

The prologue to the gospel of john religion essay



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The Gospel of John was written by one of Jesus' disciples by the name of John (thus the title of the book). It was written around A. D. 80-95 and the theme of the book is Jesus as the Son of God. We notice in the other Gospels, known as the Synoptics because of the close similarities in each account, that Jesus is portrayed in many different ways. In Matthew he is seen as the King of the Jews and was very much directed to a Jewish audience. In Mark he is seen as the Suffering Servant, which meant a lot to the Romans, to whom this text was directed to. In Luke he is the Perfect Man, an great achievement in the eyes of the Greeks and other Gentiles. Although all these facts are true and can be seen in all the Gospels, John, whose account was written long after the others, was drawn to write an account directed to all believers. John goes into the divinity of Christ and we see this from the very first chapter. In this book, Jesus is the Logos and he is the I AM. In this essay I will only look at the first chapter of John, in particular verses 1 through to 18 and we will first and foremost discuss Christ as the Logos, afterwhich we will look at the three main characteristics of the Logos in terms of his relation to the Father, his relation to the World and his relation to humanity. We will then conclude.

The first thing we notice when we start reading the Gospel of John is it's close similarity to Genesis chapter one verse one and that he introduces his book very differently to the other disciples turned apostles. All the writers begin with a different look to the story of Jesus. Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus from Joseph's line, Luke also uses a genealogy starting point, but from Mary's line, Mark goes straight into Jesus' baptism. But John decided to start from the 'beginning'. Note however that this is not the same beginning as mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Although Genesis

starts with the beginning of creation, John goes beyond that. A. M. Hunter says ' no book ever opened more magnificently. [...] John goes back to the very beginning of history, even beyond it, as to say " There is only one true perspective in which to see this story - you must see it in the light of eternity".'[1]. Therefore, although the Gospel begins in the same way as Genesis, they speak of two different creations. Genesis speaks of the old creation, whereas John speaks of the beginning of a new creation. For John to say ' in the beginning was the Word' already starts proving Jesus' immortality. One might think that he was then a part of Creation. John goes on to say ' and the Word was with God and the Word was God' which not only proves his immortality but goes beyond that to prove his divinity. To go on to say that ' He was in the beginning with God' seems to be a repetition of verse 1, but John actually reinforces what he is saying to show us that Jesus was not a part of creation, but he was a part of the creation process. He was actually the Word that spoke creation into existence. This is shown in two ways: Jesus is firstly referred to as the Word or in Greek, the Logos. What does this mean? A ' word' can be defined as ' a means of communication, the expression of what is in one's mind'[2]. Therefore the verse can be translated ' in the beginning God expressed himself'. However, some still find the translation of logos to word inadequate. One author explains that: To a Jew therefore the Word meant God showing himself in power, wisdom and love. On the other hand, to a Greek, especially if he had read the Stoic philosophers, the Logos meant the Rational Principle permeating all reality. [3]

Even so, in using the term Logos to describe Christ, John presents him as the very Word of God that God himself speaks. Jesus is then referred to as the person through whom 'all things were made'. Jesus is therefore, as we have said before, the very word that brought creation into existence. God continues to speak to us through his Son, who is the Word as explained in Hebrews 1: 1-3. The concept of the Logos is very deep however, which has brought much debate. In this passage, we see the main characteristics of Jesus operating as the Word. We see his relation to the Father first of all. One commentary says 'He was the person existing from eternity, distinct from but in eternal fellowship with the Father'[4]. Next we go on to see Christ's relation to the World in that through him the world was created. And then finally when we go on to read further down in verse 14, we see his relation to humanity. He became flesh and dwelt among us. For the rest of this essay, we will look into these three characteristics.

Looking at the first few verses, in particular verses 1-5, we see the Word's relation to God the Father. This is seen in the fact that the Word has always been in pre-existence with the Father. He was not only in pre-existence with God, but he is God himself. This is also seen in the fact that he possesses attributes of God such as being the Light. God is seen as the light in Old Testament scriptures such as Psalm 4: 6 or Isaiah 2: 5. Jesus is 'the Light of the World' (Matt. 5: 14). In his relation to the Father, Christ can therefore be seen as divine. Their relationship is so strong that 'through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made' (v. 3). We therefore learn that God created through his agent the Word and there is nothing at all that was or could have been created without him. To deny his

existence therefore is to deny that of God. John therefore affirms the pre-existence, the personality and the divinity of Christ in presenting him as the Word.

The Word is not only seen as the light, but he is also Life itself. Hunter explains that ' the Divine Word was the source of life as well as the agent of creation'[5]. He goes on to say that the word ' life' can be referred to as a ' quickening power'[6]and calls the light ' moral and spiritual illumination'[7]. This brings us to the Word's relation to the World, his very own creation. It was through Christ that God the Father created and now sustains, as seen in scriptures such as Colossians 1: 16 and Hebrews 1: 2. In verses 6-7, the author starts by introducing the one who had been called to prepare the way, or to be the witness for the Light that was to come into the world. The author is sure to emphasize that he is the not the light but has only come to testify about the light. As we look into verses 9-10, we see how they tell of the Incarnation of Christ and what happened: ' the Light was coming into the world'. In verse 11, we notice that the world he came to did not recognize him. The word ' own' here appears twice in this verse and could mean the following: the first ' own' could refer to the world in general and the second to his own people in terms of the Israelite who did not receive him. However, when Jesus came to the earth, he came to the people of Israel, who were God's chosen people. Jesus would only be taking to the World through the apostles' work and throughout Church History. This is obviously debatable, but I believe Jesus came unto his own as in his own creation, but his own (as in the people) did not respond or accept. Bruce, who uses the English

Standard Version in his commentary, backs this statement by explaining the Greek term for the word 'own':

'His own place' translated the neuter plural *ta idia*; 'his own people' translates the masculine plural *hoi idioi*. [...] This is not a mere repetition of verse 10; it particularizes what was said more generally there. The Word of God, which came to the world of mankind in general, came in form of special revelation to the people of Israel [...].^[8]

Therefore we see how he relates to the world in that he came into the world and was amongst the people of world, performing miracles, signs and wonders, showing his love, and yet the relationship between Creator and creation is so ruptured to the point where the Creator is put to death on a cross by his very own creation. However, there is hope for the ones who do want to choose to believe in him and he gave these ones the power to be reconciled with him and reborn spiritual.

Let us now look at the word in relation to humanity on a whole. In becoming flesh (v. 14) he became just like the creation. 'In Jesus, God became a human being, having the same nature as humanity, but without sin'^[9].

Through the gateway of human birth, the Incarnation is further explained in verse 14a. The rest of this verse indicates his dwelling among us. This dwelling is translated as Christ making his 'tabernacle' among us. One author explained how the term tabernacle could suggest a temporary stay, as the tabernacle in the Old Testament was a tent that was pitched up to worship God. In this tent, the people would go to worship and experience the power of God. This same author comments that 'the Greek verb *eskenosen*

means literally 'pitched his tent' [...]; the consonants s-k-n would remind the knowledgeable reader of the Hebrew Shekinah, the word the rabbis used for the Divine Presence among his people Israel'[10]. This would explain the following the final part of verse 14, when the author explains that 'we have seen his glory'. The 'we' here most likely refer to the Disciples who were with him, but denotes the idea of the Shekinah Glory concept mentioned earlier.

The rest of the verses seem to carry on from where he left off, in the sense that verses 10-14 seems like a parenthesis between verses 9 and 15, since in verse 15 he goes on to speak about John the Baptist. The author ends this prologue well in saying: 'No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known' (v. 18). Here again, the author proves the deity of Jesus Christ by interchangeably referring to him as God and as the Sent One, showing signs of the Trinity concept, which we are not able to discuss in this essay.

In this essay, we look at the divinity of Jesus Christ. He saw that He is God, he is Creator, He is omnipresent and that he is Light and Life. We then looked at his relation to his Father, to the world and to humanity in general. He was in every sense God but in order to save us he made himself human in every sense. The story of Jesus is now about to be unfolded in the rest of this book, keeping in mind who he really is.