

John 1:1-18 Introducing: Jesus!

Introduction: John 1:1-18 serves to introduce Jesus and as an introduction to the rest of the book.

Authorship: Where does the Gospel of John state that John was the author? It doesn't. Like all four of the Gospels, John's account is anonymous. It is the record of early church history that tell us who wrote it (John the apostle, one of the original Twelve disciples). He is not to be confused with John the Baptist.

Purpose: Why did John write his Gospel? Let's John him speak for himself:

ESV **John 20:30-31** . . . these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.¹

John wrote his Gospel as an evangelistic tract. It was an effort to convince unbelievers to believe in Jesus as Messiah and have life.

The key question of John's Gospel is this: *Who is Jesus?*² He is God in the flesh.

The key application of John's Gospel is this: *What does Jesus want from you?* He wants you to believe, so that you may have life.

Readers: To whom was John writing? Who were his original readers? As already indicated, John was writing to unbelievers—but not just any unbelievers. Arguably, he was writing to Jewish unbelievers who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire (Hellenistic Jews). John's Gospel assumes the readers were well familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures—something that would not have been true of the typical Gentile living in the Roman Empire. Also, in his writing, John drew a sharp line between his readers (unbelieving Hellenistic Jews) and the Jews of Palestine who had already rejected Jesus.³

Date: When did John write? The actual date of composition before that is hard to determine with exactness. The oldest fragmentary copy of John's Gospel dates from A.D. 130.⁴ It was sometime between AD 65 and AD 95. Most scholars think John likely wrote toward the end of that period, around AD 80.

¹ The Greek here is ambiguous as to John's exact purpose. It could be taken to mean that John wrote so that those who already believe will keep on believing. It could also be taken to mean that John wrote so that unbelievers would be convinced to start believing. By way of contrast, John's purpose statement in another of his books is not ambiguous at all: ESV 1 John 5:13 "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." John very clearly communicated that he wrote the epistle of 1 John for *believers*. Since that's how he put it when he was writing for believers, I prefer to take the more ambiguous purpose statement in his Gospel to mean that it was written for unbelievers. John explained why a person should become a Christian, how to become a Christian, and what it means to be a Christian (Carson, 90-92).

² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 95.

³ Carson, 91.

⁴ Papyrus 52; Carson, 24.

Place: Where was John when he wrote? The testimony of the early church fathers is that John wrote from the city of Ephesus (in modern Turkey).⁵

******Who does John introduce Jesus as being (1:1-5)?** John introduced Jesus as the Creator God in Whom is life and light.

1:1—In The Beginning

John started by writing “In the beginning” (1:1). What would a Jewish reader immediately think of when he read, “In the beginning” (1:1)? See *Genesis 1:1*. A Jewish reader would immediately recognize the first words of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning”.

How did John introduce the idea that Jesus is God (1:1)? Every Jew knew that Moses had written, in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created . . .” John, taking that familiar text, wrote that in the beginning was—the Word! And it was the Word who *created*! *What does that tell us about who the Word is?* The Word is the God who created the heavens and the earth back in Genesis 1:1. The Word is the Jehovah God of the Old Testament.

ESV **John 20:27-28** Then he said to Thomas, “. . . Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Eternal Word: When the beginning began, God was already there, because God created all things, including the beginning (Genesis 1:1). When the beginning began, the Word was already there, because the Word created all things, including the beginning (John 1:1-3). There never was a time when the Word was not:

ESV **John 17:5** . . . Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

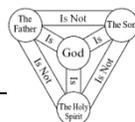
With God/Was God

Trinity: If you and your neighbor went together to the store, you were with your neighbor, but you were not your neighbor. In 1:1, how is it that the Word was both “with God” and at the same time “was God”? Which is it? Was the Word merely with God or was the Word actually God? Our one God is a Trinity, a tri-unity. God exists eternally as three co-equal, co-eternal Persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Jesus is all God, but He is not all there is of God (Jesus is not the Father or the Son).

There are hints of this starting back in Genesis:

ESV **Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Trinity Illustration:



⁵ Carson, 86.

The “Word”

Of all the ways that John could have referred to Jesus (Jesus, Son, Christ), why did John call Jesus “the Word” (1:1)? The Greek behind “word” is *logos* and refers not to a single word, but rather to a “message” or communication.⁶ It was a saying, a statement, a declaration.⁷ If a school principal says to a naughty little boy, “I want to have a word with you in my office”, the principal means he wants to have a talk with the boy. That is the sense of *logos*. The Bible is God’s written word; Jesus is God’s living word.

ESV Hebrews 1:1-2 . . . in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son . . . through whom also he created the world.

Some say John used *logos* in a special sense, such as the Gnostic used it. However, the Gnostics didn’t grow in influence until later in history, after John wrote.⁸ Some speculate that John is using *logos* the way the Greek Stoics used it, as a rational principle from which everything else springs; reason is the ultimate god. Others think the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo’s use of *logos* influenced John’s decision (the *logos* as an impersonal idea of the ideal man).⁹ I don’t think it was any of those special meanings.

Whatever else John had in mind by *logos*, it was at least something that a first century, unbelieving, Hellenistic Jew would have already understood. It can’t be all that hard to figure out. Here are two possible reasons John called Jesus the “Word”:

1) Going back to Genesis 1, how did God create the heavens and the earth? See 1:1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 27, 26, Colossians 1:26-27. The phrase, “And God said” is repeated throughout Genesis 1-2 as part of God’s creative activity. God spoke the universe into existence.

ESV Genesis 1:3 And God said, “Let there be light . . .”

ESV Genesis 1:6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters . . .”

ESV Genesis 1:9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”

ESV Genesis 1:11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation . . .”

ESV Genesis 1:14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens . . .”

ESV Genesis 1:20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures . . .”

ESV Genesis 1:24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures . . .”

⁶ Carson, 115.

⁷ George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 270.

⁸ The Gnostics thought flesh to be sinful; God a spirit being. For God to interact with fleshly men without being contaminated required a series of emanations from God to man, with the final emanation called the *logos*.

⁹ Carson, 114.

ESV **Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man . . ."

Conclusion: Part of the reason John called Jesus the Word may be because speaking a command of creation is how God was depicted as creating the world in Genesis 1-2.

ESV **Colossians 1:16-17a** For by him [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things . . .

2) What odd traits of “the word of the LORD” do you notice in Genesis 15:1-5, Jeremiah 1:4-9, and 1 Samuel 3:31? Throughout the Old Testament, you find the statement that something called the “Word of the LORD” spoke to or appeared to various people.¹⁰ The theology behind this odd title may be another reason why John called Jesus the Word.

a) Abraham: In Genesis 15:1-5, how is the “word of the LORD” clearly more than a mere verbal message from God?

ESV **Genesis 15:1** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Odd: A “word” “came” and appeared in a “vision” and “said”.

ESV **Genesis 15:4-5** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him . . . And he brought him outside and said . . .

Odd: The “word” was not an “it” but a “he” who “brought” Abraham outside and then spoke to him.

Suspicion: It is likely that “the word of the LORD” is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. This is known theologically as a theophany (an appearing of God in the Old Testament).

b) Jeremiah: ESV **Jeremiah 1:4-9** Now the word of the LORD came to me [Jeremiah], saying . . . Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth . . .

Odd: The “word” of the LORD came to Jeremiah, as if it were simply an audible voice. In his reply, Jeremiah addressed the voice as the “Lord GOD” (1:6). But then, then the LORD put out his “hand” and “touched” Jeremiah’s mouth (1:9). When the “word of the LORD” came to Jeremiah, he not only heard a voice, he evidently also saw the LORD and Jeremiah was touched by the LORD.

Suspicion: The “word of the LORD” is the visible manifestation of Jehovah God in human form.

c) Samuel: ESV **1 Samuel 3:21** . . . the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

¹⁰ “LORD” (all caps) in the Old Testament translates YHWY (Yahweh or Jehovah).

Odd: The text clearly states that the LORD “appeared again” to Samuel at Shiloh, that the LORD “revealed himself” to Samuel. *How did he do it?* He did it “by the word of the LORD.”

Suspicion: The “word of the LORD” was something that Samuel could see. The “word of the LORD” was Jehovah God in human form in the Old Testament.¹¹ It also seems like there are two Yahwehs (the LORD and then the word of the LORD).

Conclusion: John called Jesus the “Word” because the “Word of the LORD” in the Old Testament referred to appearances of Jehovah God in human form.

1:4

In 1:4, what two words that start with the letter “L” describe the Word? The Word was life and light.

What type of life do you think John meant (1:4)? See *John 3:15-16, 5:26*. In the Genesis creation context, it was biological life. However, as we shall see when we go deeper into his writings, John may have ultimately meant spiritual life. (The very next time John used the word “life” (*zoé*) was clearly with reference to spiritual life):

ESV **John 3:14-16** “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

ESV **John 5:26** . . . as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

In 1:4, John wrote that the life was the light of men. If light represents life, what does darkness represent (1:4)? The darkness would represent death (biological or spiritual).

Hymn: “The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin; the Light of the world is Jesus.”¹²

ESV **John 8:12** [Jesus] I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

1:5

According to 1:5, what is true of the darkness? The darkness has not overcome the light. Darkness never has put out light; that would be impossible. Light displaces darkness.

Example: If the earth were flat, on a dark night you could see a candle flame flickering up to 30 miles away. With the naked eye, you can see light from the Andromeda galaxy, 2.6 million light-years from Earth.¹³

¹¹ Another example is Ezekiel 1:1-3.

¹² Philip P. Bliss, “The Light of the World of Jesus”, 1875.

¹³ Natalie Walchover, “How Far Can The Human Eye See”, LifeScience.com. Accessed March 29, 2019.

******What did God send a man named John to do (1:6-8)?** God sent John to bear witness about the light (1:7). We know him as John the Baptist (not the John the Apostle who wrote the Gospel).

John the Apostle here called John the Baptist to the witness stand. Perhaps first-century Hellenistic Jews had a favorable impression of John the Baptist, who stood in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets.¹⁴ They might have thought highly of John the Baptist much as we might think highly of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Our author is saying, "You like John? Then listen to his message!"

1:7

According to 1:7, what was John the Baptist's purpose in bearing witness about the light? God sent John to bear witness in order that all might believe through his witness.

Emphatic: God's purpose in sending John the Baptist was to cause people to believe in the Word as the true God who is light and life. This was also John the author's purpose in writing this Gospel: to cause people to believe.

Who did John have in mind when he wrote that John the Baptist came so that "all" might believe (1:7)? There is certainly a universalistic, all-inclusive sound to the word "all". The overall point is that God wants people, especially Jewish people, to believe in the Word. John the author wanted his readers to believe.

When John the Baptist came as a witness, to what people group did he preach (1:6-7)? See *John 1:19-28*. John came specifically as a witness to Hebrew Jews in Judea. When it says that John came so that "all" might believe, it many mean "all" in the sense of all type of Jews: Jews in Judea, and also Hellenized Jews.

1:8

Why did John the author feel the need to point out that John the Baptist was mere a witness about the light and not actually the light (1:8)? Perhaps because his readers focused too much on John the Baptist as a prophet, and not enough on his message: Jesus. The correct application of John the Baptist's ministry is that it's not about John: it's about Jesus!

******What happened when the true light came into the world and to his own people (1:9-13)?** The world did not know him and his own people did not recognize him. Unlike physical light, spiritual "light" is invisible (ultraviolet). It can only be seen with spiritual eyes.

¹⁴ Mark 11:32, Luke 20:6

Apologetics: John is here acknowledging the fact that, on the whole, the Jews of Judea rejected Jesus as their Messiah. This is a major theme of his book and is an event he must explain if he is to convince the Hellenistic Jews to believe in Jesus.

ESV John 12:37-40 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

In what sense did the world not receive the true light (1:9-11)? John tended to use “world” (*cosmos*) in a negative sense to refer to the whole ungodly human way of thinking that rejected God.

ESV 1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

What right was given to all who did receive the true light (1:12-13)? Those who believed were given the right to become children of God.

1:12

******Based on 1:12, what does it mean to receive the true Light?** To receive the Light means to believe in his name.

What does it mean to believe in someone’s “name” (1:12)? A pop song’s lyrics went: “Stop in the name of love, before you break my heart.” Love doesn’t have a name. The song means to stop on the basis of love, because of love. You have also heard the phrase, “Stop in the name of the law!” The law does not have a name. It is a command to stop based on the authority of the government. To act in someone’s name means to act under his authority or command.¹⁵ To believe in the “name” of the Light means to believe that the Light is all the things described so far in 1:1-9—The Word, God, Creator, Spiritual Life.

“We’re all God’s children”—Not! Only those who believe have the right to become children of God (1:12). This means that those who don’t believe are not God’s children. We are all made in the image of God, but there is some sense in which we are not all God’s children.

1:13

******What in 1:13 shows that being children of God (1:12) requires a spiritual birth rather than a physical birth?** Became a child of God is not a matter of blood, not a fleshly birth, not a matter of the will of the parents, but instead it is a spiritual birth caused by God.

¹⁵ Joseph Thayer, *onoma, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 447-448.

ESV **John 3:3** Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again¹⁶ he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Why do you suppose John felt it necessary to pen 1:13? The Jews falsely thought that they were God's children simply because of their physical birth as ethnic Jews. John is making the point that being a true child of God has nothing to do with one's physical birth. It is a spiritual matter.

******What does 1:14-18 reveal about the Word? Summarize.** The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (1:14), has the glory of the Son of the Father (1:14), is full of grace and truth (1:14), John the Baptist bore witness of him (1:15), is characterized by grace upon grace (1:16), grace and truth came from him (1:17), is the only God, and is at the Father's Side (1:18).

1:14

What is the theological word used for God becoming flesh (1:14)? When God, who is in his essence a spirit being, became a man (Jesus), that is called the incarnation. The "carn" root is found in our word "carnivore" (a flesh eater) and "chili con carne" (chili with flesh).

Word Study: "dwelt" (1:14), from the root *skénoo*; the root noun *skéné*¹⁷ means "tent". God came to earth in a tent of flesh. He pitched his tent among us. The Old Testament word "tabernacle" really just means "tent".

Tabernacle: In the Old Testament, God told the Jews to make a tent, or tabernacle, where God would meet with the people and manifest His glory in a special way. That Old Testament tabernacle was a picture, a shadow of when God would come to earth as Jesus. The Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us.

John wrote that he had seen the "glory" of the Word (1:14). What exactly did John see? What is glory? It is from *doxa* (basis for "doxology"); the root means "brightness, splendor, radiance".¹⁸ It is a similar idea to Jesus being the "light" that shines into the darkness. John saw Jesus' glory in the transfiguration, but more than that John saw Jesus' glory in his teachings, fulfilled prophecy, miracles and signs.

Only

In Jewish thinking, what did it mean to be the "only Son of the Father" (1:14)? See *John 5:18*. The Jews considered themselves collectively to be sons (plural) of God, or individually to a son of God, but only the Messiah was *the* (singular) only Son of the Father. This denotes a special, unique relationship with God.

¹⁶ Or, "from above".

¹⁷ I once heard it taught that "skin" is transliterated from *skéné*, but this is not accurate.

¹⁸ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 203.

ESV **John 5:18b** [Jesus] was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Word Study: “only” (1:14, ESV) is rendered “only begotten” in the KJV, as in John 3:16. It is from *monogenés* and means “only” or “unique” (in kind).¹⁹ The emphasis is not on begotten. It doesn’t mean he was begotten in time; it means He is the only God of God (Messiah) there ever was or will be. Jesus is unique; there is no other like him.

Grace

When John thought about Jesus, the word “grace” came to his mind over and over. John wrote that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (1:14). Then he wrote that Jesus gave him “grace upon grace” (1:16). In 1:17 he repeated that grace and truth came from Jesus. Let’s talk about grace. What is grace? Grace is from *charis*, “undeserved favor.” Everything about Jesus is an undeserved favor from God.

Truth

John concluded 1:14 by declaring Jesus to be “truth”. He wrote it again in 1:17. Jesus, the Word, is a living message who should be believed.

ESV **John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

1:15—John the Baptist

******John the Baptist gets reintroduced in 1:15. What was John the Baptist’s witness (1:15)?** John’s testimony was that he had come to prepare the way for the Lord, and that Jesus was the One! John, who the Jews considered to be a great prophet, declared that Jesus ranked higher than John and existed before John.

1:16-17—Moses

******In 1:16-17, how did John show that Jesus was even greater than Moses?** Moses gave the Law (which was fantastic)—it was God’s truth (!), but Jesus also gave not only the truth but also grace upon grace.

ESV **Romans 7:12** . . . the law is holy . . . and righteous and good.

ESV **Romans 8:3-4** God has done what the law . . . could not do. By sending his own Son . . . in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us . . .

¹⁹ Bauer, 527. Abraham had many sons (Ge 25:1ff), but only Isaac was the *monogenés* son of promise (Heb 11:17).

1:18

Since Jesus is God in the flesh, and John saw Jesus, how is it that no one has ever seen God (1:18)? No one has seen God in His total essence because God is, in his essential nature, a spirit being. The Hebrew word for God, *elohim*, can refer to any spirit being (God is the Creator of all other spirit beings and is the ultimate *elohim*). True enough, Jesus was God in human form, but Jesus was not all there is of God (there is also the Father and the Spirit). However, Jesus is all of God that you will ever see.

John described Jesus as “the only God, who is at the Father’s side” (1:18). This is similar to, “the Word was with God and the word was God” (1:1).

Word Study: “only” (1:18) is from *monogenés*, as in 1:14. Jesus is a unique manifestation of God in human form.²⁰ He is the only member of the Trinity that can be seen.

Word Study: “made known” (1:18). John concluded by writing that Jesus has made the Father known (1:18). “Make known” is from *exegeomai* (basis for “exegete”); *ex* means “out” and *egeomai* means to “lead” or “pull.” Exegesis is the discipline of pulling out of the text its original meaning, thus to explain it and make it known. Jesus exegetes God for us. He explains God for us. Jesus makes Him known.

So What?

According to John, in 1:1-18, who is Jesus? According to John, Jesus:

1. Is the Word (a communication from God), 1:1a.
2. Existed in the beginning with God, 1:1a, 2.
3. Actually is God, 1:1b, 18.
4. Created all things, 1:3
5. Is Life, 1:4
6. Is Light, 1:5, 9.
7. Was not recognized/understood/received by the world or even his own people, 1:5, 10, 11.
8. Was testified to by John the Baptist, 1:6-8, 15.
9. Became flesh and dwelt among us, 1:14.
10. Is full of grace and truth, 1:14.
11. Is greater than John the Baptist, 1:15.
12. Brings the fullness of grace upon grace, 1:16.
13. Brought grace and truth, 1:17.
14. Made the Father known, 1:18.

Based on John 1:1-18, what does Jesus want from you? 1:7, 12-13. John’s Gospel has a universal appeal: Jesus wants you to believe so that you might become a child of God.

You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson NTRF.org 03/29/19

²⁰ Some Greek manuscripts read “only Son” in 1:18 rather than “only God”; either way changes nothing.