



In the Beginning

Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh.

JOHN 1:1-14

Many people think of Bethlehem as the beginning place for Jesus. The babe in a manger tugs at our hearts. But to appreciate what happened in Bethlehem, we must travel back through time eternal. Then, we may understand Jesus was God the Son—co-eternal, co-equal, and co-existent with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The baby of Bethlehem was the eternal God who took on human flesh to save human beings.

How does knowing a person's beginnings impact how you view them?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOHN 1:1-18

John's Gospel is a historical narrative of Jesus's ministry. John, who wrote the Gospel, was raised with his brother James in Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Their mother's name was Salome. Their father, Zebedee, owned a fishing business. Simon and Andrew worked with them (Matt. 27:56; Mark 1:20; Luke 5:10). One day, while James and John were preparing the fishing nets with their father, Jesus called the two to follow Him. Some biblical scholars believe John was the youngest of the twelve apostles.

John did not begin his Gospel with the birth narrative but by declaring Jesus to be God. His prologue (John 1:1-18) contains four evidences for Jesus's deity. First, Jesus was and is eternal (vv. 1-2). While Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us, He existed as God before time began. We cannot fully understand how God can be one God yet three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet God's Word declares it to be true. That's where John began his Gospel. He didn't try to explain it; he simply proclaimed it.

Second, Jesus is the Creator (v. 3). Genesis began with the pre-existent God who created all things. John started there as well. As the Word, Jesus not only was with God, He was God. John declared that everything came into being through Him.

Third, God sent forth a special witness—John the Baptist—to prepare the way for Jesus (vv. 6-9). The Baptizer bore witness to the Life that was the Light of humanity—a light that can never be overcome.

A fourth argument for the deity of Christ can be found in His incarnation (vv. 10-18). The Word took on human flesh and dwelt among the people for whom He would die. As one of the Twelve, John had seen Him with his eyes, touched Him, heard Him, and walked with Him for over three years. John was a firsthand witness of the incarnate God who lived among His people.

As you read through John 1:1-14, number the descriptors used for Jesus. What do these descriptors reveal about Jesus?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WAS THE WORD (JOHN 1:1-5)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

VERSES 1-2

In the beginning were words Jewish readers would have instantly associated with the opening words of the Book of Genesis. Jews commonly referred to books of the Bible by their first few words, thus they called Genesis, “In the beginning.”

Not until near the end of John’s Gospel do readers find out why he penned his Gospel: that people would believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, they would gain eternal life (see 20:31). John wrote not merely to give an account of Jesus’s life and ministry. He wrote so that his readers might believe and experience life—eternal and abundant. Led by the Holy Spirit, John offered a theological retrospective of Jesus.

The opening phrase, *In the beginning was the Word*, affirms the Word’s existence from eternity past. Why did John speak of *the Word*? Jews understood that God’s Word has power. God spoke and universes came into existence (Gen. 1:3,6-7,9; Ps. 33:6). Healing came through His Word (Ps. 107:20). God’s Word accomplishes what He intends (Isa. 55:10-11).

John also answered Greek philosophical thought, which taught that the Word (in Greek, *logos*) was abstract and impersonal. Stoics believed *logos* was an unknowable principle or force that gave purpose and stability to the universe. John’s Gospel stands in opposition to this teaching.

To say *the Word was with God* affirmed the Word’s existence prior to creation. John made a final connection of the Word’s eternal existence by saying *the Word was God*. John was speaking of the Second Member of the Godhead and laying the foundation for the existence of the Trinity. Paul likewise declared Jesus’s divinity: “For the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in

Christ” (Col 2:9). In verse 2, John reiterated and thus reemphasized the theme of verse 1, the eternal existence of the Word.

Why was it important for John to emphasize that Jesus existed before time?

VERSE 3-5

Having established the Word’s eternal existence, John explained His activity from the beginning using a positive statement and a negative one. Positively, the Word *created* all things; negatively, nothing was created apart from Him. John’s declaration again echoes Genesis 1, which states, “In the beginning God created” (v. 1). Genesis 1:1 shows God’s dual nature: He is and He does. In the same way, the Word is and the Word does; He existed from the beginning and He creates. The New Testament elsewhere proclaims Jesus as the Creator (Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14).

In verses 3-5, John introduced words that serve as themes in his Gospel: *life*, *light*, and *darkness*. These themes represent both the promise and the problem of creation and of God’s new creation. Just as God was the origin of light and life in Genesis, so John declared the Word to be the same. As Creator, Jesus is the origin and sustainer of physical light and life. As Redeemer, He is the origin and sustainer of spiritual light and life. John’s declaration that life was *in him* reinforces the reality of Jesus’s eternal and self-existing nature (see 5:26).

Jesus came as *light* because humans are prone to wander in *darkness*. In verse 5, John introduced the dichotomy of light and darkness, which represent good and evil. John 3:19 says, “The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.” Thus, in his Prologue, John was contrasting the darkness of fallen humanity with the glory of the Word that came as the light.

When introducing the subject of light, John included an element of hope. Since the garden of Eden, the forces of evil have tried to destroy life and obscure the light. Darkness, though, did not win or *overcome* it. As the rest of John’s Gospel will show—neither did death.

What was the significance of pointing out Jesus's role in creation?
How does that reinforce John's argument?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God. (See Matt. 16:16; Phil. 2:5-22.)

MADE KNOWN (JOHN 1:6-8)

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

VERSES 6-8

John interrupted his declarations about the light to feature the one who was a messenger or *witness* of that light *whose name was John*. In establishing the background for the arrival of the Light, John the Gospel writer first introduced John the Baptizer.

John was *sent from God*. As had occurred with Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament, John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, conceived when they were older (Gen. 21:1-3; Luke 1:7-25). Through Abraham, God established His covenant; with John the Baptizer, God was introducing His new covenant. John's Jewish readers would have recognized the significance of the Baptizer being *sent from God*. This verb placed him on the level of Moses and the Old Testament prophets, each of whom the Lord sent with His message (Ex. 3:10-15; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:4-10; 25:4). Further, the Jews would have recognized that John's being sent was a fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy about sending a messenger to clear the way for the Messiah (Mal 3:1). Thus, John the Baptist's arrival and proclamation were an integral part of God's plan.

Using courtroom terminology, the Gospel explains John came to testify not about himself but about *the light*. He came to testify about who the Word was and why He came into the world.

Throughout John's Gospel, more of these witnesses step forward with the same intent. Not only did John the Baptizer have a message, he had a mission—*that all might believe through him*.

The readers of John's Gospel would have included both Jews and Gentiles. The emphasis on John the Baptist's preaching so that all might believe was good news. Regardless of one's ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or age, all were (and are) invited to believe.

Using repetition, John's Gospel declared emphatically that the Baptizer was *not the light* himself; light and life came only through the One he would soon baptize. Like John, believers are messengers sent to tell others about the Light. Being a witness for Jesus is not complicated. We simply tell others what we have discovered about Jesus, how He brought life and light into our lives, and how He can do the same for them.

How might believers help other people believe in Jesus?

IN THE FLESH (JOHN 1:9-14)

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

VERSE 9-13

John the Gospel writer revealed truth in layers. He revealed the Word—but not by name. Similarly, he introduced John as a witness to the arrival of the Word—but told us nothing of John's ministry or work. John was setting the stage to write about the main character of his Gospel. Picking up on the theme of the Word as light, John described Him as the *true light*. The word *true* carries the idea of being authentic, dependable, and complete. In saying

the true light *gives light to everyone*, John was not claiming that all would embrace the light. In fact, not all would. Rather, he was explaining that the light was intended for all and would be available for all to embrace.

Stating that the light *was coming into the world*, John was emphasizing some of the messianic expectations of the first-century Jews (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5; Zech. 9:9). Additionally, he was indicating that the light would be coming in a physical form. This was quite the contrast to the philosophers' teaching that the *logos* was abstract and unknowable. In physical form, the light would be personal, tangible, and knowable.

John typically used *world* not to describe the planet that spins in space but to refer to the realm where people live, with the emphasis being on the people—fallen, rebellious, and immoral people. When the Word appeared, mankind as a whole *did not recognize him*. Thus, people missed the opportunity to know Him.

John moved from the larger context of the world and zeroed in on the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who likewise, as a whole, *did not receive him*. This phrase means they did not take hold of Him. Tragically, the Creator came to His creation and they did not welcome Him.

Those *who did receive him* received something in return. They received it not as a reward; it was something he *gave*. He gave them *the right* or the authority, to be the children of God. In becoming one of His children, people experienced a change of status.

John explained to his readers how that change in status occurs: those who believed and received. Yet John was clear, this was a result of what God had done. It was not by family heritage, human action, or some religious act, but because of the will of God; “it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8b-9).

VERSE 14

Christians often speak of Jesus’s incarnation, which refers to His coming to earth in human form. The word *incarnation* comes from *incarnatus*, which is Latin for “made flesh.” Verse 14 is the clearest statement about the incarnation in the New Testament. It and verse 1 stand together like regal bookends, proclaiming that the Word was God in human form.

God’s Son stepped across the threshold of eternity to dwell *among us*. The Greek word translated *dwelt* literally means “to

tabernacle,” to set up His residence with us. In the Old Testament, the Hebrews understood the tabernacle to be the location where God met His people (Ex. 25:8). In the same way, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us was and is the center of God’s presence for His people.

John could remember when he laid aside his nets; when he saw the blind, crippled, and deaf healed; saw dead raised to life; and saw Jesus transfigured and standing beside Moses and Elijah. John could remember Jesus’s *glory*, which the Father had manifest in His *one and only Son*—who came to reveal God’s *grace and truth*. The imagery is reminiscent of God in His glory passing in front of Moses and revealing His love and faithfulness (Ex. 34:5-7).

The Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, revealing God’s glory, was the exact opposite of the Greek and Roman gods that were imaginary, unapproachable, and unknowable. God’s only Son came to earth in human form. He invites us to follow Him and behold His glory as He works in our lives and in our midst.

How does Jesus becoming human demonstrate the glory of God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Review additional passages in John’s Gospel about Christ’s deity. Read John 4:26; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9; and 17:5-11. Why is it important that we understand Jesus as God the Son and not merely the Son of God? How does John consistently point to the deity of Jesus?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can face the future knowing Jesus created all.
- Believers are messengers sent to tell others about the Light.
- Faith in Jesus secures a person's place in God's family.

Discuss as a group ways of affirming Jesus being God the Son in human flesh during this Christmas season. How can the group make sure that every class or group activity reinforces this truth?

The ancient philosophers believed the *logos* (Word) was distant and aloof. Are there areas of your life where you keep Jesus at arm's length? What steps do you need to take to allow Him to move closer to you?

PRAYER NEEDS
