and truth, the kindness and faithfulness of God, that came through the Word incarnate.
 - But what, exactly, was the grace that these people experienced and of which they bore witness?

4. Taking our cue from this Gospel we could say at least that they witnessed the miracles Jesus performed.
 - His disciples probably drank some of the wine Jesus provided at the wedding feast in Cana (2:1–11), they probably ate some of the food he miraculously provided for the hungry crowds (6:5–13) and they were saved from a violent storm when he brought their boat safely to shore (6:16–21).
 - But probably much more than this is intended.
 - They received of his grace as they saw the Father revealed in his Son, when Jesus laid down his life for them, when they experienced the gift of eternal life that Christ makes available to all who believe, and when their ascended Lord fulfilled his promise to send them another Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to be with them for ever.

5. It is noteworthy that it is only here in verse 17 in the final paragraph (*a*¹) of the Prologue that the Word is identified as Jesus Christ.
 - Everything that precedes is predicated of the Word, but here we discover that the Word was incarnate in Jesus Christ.

6. The grace and truth that came through Jesus far surpassed the blessing of the law given through Moses.
 - One of these surpassing features was the unparalleled revelation of the Father that he brought: *No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*
 - The words 'no-one has ever seen God' remind us of the invisibility of God, an important theme in the Fourth Gospel (cf. 5:37; 6:46).
 - Significant in this context, where Moses and Jesus are compared, is the fact that when Moses asked to see God's glory he was told, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence ... But you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live' (Exod. 33:19–20).
 - Clearly, the revelation of God that came through Jesus Christ far surpassed the revelation that came through Moses, precisely because Moses did not see God—only Jesus has seen God and is therefore able to make him known.

7. Jesus is described here as 'God the One and Only (*monogenēs*)'.²⁹
 - This description is striking.

²⁹ There is a variant that reads the 'one and only Son' (*monogenēs huios*), instead of 'God the one and only' (*monogenēs theos*), but the latter has stronger manuscript support.

- It differs from other statements that use *monogenēs* in relation to Jesus to describe the uniqueness of his status as the one who came from the Father (14) or as the Son of God (3:16, 18).
- This verse speaks of Jesus as ‘God the One and Only’ and echoes the opening paragraph (*a*) of the Prologue, which says ‘the Word was God’.

8. The word used for the Father’s ‘side’ is *kolpos*.
 - In the LXX this means a person’s ‘bosom’ or ‘lap’ and is used of both males and females in relation to the affection, care and protection of a parent for a child.
 - *Kolpos* is used again in 13:23 to depict the disciple whom Jesus loved ‘reclining next to him’ (*en tō kolpō*).
 - The words ‘who is at the Father’s side’, then, highlight the intimate relationship Jesus had with the Father and echo the description of the Word in the first paragraph (*a*) as the one who ‘was with God’.
 - It is because of his intimate relationship, as well as his being the only one who has ever seen God, that Jesus can make him known.
9. The word used for ‘making known’ is *exēgeomai*, which means to ‘set forth in great detail’ or ‘expound’.
 - Its cognate is *exēgēsis*, which in its anglicized form is used to mean ‘exegesis’/‘exposition’.
 - The evangelist is saying, then, that the Word (Jesus), being God the one and only, at the Father’s side, the only one who has seen God, has ‘expounded’ him, made him known, through his person, words and works.

Conclusion

1. It is evident that the prologue is more than a preface, such as that which Luke provides for his Gospel, explaining how he came to write his work.
 - The explanation for the writing of the Gospel is left to its conclusion (20:30–31).
 - The prologue is “a directive to the reader how the entire Gospel should be read and understood.”³⁰
2. As the Gospel is wholly concerned with Jesus, so the prologue is wholly taken up with him.
 - The Evangelist does not feel it necessary to commend the story of Jesus to his readers.

³⁰ Thyen, T. *Textus Receptus* [39] 223.

- Rather he prepares for the story by describing the Son of God in terms that rivet the attention of his readers, and so encourages them to read the story for themselves.

3. The remarkable feature of this presentation is that it employs categories universally known, possessing universal appeal, which would attract and have attracted alike Jews, Christians and pagans, Hellenists and Orientals in their varied cultures, followers of ancient and modern religions, philosophers and people of more humble status who were yet seekers after God.³¹

Additional Note: The Logos (The Word)³²

The term *Logos* was in frequent use among the Greeks.³³ The word might be thought of as remaining within a person, when it denoted thought or reason. Or it might refer to the word going forth from the person, when it denotes the expression of the person's thought, that is speech.³⁴ The *Logos*, as a philosophical term, depended on the former use. It denoted something like the world-soul, the soul of the universe. It was an all-pervading principle, the rational principle of the universe. It was a creative energy. In one sense all things came from it, in another people derived their wisdom from it.³⁵ The concept is as old as Heraclitus (sixth century B.C.). This philosopher declared that the *Logos* "is always existent," and again that "all things happen through this *Logos*."³⁶ He thought of the ultimate reality sometimes as Fire, sometimes as God, sometimes as *Logos*. "In Heraclitus the three conceptions, *Logos*, Fire, and God, are fundamentally the same. Regarded as the *Logos*, God is the omnipresent Wisdom by which all things are steered."³⁷ Heraclitus

³¹ Beasley-Murray, G.R. (2002). *Vol. 36: Word Biblical Commentary: John*. Word Biblical Commentary (5). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

³² Morris, L. (1995). *The Gospel According to John*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (102). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

³³ For that matter "the Word" was used in many religions (see F.W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Symbolism* [London, 1955], 141–51). See further R.H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times* (New York, 1949), 122–27; art. "Logos" by A.F. Walls in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1960), 327–28; art. by R. B. Edwards in *ISBE*, IV, 1101–7.

³⁴ These are distinguished as λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός. Sometimes we read also of λόγος σπερματικός, the "seminal" or "generative" reason, the creative force in nature. This last term is often in the plural. Justin used it in the singular of Christ, saying concerning the philosophers, "each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatoc word" (2 *Apol.* 13).

³⁵ Origen seems to understand λόγος in much this way: "all who are rational beings are partakers of the word, i.e., of reason, and by this means bear certain seeds, implanted within them, of wisdom and justice, which is Christ" (*De Prin.* 1.3.6).

³⁶ James Adam, *The Religious Teachers of Greece* (Edinburgh, 1909), 217.

³⁷ Adam, *Religious Teachers*, 233. We must be on our guard against thinking that "God" means the same to Heraclitus as it does to us. He could say, "God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace,

found people conceiving of the universe in physical terms. He introduced the idea of the *Logos* to account for the order he saw in the *kosmos*. It was the stabilizing principle of the universe.³⁸

Later thinkers for the most part failed to follow this thought up. For example, though Plato occasionally mentions the *Logos*, he is more concerned with his distinction between this material world and the real, heavenly world of “ideas.” It was the Stoics who really developed the concept of the *Logos*. They abandoned Plato’s heavenly archetypes in favor of the thought (more akin to Heraclitus) that the universe is pervaded by the *Logos*, the eternal Reason. The term *Logos* gave expression to their deep conviction of the rationality of the universe. They did not think of the *Logos* as personal, so they did not understand it as we would God. For them it was essentially a principle or force. But the important thing is that if it was a principle it was the supreme principle of the universe. It was the force that originated and permeated and directed all things.

When John used the term *Logos*, then, he used a term that would be widely recognized among the Greeks.³⁹ The average person would not know its precise significance to the philosophers (any more than his modern counterpart knows what the scientist understands by, say, “nuclear fission”). But he would know that it meant something important. John could scarcely have used the Greek term without arousing in the minds of those who used the Greek language thoughts of something supremely great in the universe. But, though he would not have been unmindful of the associations aroused by the term, his essential thought does not derive from the Greek background.⁴⁰ His Gospel

satiety and hunger. But he is changed, just as fire, when mingled with different kinds of incense, is named after the flavour of each” (*Religious Teachers*, 225).

³⁸ T.F. Glasson, following J. Burnet, questions whether Heraclitus really had a *Logos* doctrine (*JThS*, n.s. III [1952], 231–38). It may be doubted whether he has made his point, though clearly John owes nothing directly to Heraclitus.

³⁹ John also has affinities with strands of Greek thought that do not use the *Logos* concept. Thus Dodd is able to point out that there are parallels in the *Poimandres* to several things John said about the *Logos* in John. He goes on, “we may say that the Johannine conception of Christ has in some measure combined the roles assigned in the *Poimandres* to four distinct beings” (*IFG*, 33). There is no question of literary dependence. But John has clearly used a form of expression that would strike many chords among his Greek readers.

⁴⁰ F.V. Filson shows that there is no complete parallel in Greek thought to the Johannine concept (*The New Testament against its Environment* [London, 1950], 89–90). He reminds us that “in the Christian account the Son or *Logos* is linked with the historical Christ and not, as logic would lead us to expect, with the Spirit. This most notable difference is striking, but it is often overlooked. The fact shows that the Christian doctrine of the Spirit is not a borrowing from Stoic sources, either directly or indirectly. It derives from a historical career and its sequel, rather than from a Greek philosophy” (90). See also W.J. Phythian-Adams, *CQR*, CXXXIX (1944–45), 1ff. But if John’s idea of the *Logos* cannot be derived from Greek concepts the effects of its Greek associations are important. A.C. Headlam says: “It enabled Christianity to express itself in terms of Greek thought.... It enabled a Christian philosophy to be built up in harmony with

shows little trace of acquaintance with Greek philosophy and less of dependence on it.⁴¹ And the really important thing is that John in his use of *Logos* is cutting clean across one of the fundamental Greek ideas. The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John's idea of the *Logos* conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's *Logos* does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved. The *Logos* speaks of God's coming where we are, taking our nature upon himself, entering the world's struggle, and out of this agony winning our salvation.⁴²

More important for our understanding of this Gospel in general and of its use of this term in particular is its Jewish background. The opening words, "In the beginning," compel a comparison with Genesis 1:1, while "the Word" irresistibly turns our attention to the repeated "and God said" of the opening chapter of the Bible. The Word is God's creative Word (v. 3). The atmosphere is unmistakably Hebraic.

A feature of Old Testament teaching that was receiving attention in the first century was its use of concepts like "the Word," and "Wisdom." While nothing was said to compromise the basic monotheism of Judaism, attention was increasingly directed to passages where such entities are given an almost independent existence. Thus throughout the Old Testament the Word of the Lord is thought of as an effective agent for accomplishing the divine will. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made" (Ps. 33:6). When God speaks he does something. His word is a divine action.⁴³ God's

current thought" (*Christian Theology* [Oxford, 1934], 334). For the importance of the *Logos* concept to early Christian theologians see G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952), and especially ch. VI.

⁴¹ Yet it is surely going too far to say, as J. Burnet does, "the Johannine doctrine of the *λογος* has nothing to do with Herakleitos or with anything at all in Greek philosophy" (*Early Greek Philosophy* [London, 1945], p. 133, n. 1). It would be impossible to use a term so widely known in Greek philosophy in a writing in the Greek language, probably published in a center of Greek culture, without being mindful of the associations the term would arouse.

⁴² Cf. W. Barclay: "John spoke to a world which thought of the gods in terms of passionless *apatheia* and serene *detachment*. He pointed at Jesus Christ and said: 'Here is the mind of God; here is the expression of the thought of God; here is the *Logos*.' And men were confronted with a God who cared so passionately and who loved so sacrificially that His expression was Jesus Christ and His emblem a cross" (*ExT*, LXX [1958-59], 82).

⁴³ "There can be little doubt that the Hebrew concept of *word as deed* plays a major role in understanding the meaning of the *Logos*. In Old Testament history and prophecy the *debar Yahweh* always meant Yahweh's *activity* in creation, revelation and redemption" (R. Morgan, *Interpretation*, XI [1957], 159-60). Thorlief Boman puts a great deal of emphasis on the dynamic significance of *dabhar* (though he rejects the idea of the word as "a connecting link between Jahveh and his creation. It is of moment to the prophets and the other great personalities of the Old Testament to trace the creation directly back to Jahveh" (*Hebrew Thought compared with Greek* [London, 1960], 64). He notices Faust's translation of John 1:1, "In the beginning was the deed," and comments, "Actually Goethe is on solid linguistic ground because he goes back to the Hebrew (Aramaic) original and translates its deepest meaning; for if *dabhar* forms a unity of word and deed, in our thinking the deed is the higher concept in the unity" (p. 66). The linguistics behind all this has been severely criticized, notably by James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford,

revelatory act is often described by saying that the word of the Lord “came” to the prophet. In keeping with this a prophet may ascribe a more or less independent existence to the Word, as when he reports God as saying, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). And in Psalm 29 “the voice” of the Lord is regarded in much the same way.

There are also semipersonalizations of Wisdom or the Law. Thus Wisdom can be spoken of very much like a divine person: “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.... I was there when he set the heavens in place.... Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind” (Prov. 8:22–31). Parallelism can show that “the law” and “the word” can mean very much the same thing (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). In such passages “Wisdom” or “the Law” or “the Word” is in some sense divine, yet not quite the same as God.⁴⁴

There is another use of some importance, namely that in the Targums. When Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language Scripture was still read in that language in the services in the synagogue. As a concession to the weakness of the flesh there arose the custom of giving a running translation, which was called a Targum. At first the Targums were oral only, but in later times they were written down. Those that have survived enable us to see that they were somewhat free paraphrases rather than exact translations. The Targumists tried to give the sense of the passage being read, and not simply to translate mechanically. These Targums were produced at a time when, from motives of reverence and from a fear of breaking the third commandment, Jews had ceased to pronounce the divine name. When they came to this name in the original the readers and translators substituted some other expression they thought more reverent, such as “the Holy One” or “the Name.” Sometimes they said, “the Word (*Memra*).”⁴⁵ For example, where our Bible says, “Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God” (Exod. 19:17), the

1961). But, when full allowance has been made for his strictures the connection of *logos* with deed is noteworthy.

⁴⁴ See G.A.F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Edinburgh, 1953), for a discussion of several Old Testament terms of this kind. He thinks that “the Word of God” in the Old Testament is an “alter ego of God” (16).

⁴⁵ W.F. Albright refers to the manuscript Targum Neofiti 1 (a complete Palestinian Targum) as “an important new Aramaic targum of the Pentateuch” that “has come to light in the Vatican library.” It is “two or three centuries older than any previously known targum.” In it, Albright tells us, “the ‘Word’ of God appears as a surrogate for the name of God, Yahweh” (*New Horizons in Biblical Research* [London, 1966], 45). See also M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Rome, 1966); G.J. Cowling, “New Light on the New Testament? The Significance of the Palestinian Targum,” *TSF Bulletin*, no. 51 (Summer 1968), 6ff.

Targum reads “to meet the Word of God.” This kind of thing is quite common. Barclay says that in the Targum of Jonathan⁴⁶ alone the expression is used in this way about 320 times. It is often said that this Jewish use is not relevant because it does not denote a being in any way distinct from God. It is just a reverent way of referring to God himself.⁴⁷ But this is hardly the point. The point is that wherever people were familiar with the Targums they were familiar with “the Word” as a designation of the divine.⁴⁸ The Johannine use is not that of the Targums, but to those familiar with the Targums it must necessarily arouse these associations.

In the period between the two Testaments there was a marked extension of the usages we have been discussing. There are some striking statements about Wisdom.⁴⁹ Thus Wisdom is reported as saying: “I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss” (Sir. 24:3–5). Clearly Wisdom stands in close relationship to God, though the writer is careful to speak of her as a created being: “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me” (Sir. 24:9). In the *Wisdom of Solomon* we find that Wisdom “glorifies her noble birth by living with God” (Wis. 8:3), and that she “is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works” (Wis. 8:4). The writer can pray, “O God of my fathers, and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word, and by thy wisdom hast formed man” (Wis. 9:1–2, a passage that incidentally shows that the author made little distinction between Wisdom and the Word). There is an even bolder personification of the Word: “For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, thy all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne ...

⁴⁶A Targum on the Former and Latter Prophets, that is the books in our Bible from Joshua to 2 Kings (excluding Ruth), and the prophetic books (excluding Daniel).

⁴⁷SBK, II, 302–33, makes it clear that *Memra* is used as another name for God. It is not an intermediary. Bultmann directs attention to the point that the Targums always use *Memra* with a genitive. It is “the *Memra* of the Lord” or the like, not simply “the *Memra*,” as in John’s use of “the Word.” E.M. Sidebottom gives the force of it in these terms: “*Memra* then is not a mediating principle of any kind, and not the creative Word of the psalms ... it is the Name of God himself, with perhaps the suggestion especially of God as self-revealing” (*The Christ of the Fourth Gospel*, 39).

⁴⁸M. McNamara regards the Targums as an important part of the background of John’s *Logos* concept (“*Logos* of the Fourth Gospel and *Memra* of the Palestinian Targum (Ex 12⁴²)”; *ExT*, LXXIX [1967–68], 115–17). He can go so far as to say, “Johannine tradition may yet well prove to be mainly influenced by liturgical Jewish tradition, particularly of the form found in the Targums” (117). This may be going too far, but the influence of the Targums on John should certainly not be overlooked.

⁴⁹Rendel Harris argues strongly that the *Logos* must be understood in terms of the Wisdom literature. Again and again he suggests that the Prologue is to be understood against this background: “the Prologue to the Gospel can be turned back from a *Logos*-Hymn to a *Sophia*-Hymn” (*The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, 39).

a stern warrior ... and touched heaven while standing on the earth" (Wis. 18:14–16).⁵⁰ While it would be too much to say that these writers thought of Wisdom or the Word as having any distinct existence of their own, yet their bold imagery was certainly preparing the way for John's idea of the *Logos*.

It is difficult to know whether Philo should be thought of as a Jewish or Greek thinker. The great Alexandrian Jew really effected a synthesis of Greek philosophy and Old Testament thought. He spoke much about the Word,⁵¹ and his various sayings do not readily harmonize. Sometimes he speaks of the *Logos* as a "second God," sometimes as the one God in action (is it too much to see in this his Greek philosophy and his Hebrew religion respectively?). If we might venture on a generalization, he saw the *Logos* as a philosophically respectable bridge between a transcendent God and this material universe.⁵² He had no intention of abandoning the Old Testament. But he accepted the philosophical ideas of the day, and interpreted the Old Testament in terms of those ideas.⁵³ Thus his view of the *Logos* is rather that of current philosophy, somewhat modified, than the religious conception of the Old Testament.⁵⁴

C.H. Dodd takes very seriously the idea that the Philonic understanding of the *Logos* is part of the background of the Johannine Prologue.⁵⁵ He thinks that Philo helps us to understand expressions very difficult to explain in terms of a merely Jewish background, for example, "the Word was God." His conclusion is that the opening words of the

⁵⁰ Similarly there was a development in the personification of the Law, the Torah. This had a great vogue among the rabbis, as may be seen from the passages cited in SBk, II, 353ff., where we see the *Torah* depicted as preexistent, as eternally existent with God, as God's daughter, as active in creation, as the life of Israel and the light of Israel.

⁵¹ W.F. Howard says that Philo used the term "no fewer than thirteen hundred times" (*Christianity according to St. John* [London, 1943], 36–37).

⁵² D.M. Baillie reminds us that "in the Philonic tradition the *Logos*, so far as hypostatized at all, was conceived as an intermediate being, between God and man" (*God was in Christ*, 70, n. 1). This is very different from John's idea of a *Logos* who "became flesh," that is, who was both God and man.

⁵³ Cf. Westcott: "He found a 'Logos' in the Greek Bible which he accepted as the record of revelation, and he applied to that what Greek writers had said of the 'Logos,' without thinking it necessary to inquire into the identity of the terms" (xxxvi).

⁵⁴ Against this A.W. Argyle argues that Philo thought of the *Logos* very much as he did of God ("The *Logos* of Philo: Personal or Impersonal?" in *ExT*, LXVI [1954–55], 13–14). On the question of the personality of the *Logos* in Philo, A.C. Headlam says, "if we ask what it was in itself, whether it was personal or impersonal, we get no satisfying answer. Philo never asked or answered the question. He remains always vague and poetical" (*Christian Theology*, 331).

⁵⁵ See, for example, the list of parallels he gathers (*IFG*, 71–72, 276–77). Another who stresses Philo is A.W. Argyle (*ExT*, LXIII [1951–52], 385–86). He questions whether "any fully satisfactory alternative interpretation" of the Fourth Gospel has been found to that which sees it in the light of Philo. He cites an impressive list of parallels and concludes, "Their cumulative force suggests that to deny any connexion between the Johannine *Logos* conception and that of Philo would be to throw away a valuable clue to the understanding of the mind and thought of the fourth evangelist."

Prologue “are clearly intelligible only when we admit that λόγος, though it carries with it the associations of the Old Testament Word of the Lord, has also a meaning similar to that which it bears in Stoicism as modified by Philo, and parallel to the idea of Wisdom in other Jewish writers.”⁵⁶ This, however, seems to assume that the whole of the Johannine concept of the Word must be explicable in terms of some part of its background, be it Jewish, Hellenistic, or whatever you will. This I would strongly contest. John’s thought is his own. He uses a term that would be full of meaning to his readers whatever their background. But whatever their background they would not find John’s thought identical with their own. His idea of the *Logos* is essentially new.

We may sum up this part of the discussion in the words of William Temple. The *Logos*, he says, “alike for Jew and Gentile represents the ruling fact of the universe, and represents that fact as the self-expression of God. The Jew will remember that ‘by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made’; the Greek will think of the rational principle of which all natural laws are particular expressions. Both will agree that this *Logos* is the starting-point of all things.”⁵⁷ John was using a term that, with various shades of meaning, was in common use everywhere. He could count on all his readers catching his essential meaning.⁵⁸

Such, then, is the background to John’s thought. But it is not his thought itself.⁵⁹ He had a richer, deeper, fuller idea than that of any of his predecessors. For him the Word is not a principle but a living Being and the source of life; not a personification but a

⁵⁶ IFG, 280. He proceeds to apply this concept to the expression “the Word became flesh.” It is curious that he selects this passage, for from the time of Augustine on, many have felt that this thought is completely out of harmony with Philo. Argyle, for example, says bluntly, “Philo could not have said” it (IFG, 385). Indeed, Philo says explicitly of the life πρὸς Θεόν that it “has never come down to us, nor submitted to the constraints of the body” (*Quis Rer. Div. Her.* 45).

⁵⁷ Temple, 4.

⁵⁸ MacGregor dismisses as “a singularly futile dispute” the question of whether John’s *Logos* concept owes more to Greek or Hebrew sources. He says, “John must certainly have been indebted to both; if he was able adequately to present the Gospel to a heterogeneous Church, it was just because in the forefront of his Gospel so many converging streams of thought are gathered into one clear pool in which is reflected the face of Jesus Christ” (xxxv). Similarly B.H. Streeter thinks that “The interpretative fusion of Greek philosophic mysticism with the conception of a Personal God reached by the Hebrew Prophets, modified by the religious experience of the Early Church, obtained its classical expression in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel” (*The Four Gospels* [London, 1930], 374). In an article entitled “Ambiguity of Word Meaning in John’s Gospel” F.W. Gingrich points out that it is characteristic of John to use words with two meanings (*Classical Weekly*, XXXVII [1943–44], 77). He thinks that λόγος is used here to convey both the Hebrew “word” and the Greek “reason.”

⁵⁹ In discussions of John’s use of the *Logos* not all have borne in mind the principle of which C.J. Wright reminds us: “the ‘ancestry’ of an ‘idea’ is not the idea itself” (65). T.E. Pollard holds that John “intended the Prologue to be interpreted in the light of the rest of the Gospel.... The subject of the Gospel is Jesus Christ, not the *Logos*” (*Johannine Christology and the Early Church* [Cambridge, 1970], 13).

Person,⁶⁰ and that Person divine.⁶¹ The Word is nothing less than God. John gave full expression to this, but it is important to notice that this was but the culmination of a tendency inherent in Christianity from the first.⁶² The “word” stands for the whole Christian gospel in such passages as Mark 2:2 (where it applies to the preaching of Jesus) and Mark 8:32 (where it has special reference to the death of the Son of man).⁶³ Allan D. Galloway can regard *Logos* as referring to the work of Christ rather than to his Person.⁶⁴ That is to say, it is a term that gathers up into itself the universal saving significance of Christ. He, the Word, is no tribal savior, but the one hope of all the human race. The Word and the gospel are intimately connected. When Luke speaks of those who were “eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (Luke 1:2), it is difficult to escape the impression that by “the word” he means more than teaching. He is thinking of the intimate relationship between Christ and the gospel, and is coming very close to calling Jesus “the Word.” Again, he does not seem to make much distinction between preaching the word (Acts 8:4) and preaching Jesus (Acts 11:20). A number of times Paul speaks of preaching Christ (1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 3:1). He can explain “the word of God” as “the mystery,” and this in turn as “Christ in you” (Col. 1:25–27). Though the step of calling Christ “the Word” is not often taken (but cf. 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13), it is clear that the way had been prepared.

There is a preparation also in the realm of ideas, for in some passages, though the terminology is different, Paul ascribes to Christ qualities and activities akin to those

⁶⁰ “Logos for the Christian is a *person*. The Logos is not an abstract philosophical concept. It is not a category of religious experience. Nor is it speculative religious mythology. It is person, infleshed, living, historical person” (R. Kysar, *John the Maverick Gospel* [Atlanta, 1976], 25).

⁶¹ Godet thinks that the writer “wished to describe Jesus Christ as the *absolute revelation* of God to the world, to bring back all divine revelations to Him as their living centre, and to proclaim the matchless grandeur of His appearance in the midst of humanity” (I, 290). Cullmann maintains that “this title expresses very forcefully an important aspect of New Testament Christology — the unity in historical revelation of the incarnate and the pre-existent Jesus” (*The Christology of the New Testament* [London, 1959], 258). His whole discussion of the term is very valuable.

⁶² “The compelling urge which led the Evangelist to pen, or make use of, the Logos Hymn, is not any of the external factors which from time to time have been proposed, but the dynamic fact of Christ Himself” (V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* [London, 1953], 164).

⁶³ Ὁν ἔνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ ἔνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου in Mark 10:29 Vincent Taylor comments: “together with the Synoptic variants, it is important as indicating an identification of Jesus Himself with the ‘Gospel’ and the ‘Kingdom’ in primitive Christian thought” (*in loc.*).

⁶⁴ He says, “in the long run, it is primarily as an assertion of the cosmic significance of the *work* of Christ that we should see it” (*The Cosmic Christ* [London, 1951], 54). He compares the openings of the Second and Fourth Gospels and goes on: “Both Mark and John, while using very different language and symbolism, imply the same claim for the universal significance of the redeeming work of the Christ” (54–55).

postulated of Wisdom in the Old Testament and elsewhere (see Phil. 2:5ff.; Col. 1:15ff.).⁶⁵ The conclusion seems inescapable that, while John uses a term that was widely familiar and would convey a meaning to people of very diverse backgrounds, his thought is essentially Christian.⁶⁶ When he speaks of Jesus as the *Logos* he does but put the coping stone on an edifice that was being erected throughout the New Testament.⁶⁷

After the Prologue John does not apply the specific term *Logos* to Jesus, but it should not be overlooked that he puts a great deal of stress on “the word(s)” of Jesus or of God.⁶⁸ He makes it clear that Jesus’ words are God’s words (3:34; 14:10, 24; 17:8, 14), which makes it very important to believe them (5:47). Indeed, to abide in Jesus’ “word” is the same as to be his disciple (8:31). Jesus’ words bring life (5:24; 6:68; 8:51), and in fact are life (6:63). They bring cleansing (15:3) and power in prayer (15:7). The reverse side of the coin is that the refusal to heed Jesus’ word or words brings judgment (12:47–48). Those who refuse to hear belong to the devil (8:47; cf. 44). It is important to “keep” Jesus’ word (14:23; 15:20; 17:6). There is a good deal more. It is quite plain that the use of *Logos* on the threshold of this Gospel is not a casual expression. It is meaningful, and leads us into an important concept for the understanding of the Gospel.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ T. E. Pollard finds similarities between Paul and John: “Like St Paul, St John focuses his attention on the redemption which God has wrought through Jesus Christ, and like St Paul also he argues back from the mediatorial work in redemption (the re-creation of man and the cosmos) to the mediatorial work in the original creation” (*Johannine Christology and the Early Church* [Cambridge, 1970], 22).

⁶⁶ Against this, E.F. Scott thinks that “There can be little doubt that by thus importing the doctrine of the *Logos* into the Gospel record, John is not only compelled to do violence to historical fact, but empties the life of Christ of much of its real worth and grandeur, while seeming to enhance it. The moral attributes, trust, pity, forgiveness, infinite sympathy, are replaced by certain metaphysical attributes, which are supposed to belong more essentially to the divine nature” (*The Fourth Gospel*, 173). But where does John’s use of the *Logos* replace “moral attributes” with “metaphysical” ones? The fact is that the *Logos* adds something rather than replaces anything. If we are to think of a real incarnation, then there must be genuine deity as well as genuine humanity, and John insists strongly on both. His use of the *Logos* concept is part of his way of drawing attention to the deity. Nowhere can it be justly held to minimize the humanity. Scott’s idea that the doctrine of the *Logos* is “born of philosophical theory” (175) perhaps accounts for his point of view. But, as we have seen, for John the idea is more religious than philosophical, more dependent on the Old Testament than on the Stoics, and more dependent on Christian experience and thought than either. The Prologue is the expression, not of a philosophical theory, but of a religious faith.

⁶⁷ With a different metaphor Hoskyns says: “The workshop in which the Word of God was forged to take its natural place among the great theological descriptions of Jesus and His Work is a Christian workshop: the tools are Christian tools” (162). He develops the point convincingly (pp. 159–63). See also K. Harper, “Christ the Word” (*ExT*, LX [1948–49], 200–202).

⁶⁸ There does not appear to be much difference between his use of ῥήματα (always plural) and λόγος (nor between λόγος and λόγοι; see on 14:24).

⁶⁹ J. Ernest Davey maintains that the emphasis on the word(s) of God or of Christ is “One of the leading features in the Gospel” (*The Jesus of St John* [London, 1958], 83). He also says, “the main suitability of the

word Logos to *John's* conception of Christ's significance lies in the central importance for him of the teaching or message of God which Christ mediated to men in His actual words and life on earth" (88).

