

The Prolegomena of the Fourth Gospel: Jesus, LORD and YAHWEH.

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Since this is the first passage in the Gospel of John, let's take a short journey into its background.

Most literary sources point with little doubt to the Apostle John as its writer, though he is not specifically mentioned in the book. However, he is always present in the Gospel, and his presence coincides with his described presence in the synoptic gospels.¹ The assignment of the gospel to John was first documented in the second century, close to the date it was written. Irenaeus, a second-century historian was a contemporary of Polycarp, who knew John personally, and wrote "Afterwards John the Apostle of our Lord, the same that lay upon his bosom, also published the gospel, while he was yet in Ephesus of Asia."² This would lead us to hold that, contrary to some church traditions, the gospel was actually written after John was released from his exile in Patmos by Emperor Nerva. Also the writer refers to other Apostles by name, but describes himself as the apostle loved by Jesus.

There is little doubt that the same author wrote the epistles of 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the Revelation. The author was the most masterful writer of New Testament canon, and his unique and complex style is evident in all of these writings. Of particular interest is the way John organizes the Gospel and the Revelation. Both are configured as a recursive sequence of seven sub-parts. There are three major themes in the Gospel, each can be divided into seven parts. Each of these themes can

¹ The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke and is referred to as such because of their common content.

² Eusebius, 164

also be divided into seven parts. The book of Revelation contains a sequence of seven themes, each divided into seven parts. The writer makes masterful use of poetry and symmetry in the text. The concepts of the book are simple enough for a child to understand, yet profound enough for a Biblical scholar to spend a lifetime studying.

Where the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are detailed testimonies of the facts surrounding Jesus' ministry, John concentrates on the theology surrounding those events. This may make it the most important book ever written. It tells who Jesus is, what He did on the cross, how He can be known personally, and how a person can receive eternal life through Him. As such, if one is to have only one Biblical text, the Gospel of John is a good choice. It is also a good source of initial study for a new believer.

The Apostle John was the primary source of the gospel. Much debate surrounds whether the author had the synoptic texts available. There is little doubt as to the collaboration between the Synoptics. The gospel of John was written between 60 A.D. and 95 A.D, an entire generation after the synoptics were written. Irenaeus' statement as well as other recent findings tend to push estimates towards the earlier dates. Those who prefer an earlier date argue that the author of the gospel makes no reference to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. However, unlike the synoptics, John's Gospel is not intended to be a book of history. The oldest New Testament manuscripts are of this book and were found in Egypt, dated between 120 A.D. and 150 A.D. The gospel was written to both Jews and Gentiles without any emphasis on either culture. By the time of the writing, Gentiles made up a large percentage of the church since it had spread so far outside of Jerusalem. John states very clearly his purpose for writing this book in verse 20:31 "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Just as John clearly demonstrated in The Revelation, it is evident that John held that the foundation of the gospel is found in the Old Testament. His gospel combats early forms of Gnosticism and Stoicism, teachings that were finding their way into the early church. Gnostics believed that God was good, because he was spiritual, and all material things were evil.³ The Dosetics used this philosophy to argue that Jesus was a Spirit that appeared to be a man, but was not human. Gnostics had trouble with creation, since they held that all material things were evil, yet God called them good. The ultimate theological consequence of the system was that they denied the deity, incarnation, and purpose of atonement of Jesus, a dangerous philosophy for the early church.

The first eighteen verses of John's book form a unit called the prologue, setting forth the major themes of the book. John is a literary genius, composing the fourth gospel like a great symphony. The themes of the prologue keep recurring throughout the book. This study will focus on the beginning of John's book, an introduction, prologue, or prolegomena.

1. JESUS IS THE WORD.

John 1:1-2. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²The same was in the beginning with God.*

Verses 1 and 2 may have been an early Christian hymn. Scholars point out that the style of these verses seems to be related to common Semitic poetry referred to as stair-step parallelism. Each new line carries forward the controlling idea of the preceding line. Following this pattern of thought the first line would be, In the beginning was the Word. The second line repeats the word, *word*. And the Word was with God. The third line repeats the word *God*, And God is what the Word was. This

³ Doctrine of Eternal Dualism.

form of parallelism is continued in verses 4-5, In Him life was, and the life was the light of men, and the light in the darkness shines, and the darkness cannot extinguish it.

John may have incorporated a hymn or may have written these verses himself. Regardless of their initial source, these are some of the most profound and important biblical verses ever written. They use the word “*word*”, or “*logos*” to communicate their very unique and powerful message. John is attempting to get the attention of all people: Jews, Greeks and Romans, both believers and unbelievers. With one word he opens the hearts and minds of both Jews and Greeks. It is the word *logos* (λογος), Greek for word. The use of this word engages the ancient the *logos* concept, and would get the attention of those he seeks to inform.

John draws this concept both from his Hebrew-Jewish background and the Greek philosophy of the *logos*. In the Old Testament God exists. Out of his existence comes thought. And out of his thought comes action. The acts of God in history become the basis of the theology of the Old and New Testaments. Christianity comes into being by the historical acts of God. Christianity is not just another way of thinking. The salvation of man comes out of certain historical acts that can never be repeated. God’s creation cannot be re-created. Jesus cannot be historically crucified and resurrected again.

John shows that the Word, the *logos*, is more than a sound or a symbol for something else. The Word is God in thought and action; it is the very mind, heart, nature, and power of God, representing both His authority and His works. Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 55:11. *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

The ancient Hebrews believed that once a word was spoken it was alive and went forth to accomplish its intended purpose. This certainly affects our understanding of Genesis 1, when God said, *Let there be light*. God spoke, and his word went forth to obey his command. On the human level we have some power similar to this. For example, if I see you walking ahead of me and I call your name you will turn your attention to me. By speaking your name my words achieve their purpose and I have some control over you. Words have the power to create action. This concept is very ancient. Some ancient kings had names that only their families knew. They believed that anyone who knew their names had some power over them.

We have seen this concept illustrated in the biblical account of the creation of mankind. God breathed into man the breath of life, His wind. Words are made with wind, so in a sense the image of God in man is connected with man's ability to speak words.

Even today in the deserts of the near East, where the people live much as they did in the time of the ancient patriarchs, if a man with his son were to meet an enemy who curses them, the man will sometimes throw his son to the ground and fall on top of him so that the curses will not harm him. This is similar to what you might do if someone with a gun threatened to fire at your child.

Also, after the Babylonian exile, "word" and "wisdom" became equated and used interchangeably to describe a mediating force between God and His people."^{4,5} Wisdom was personified and served as God's representative on earth, having been with God in creation."⁶

⁴ Pierce, Rice A. Word. *Biblical Illustrator*, 5(1). Fall 1978. p. 81.

⁵ Proverbs 8:15-30.

⁶ Hull, William E. "John". *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman Press, (1970). p. 185.

The earliest known reference to the logos concept is found in Ephesus about 700 B.C., espoused by the ancient philosopher Heraclitus. Again, Ephesus is the city where many scholars believe John wrote this gospel. Heraclitus was one of the first philosophers to teach that the world was in a state of flux. Everything was constantly changing. But at the center of all this change Heraclitus proposed a principle that gave the world order and cohesion. This principle he called the *logos spermatikos* or initial, seminal reason, the fundamental principle of orderliness in the universe.⁷ The Stoics also considered the logos as the stability given to the universe by God. This concept implies that there is a mind behind the universe that gives it order.

The man who attempted to relate Jewish wisdom with Greek wisdom was a respected Jew from Alexandria named Philo. "Philo uses the term *logos* to express the concept of a mediator between the transcendent God and the universe, an immanent power active in creation and revelation, but though the logos is often personified, it is never truly personalized."⁸

The logos also had a Christian background even before John wrote his gospel. According to the book of Acts the early Christians consider the work of the Apostles a ministry of the word.⁹ They consider this work so important that deacons are appointed so the Apostles can be given to prayer and the ministry of the Word, the *Logos*. This concept established priorities in the church.

The writer of the Fourth Gospel is not the first to use the term *logos*, but he is the one who gave it full meaning. He uses it in such a way that it is intelligible to Greeks, Jews and Christians alike. In John 1:1, the phrase "the Word was God" is

⁷ Wood, Darryl. John's Use of Logos. *Biblical Illustrator* 15(1). Fall 1988. p.. 73

⁸ Howard, W. Fred, Jesus' Use of Figurative Language . *Biblical Illustrator*. 20(3), Spring 1994. p 57

⁹ Acts 6:4.

significant, because the Greek text does not have the article before the word *God*. In Greek the article usually occurs before a noun like *God*. When the article is omitted the noun becomes like an adjective. It describes. In this case it leaves room for the personality of Christ. These verses also stress both the unity and the distinction between the *logos* and *God*.

In Genesis chapter 1, we see similarities to John chapter 1. Both books begin with the words, "In the beginning." The article does not appear in any of the early manuscripts, so the statement is more accurately, "In beginning." This can have a dramatic effect upon our understanding of the phrase in that it "does not point to a definite place and time that would indicate an historical reference, but points to just beyond the phrase to what comes after. The writer was saying, 'here it is where it all starts.' What comes after the opening in Genesis is the word, "God", and what follows after the phrase in John is "Word."¹⁰

John is teaching that Christ was in the beginning with God. Eternity encounters time as the Word existed with God and then comes into humanity. William Hull states, "One basic purpose of the prologue or introduction is to identify the historical Jesus with the eternal Logos and thereby contend that what men heard in his brief ministry is what God has always been trying to say to the world."¹¹ Hull also points out that the purpose of the prologue in stating that the word existed in the beginning was to show that Jesus was ageless, older than the Old Testament Scriptures and the ancient patriarchs.

Also, John used the *logos* concept to assert that Jesus Christ was deity by His nature. "The Word is God" does not blur the distinction between the personal quality of the Word and the personal quality of God. Jesus existed eternally on an equality

¹⁰ Wright, G. Al Jr. John 1 and Genesis 1. *Biblical Illustrator*, 20(2). Winter 1994. p. 21.

¹¹ Ibid. Hull.

with God, even as God Himself. He possessed the fullness of deity.^{12, 13}

2. JESUS IS THE AGENT OF CREATION.

John 1:3. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

The *Word* is the agent of creation. John attacks contemporary Gnosticism by establishing a relationship between spirit and matter. The Gnostics did not believe that God created matter. John shows that the God of the Old Testament is like Jesus who is the Word. The idea is that the world belongs to God by the right of creation. This means that the source of the material world is spiritual. Therefore, the world will ultimately be judged by spiritual values. This also gives ownership of all creation to the creator. Nothing that we see or handle belongs to us, but ultimately to God. We find that we are merely stewards of the objects of this universe that we have contact with. Other scriptures place this concept into a similar context where people are responsible for the care of God's creation; they are not the owners of it.

3. JESUS IS LIFE AND LIGHT.

John 1:4-5. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

These verses dramatize the stark contrast of light and darkness. In Genesis, Chapter 1, darkness was upon the face of the deep and God said, "Let there be light." Darkness represents the

¹² Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. . 1974. p. 238.

¹³ Gritz, Sharon. The "Word" in John's Gospel. *Biblical Illustrator*, 20(2). Winter, 1994. p. 2.

whole of the spiritual world that opposes Christ. Just as darkness is the absence of light, satan, evil, crime, ignorance, the absence of good and the lack of Godly knowledge embodies the absence of truth. The Gospel of John uses darkness to illustrate an existence without Christ. For example, in John 6:17 the disciples are in the boat at night without Jesus. Judas goes into the darkness in John 13:30. Mary Magdalene comes in the darkness to the tomb. First, she is in the literal physical darkness, and second she is in the darkness of grief and despair, because she thinks Jesus is dead. She is also in the darkness of ignorance, because she does not know that Jesus is alive. In John we see the journeys people take are often from darkness to light. Nicodemus comes in the darkness of the night to meet Jesus, the light of the world.¹⁴

In the concept of darkness John presents Jesus' first wall of resistance. Darkness signifies more than physical darkness. It represents a dark kingdom. In verse 5, the word translated *comprehended it not* (KJV) or *extinguish* (NIV) describes a darkness that has never fully comprehended, understood or discerned the meaning of the light. Paul writes to the Romans, that to the lost the preaching of the cross is foolishness, but to those who believe it is the power of God unto salvation.¹⁵ The darkness has never been able to overcome or extinguish the light. The aorist tense of the verb in verse five implies that there has never been a single instance of such a defeat. The light of Jesus has complete power over darkness.

The metaphor is aptly illustrated by the illumination of a bright light in a darkened room. With the absence of light, darkness permeates every corner of the room. However, when the light is lit, darkness is powerless to remain. Darkness can only exist when the light is blocked by some other means. Darkness flees the advance of the light at an unimpeded speed of 300 million meters per second. Likewise, satan has no power over the Spirit

¹⁴ John 3:1.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:18.

of God. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."¹⁶ Here John stresses his basic themes of life and light. By *life* he means more than existence. He means that Jesus is the source of life, and a life that is abundant in blessings. He has just written about the Word living in relationship with God. The word is the quality of God's life. The chief task of Jesus, according to John is to bring the message of God's life or eternal life to us.

The message from many of our pulpits is "try harder, do the best you can, lift yourself up, life is worth living." If we read John's words carefully, we should question whether life is worth living at all without Jesus, and we find that the only true source for our success in this world is God. Why? Because Jesus *is* the life of God. Without Jesus there is no life, only existence.¹⁷

In God's early relationship with man, He presented Himself as light, the Shekinah glory that was the burning bush to Moses, the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day, leading the tribe of Israel out of Egypt into the promised Canaan land, residing over the tabernacle and Temple for 1200 years until God's light departed when Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon. We saw that light return to the shepherds at Jesus' birth.¹⁸ John presents Jesus as the light and the life of men. Jesus calls himself the "light of the world."¹⁹ Jesus even goes further and tells his disciples prior to His ascension that they are the light of the world.²⁰ Thus, His people are children of the light.²¹

*Our physical lives depend on light from the sun.
Our spiritual lives depend on light from the Son.*

¹⁶ James 4:7.

¹⁷ John 3:16, 5:26, 5:40, 10:10, 10:28, 14:6, 20:31.

¹⁸ Luke, Chapter 2.

¹⁹ John 8:12, 9:5.

²⁰ Matthew 5:14-16, the Sermon on the Mount.

²¹ John 12:36.

4. JESUS IS ETERNAL.

John 1:6. *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

Verses 6-8, compose a section about John the Baptist, the first witness to the Light, the last and the greatest of the prophets. One of the purposes of the Fourth Gospel is to place John the Baptist in proper perspective. Evidently some people were turning their attention on John the Baptist, holding him too high in esteem and neglecting the supreme importance and deity of Jesus. In fact we read in Acts that Paul found in Ephesus, where this gospel was probably written, a group who knew only of John's baptism. Similar problems still exist. For some people the task of preaching is only to point to condemnation: "repent or you will perish in the fires of hell." Jesus' message certainly speaks of repentance, judgment, and hell, but his message is always packed with promise, hope, and joy. Jesus came preaching, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But he spoke of the kingdom of heaven as feasts, parties and celebrations. He was saying, repent, or you will miss Gods great party.

Jesus said that John the Baptist was one of the greatest of men, but John the Baptist made no such claim for himself.²² As Jesus' first cousin, John the Baptist knew Jesus and understood his own purpose clearly. He was to point people to Jesus, the Lamb of God.²³ He knew he was a witness to Jesus. Who is a witness? A witness is one who testifies about what he has seen. If a person has not seen anything he is only reporting hearsay; he cannot be a witness. John was a man sent from God to be a witness to the light, a prophet sent from God, but that did not keep him out of Herod's jail nor did it keep him from losing his life to Herod's sword.

²² Matthew 11:11.

²³ John 1:29.

John 1:7-9. *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

There are two barriers that stand between the Word and its fulfilled purpose: the world and Jesus' own people. There are two at least words in the Greek text that can be translated *true*. However, there is a shade of difference in their meaning. One word means true as opposed to false. The other word means real or genuine instead of a fake or a substitute. This latter usage is the word John uses in verse 9. Jesus is the real light, the genuine light from God. John is speaking to those of Platonic philosophy who saw everything in the world as a form or shadow of the real thing. John states that Jesus is the "real thing." The real light has come to illuminate people's lives. This is a statement about God's great love for all people. It also implies that all people are responsible for the light they have been given. General or natural revelation advocates that enough of God is revealed in the human heart for all people to have some knowledge or awareness of God. When John says that Jesus is the true or the real light we might immediately think of the book of Romans where Paul points out that in a fallen world people substitute things for God. With Jesus there is no need for substitution.

John 1:10-11. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ¹¹He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

This is a sad verse. John reminds us that Jesus is incarnation of the Eternal Creator who came to visit his own creation so that He might bring them to Himself. God called the Jewish people to be a nation of priests to the world, He delivered them out of

slavery in the Exodus, He gave them the law and the prophets that point the way to the Messiah, and He finally sent the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But when the Messiah came, they rejected him. The phrase, "there was no room in the inn,"²⁴ is symbolic of the lack of a place for him in the world he created or among the people he chose. Even today, there are few who will make room in their lives for Jesus. It is the rejection of God's grace through Jesus Christ that separates people from the life and light that John describes. Rejection of Jesus is a rebellion against God that cannot be forgiven, and will serve to separate one from God for all eternity. However, there is good news:

5. JESUS IS THE GIVER OF LIFE

John 1:12. *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

This verse explains how people become children of God. John frequently uses some form of the term *children* to refer to believers, avoiding the use of the term *son*. He always uses the term *Son* to refer to Jesus. In verse 12 all who receive, believe, trust, and rely upon Jesus are given the authority, or empowerment, to become children of God. They did not possess this power by themselves, nor can they attain it by themselves. They were given the authority by God only by virtue of His own love for His creation through His graceful nature. The term *power* refers to the ability to completely accomplish a task, *dunamis*, like dynamite has the power to move mountains. A wrestler has power to throw another man to the mat; whereas, a policeman who directs traffic does not have the power to stop an automobile with his hand, but he does have the authority to stop the automobile. The driver of the automobile knows that the authority of the policeman's hand symbolizes the power of

²⁴ Luke, Chapter 2.

the state to revoke his license, place him under arrest, and remove him from the highway.

This verse reserves this power to those who believe on his name. Note that it does not say to "believe in Jesus." There is a critical difference. Even satan believes in Jesus and he trembles.²⁵ In Jewish tradition a person's name reflected the nature and character of a person. To believe in His Name was to believe in His character, to accept Him for all He truly is including Savior and LORD. Therefore, one becomes a child of God when one receives Jesus, the Word, by believing in his character, who He is and what He has done on the cross, appropriating that belief in faith, and acting on that belief by acceptance of His Lordship. This satan cannot do.

John 1:13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

This verse continues to describe how we become children of God: not by bloods (plural in the Greek, referring to a noble birth) nor because we can will it to be so, but because God alone wills it to be so. This negates the argument that we can obtain salvation by our own good works, since any such salvation is one of self-will.

God is the only source of the authority and power to save, and He takes the initiative in His act of grace. The word *born* could be translated *begotten of God*. In Scripture the word *begotten* is used of a father's producing a child, and the word *born* is used to describe the mother's part in the process. This is how the believer is related to the New Covenant. Born of an earthly mother a Christian is also begotten of God, the Father.

²⁵ James 2:19.

6. JESUS IS THE LORD WITH US.

John 1:14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

These verses are the climax of the prologue. In the context of the entire prologue of Gohn's Gospel, verse 14 may be one of the most important verses in Scripture and certainly significant to John's readers.²⁶ This statement is one of the most clear arguments that defend Jesus as the Messiah, the incarnation of God, YAHWEH, Himself. The *Word* becomes flesh. The One whom John has heretofore clearly described as the *logos*, the agent of creation and the one power of salvation, is described as taking on human form. The term *flesh* here refers to the physical body, soul and spirit, and not sinful flesh as used by other writers. The Greeks could hardly imagine a God who would actually be involved in human redemption. "For his readers who were Greek-speaking Jews or readers of the Greek Old Testament, the fact that God has dwelt with us would be reminiscent of the Septuagint's use of the term to refer to the tabernacle where God met with Israel before the temple was built.²⁷ "In the Word, God Himself entered human history. Jesus became a real skin-and-bones person. Without surrendering His essential divinity, the Word became a person and took up residence among humanity."²⁸ To the Jewish people for God to become a human was the height of blasphemy, the charge they levied against Jesus in his final trials. The Jews did not, and still do not understand their own

²⁶ Priest, Michael. To Tabernacle. *Biblical Illustrator*, 31(4) Summer 2005. P. 68.

²⁷ Carson, D.A. The Gospel According to John. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991. p. 1122.

²⁸ Ibid. Gritz, Sharon. The "Word" in John's Gospel. *Biblical Illustrator*, 20(2). Winter, 1994. p. 8.

Scripture, particularly the prophecies that describe who the Messiah is.

John's *Word*, *logos*, is the reason, or mind of God, who became a man. The Word became flesh like us. The Word shared in our plight as human beings. The phrase translated *dwelt among us* literally can be translated from the Greek *pitched his tent* among us. It is the word from which we obtain the word, "tabernacle,"²⁹ and came to refer to God's dwelling place.³⁰ His presence as demonstrated in the ancient tent of the tabernacle with its pillar of fire, God's presence, witnessed by Israel for 1200 years. "When referring to God, no longer did the words speak of transitory structures or temporary dwellings, but rather to that which is fixed and constant."³¹ In John's writing these terms appear infrequently, but are incredibly important theologically. He used them in Revelation 13:6; 15:5; and 21:3 to speak of God's dwelling and presence.³²

The word translated dwell is *eskenosen*. The Greek root is from a noun meaning *tent*. The sound of this Greek word is also in the Hebrew word *Shekinah*, that illustrates, demonstrates, and speaks of the glory of God as He "enters" into the Tabernacle of Israel to dwell among his people. John is announcing that Jesus is the glory of God come to dwell among his people. John adds to this, "We beheld his glory." The word *beheld* could be better translated *discerned*. It is the word *etheasametha*, and it means more than to see or to look at. It means they fully observed and discerned God in Him. They saw and understood, and are now witnesses to the truth. John's knowledge is first-

²⁹ Exodus 25:9.

³⁰ 2 Chronicles 6:1-2.

³¹ Michelis, Wilhelm. *Skene, skeno, skenouma, skeunou, episkenou*. TDNT, Vol. 7, Gerhard Kittle, trans. G.W. Bromley. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 1971. P. 368-85.

³² Mounce, Robert M. The Book of Revelation. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F.F. Bruce. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977. p. 255, 289, 372.

hand, not hearsay or learned knowledge. Thus, God's glory, once restricted to the tabernacle is now visible in Jesus.³³

The word translated glory is *doxan* from which our English word doxology comes. The Old Testament reaches its greatest point when God's glory appears. When God comes to dwell in the tabernacle, the glory of God is so powerful that Moses cannot enter it. When Moses received the tablets inscribed with the words of the Ten Commandments the glory of God came upon him. Glory is the revelation of God's divine character in perfection and power. In John's gospel, glory also refers to praise to God or Christ. The word *glory* is extremely difficult to define. It declares the greatest, the supreme, the ultimate. The *only begotten* means to be born to a father, the unique one, or no one else like him. Everything appears as nothing when compared with Christ. Though John refers to all Christians as begotten children of God, Jesus' status as God's *begotten* is unique. He is the one and only firstborn, full of glory, grace, and truth. These are two extremely significant words in the fourth gospel. The first word is *charitos*, grace. Grace is always connected with the unmerited favor of God. In the Old Testament it is because of God's grace that he chooses Israel. Grace is also connected with God's forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament.³⁴ Jesus is the embodiment of God's grace in the New Testament.³⁵ The Old Testament and the New Testament are tied together by God's grace. It is God's grace alone that restores mankind's fellowship with Himself.

Truth, *altheias*, is the second significant word used here. In John's gospel, truth basically means undiluted reality, the real thing, or what is left when everything is stripped away. Pilate asked Jesus in a modern cynical fashion, "What is truth?" Pilate was, no doubt, well-educated and traveled in circles of culture

³³ Burge, Gary M. John. *The NIV Application Commentary: from biblical text ... to contemporary life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. P. 59.

³⁴ Exodus 34:6-7

³⁵ 1 Peter 5:12.

and sophistication where the ideas of the philosophers were openly and frequently discussed; so, he did not wait for some backwoods teacher to expound his theory of truth. In philosophy there are at least three theories about truth; the correspondence theory, the coherence theory, and the pragmatic theory. In the correspondence theory something is true if it coincides with actual fact. In the coherence theory something is true if it cohesively holds together a system. In pragmatic theory something is true if it works. Jesus fulfills all of these. Truth for the fourth gospel is not some far off abstraction or theory. It is who Jesus is, and what Jesus does.³⁶

7. JESUS IS THE LORD: YAHWEH.

John 1:15. *John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spoke, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.*

This verse brings us back to the witness of John the Baptist and shifts the emphasis from John to Jesus. John has left an indelible impression upon the people. In modern times a group who still follow John the Baptist was discovered in Persia. Jesus himself had acknowledged that no greater man than John had ever lived. The fourth gospel, however, is always careful to identify John only as the one who made the way for Jesus.

Isaiah 40:3-5. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: ⁵And the glory of*

³⁶ John 3:21; 8:32; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 8:37.

the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it"

John 1:16-17. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. ¹⁷For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

This verse has the phrase *grace upon grace*. The idea is that God's grace is more than sufficient for any need. Our needs are different at various times, but God's grace is always sufficient. Throughout the Old Testament we are shown man's inability to attain righteousness under the law. Because of our sinful nature, demonstrated first in the rebellion of Adam and Eve, we simply cannot perfectly obey a set of rules. The result of that rebellion is demonstrated in the experience of Israel until finally God's Shekinah Glory departed from the Temple 400 years before Jesus was born. Israel was separated, spiritually, from God, and was destroyed as a political nation. God no longer interacted with the Jews as He had done before. God taught us a simple lesson, that we cannot attain righteousness on our own strength. Jesus, the incarnate YAHWEH, came to clearly communicate and fulfill God's plan of grace, a plan that was always a part of God's purpose, but through Jesus was fully revealed. Before the testimony of Jesus, man was "without excuse"³⁷ because the presence of God is obvious to all people whom He created in *His image*. However, with the coming of Jesus, God's purpose of grace was literally explained and demonstrated, so there is an opportunity for every person, without regard to any earthly state, to become a child of God. The law serves to condemn the sinner, but grace serves to lift the sinner to God's throne of grace through the atoning act of Jesus on the Cross.

³⁷ Romans, Chapter 1.

John 1:18. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

Jesus is able to reveal God because of his intimate relationship of unity with Him. The phrase *in the bosom of the father* is an idiom, an expression of deepest intimacy, similar to the closeness of a nursing baby closely embraced into a mother's breasts. We find the phrase again in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus dies and goes to the bosom of Abraham.

The prologue, the first eighteen verses of John's gospel, sets the stage for the remainder of the book. In this introduction we find the message of the book in a nutshell, and if we believe its words to be true, we have little choice but to respond in faith. We see the uniqueness of Jesus, the Word, the Creator, the Life, and the Light.

He truly is God's perfect Man and man's perfect God.