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Jesus: The Word *(John 1:1–14)*

THE WORD AND GOD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1:1, 2).

John began by discussing the relationship of “the Word” (λόγος, *Logos*) and Deity (1:1), including the eternity, personality, and nature of the Word. *Logos* appears four times in the Prologue (1:1, 14). Whether John’s use of *Logos* came from a Greek, Jewish, or some other background is unknown. It is equally difficult to determine exactly what John meant by the term. For the Greeks, it would denote the whole realm of thought, the abstract rational principle lying behind the universe. Leon Morris noted that John’s use of *Logos* would have been widely recognized by the Greeks and that, though the average person would not know its full significance, he would know that it referred to “something supremely great in the

universe.”¹ Even so, John’s Gospel does not appear to reflect a Greek background for at least two reasons. (1) The Greeks thought of the gods as being detached from the world and rather indifferent to the state of human existence. (2) One cannot overlook that John 1:1 immediately calls attention to Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning”), while the idea of “the Word” calls attention to the repeated statement “Then God said” in Genesis 1. Also, like Moses, John used words like “life,” “light,” and “darkness.” In the Jewish mind, the Word focused on a person, not some abstract impersonal force. The Word is an effective agent to accomplish God’s will (see Psalm 33:6), perhaps “a description of Jesus from the [Old Testament] designating Him as the divine and ultimate Revealer of God’s wisdom and power.”² Much as one’s words reveal his heart and mind, Jesus revealed and explained God (see John 1:18). Whatever one’s view of the background of the term may be, John was making a claim that Jews and Greeks would equally understand. He chose a term that was in common use; but he used it to refer to a divine being who is the expression of God’s will, the creative and sustaining power of the universe (see Colossians 1:15–17).

First, John focused on the *eternality* of the Word: “In the beginning” (1:1a). While the Gospel of Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus and Matthew and Luke begin with the birth of Jesus, John’s Gospel

¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 103.

²Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 175.

takes the reader back to the eternal purpose of God. The introductory phrase appears to be an allusion to the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, named for its opening words, "In the beginning." Whereas Genesis begins with the creation, John's Gospel begins before the creation. The Word was before all else. The importance of "in the beginning" can be seen when contrasted with "from the beginning" in 1 John 1:1. The latter draws attention to that which took place from the beginning on; John 1:1 declares that in the beginning the Word was already there.

The timeless existence of the Word is underscored by the verb "was" (ἦν, *ēn*). It is the imperfect of εἶμι (*eimi*), which means "to be." In this context, the language refers to an eternal, unchanging being. It is significant that ἦν (*ēn*) was used, implying eternal existence, rather than ἐγένετο (*egeneto*), meaning "to come into existence" (see 1:3, 6, 14). Verse 6 says, "There came [*egeneto*] a man sent from God, whose name was John." John the Baptist "came" into being, but the Word "was" in the sense of eternally existing. B. F. Westcott summed it up this way: ". . . St John lifts our thoughts *beyond* the beginning and dwells on that which 'was' when time, and with time finite being, began its course."³ John showed that the Word has existed from all eternity and refuted the idea that Jesus was a created being (a false teaching held by the ancient Arians as well as some modern-day groups⁴).

³B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1881; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 2.

⁴Arius (early fourth century) taught that Jesus and the Father do not have an identity of essence and that Jesus was a created being. This teaching is advocated today by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Second, John emphasized the *personality* of the Word: “The Word was with God” (1:1b). The Greek preposition *πρός* (*pros*, “with”) can suggest either the translation “with God,” indicating accompaniment, or the translation “towards God,” showing relationship. These concepts are so important that John repeated the expression in 1:2. The Word existed in the beginning, and He existed in the closest possible association with the Father. The preposition *pros* is used in such passages as Mark 6:3, where some asked in astonishment, “Are not His sisters here *with* us?” (emphasis added). Merrill C. Tenney observed that the preposition “implies association in the sense of free mingling with the others of a community on terms of equality.”⁵ The *Logos* and God do not just exist side by side, but are in constant fellowship with one another. This shows a differentiation between the two and refutes any idea that would suggest that the *Logos* and God are identical (a false teaching promoted by ancient Sabellians and some present-day groups⁶).

Third, John discussed the *personal nature* of the Word: “The Word was God” (1:1c). In this clause, the Greek word for “God” (*θεός*, *Theos*) is employed without the article, unlike the second clause in which the article is used. John apparently excluded the article here in order to avoid making “the Word” and

⁵Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 64.

⁶Sabellius (third century) taught that the Godhead is not made up of a plurality of Persons, but only one—Jesus, who manifested Himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This teaching is currently promulgated by the United Pentecostals. For a discussion of the Godhead and the teachings of the United Pentecostal Church, see David Lipe and Billy Lewis, *The Lipe-Lewis Debate on Pentecostalism* (Winona, Miss.: J. C. Choate Publications, 1984).

“God” identical. Without the article, the emphasis is on quality, indicating God as a kind of being—namely, One possessed with the very essence of Deity.⁷ Thus, the clause identifies the Word as being fully God,⁸ without identifying Him as God the Father (see 1:14, 18).

To render the clause as “the Word was a god,” as does the *New World Translation* (NWT),⁹ is to deny the eternity of the Word. This translation is theologically biased, and authentic scholarship to support this idea is lacking. The translators allege that this should be the rendering of the clause because there is no article before *Theos*. However, the translators of the NWT depart from their arbitrary rule in the same context, where *Theos* without the article is translated “God” with a capital letter “G” (see 1:6, 12, 13, 18; NWT).

In *A New Translation of the Bible*, James Moffatt rendered the clause as “the Logos was divine,” yet this seems too weak. If John had wanted to say “divine,” he could have used the adjective θεῖος (*theios*); but it would not have captured his meaning here. Even Christians “may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). John did not just say there is something divine about the Word; he affirmed that the Word (Jesus) is God in His very nature. The NEB captures the true significance of this Word when it says, “What God was, the Word was.”

⁷For further study, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 266–69.

⁸See 1:18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 Jn. 5:20.

⁹*New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, rev. ed. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1951), 773–75. This is a translation issued by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

While verse 2 (“He was in the beginning with God”) does not add to the content of verse 1, it repeats the points about the eternality of the Word and the close relationship the Word has with the Father. The repetition of these thoughts emphasizes the great importance of the Word.

THE WORD AND CREATION

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:3–5).

Having established the relationship of the Word and Deity, John next discussed the relationship of the Word and creation. If the *Logos* is the revealer of God’s wisdom and power, it seems only natural that John would discuss the relationship of the *Logos* to the creation. John’s discussion of the creation is found in three verses which make two distinctive points about the creation in general and the creation of life in particular.

First, concerning the creation in general, John said, “All things came into being through Him” (1:3a). Everything came into being and owes its very existence to the Word (see 1:10b). The verb translated “came into being” (ἐγένετο, *egeneto*) is aorist in tense and indicates that the creative activity was a single event (not a process), in contrast to the continuous existence of the Word in 1:1, 2. All things came into being “through” (διὰ, *dia*) Him, not “by” Him. The use of “through” instead of “by” ensures the truth that the Father is the source of all things, while the Word

functioned as the agent in creation (see 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Both the Father and the Word were at work in the creation, but the Father created through the agency of the Word.

It is characteristic of John to emphasize a particular concept by making a claim in the affirmative, followed immediately by the same claim stated in the negative. Therefore, after affirming that all things were made through Him, he made it clear that without the Word not one thing was made: "Apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (1:3b).

Second, John discussed the key element in creation, namely, the creation of "life" (ζωή, *zōē*; 1:4a). The Greek word translated "life" is used thirty-six times in the Gospel of John, while there are over 130 occurrences in the entire New Testament. Therefore, about a quarter of all the references to life are found in John's Gospel. Frequently, "life" in the Gospel refers to eternal life, with the word "eternal" (αἰώνιος, *aiōnios*) being used seventeen times in John. (Matthew is next in frequency, using the word six times.) In this context, "life" should be understood in an all-inclusive sense of the term. Life is in the *Logos*. The *Logos* has the right and the power to give "life," to make alive (see 5:21). Without the *Logos*, there would be no life. Life does not exist by its own right, but owes its existence to the Word. A characteristic of John is the use of words with double meanings, and this is probably the case with "life." While the term "life" can be applied to creatures found throughout the earth, it also encompasses that which is found in the spiritual realm. For this reason, the NIV speaks of the Word as "that life." John regularly associates the Word with life (see, for example, 3:16; 10:10).

Not only is the Word the embodiment and source of life, but He is also the source of light: "The life was the Light of men" (1:4b; "that life was the light of all mankind"; NIV). The Word which is life Himself is also the one true "Light of men." Just as the first result of God's creative activity was light (Genesis 1:3), all the light mankind has is a result of the Word.

Beginning in 1:5, John discussed the ways in which the Word is manifested. Having established that the Word is Light, John pointed out that "the Light shines in the darkness" (1:5a). It is the essential action of light (φῶς, *phōs*) to shine in the darkness, to dispel darkness. Up to this point, the text has been in the past tense; but now it changes to the present, saying that "the Light shines." The Word, the Light of the world, continuously shines. The Light never ceases to shine in "the darkness," which refers to the evil environment over which the devil reigns.

The NASB translates the next clause as "the darkness did not comprehend it" (1:5b). A margin note in the NIV has "understood." While one definition of καταλαμβάνω (*katalambanō*) is "to understand," that is not the idea here. The word can also mean "to seize" or "to overcome." Other versions more accurately render it as "overcome" (NIV; NRSV) or "overpower" (NJB; NCV) in 1:5 (see 12:35). Therefore, the Light is shining in an evil environment, and such an environment is unable to overcome it. The resistance of the Light to the darkness and the inability of the darkness to overcome the Light is a vital theme in John.

THE WORD AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light (John 1:6-8).

The Light shines in a world of darkness, the sad spiritual state that was the setting in which John the Baptist came on the scene. John, the author of the Gospel, never wrote the designation “John the Baptist,” perhaps thinking that no other John could be confused with him.¹⁰ The author made distinctions between other persons. For example, “Judas (not Iscariot)” distinguishes the man in 14:22 from Jesus’ betrayer; but no other John besides John the Baptist is prominent in the book. It has been traditionally thought that the lack of focus on any other John in the Gospel supports the view that John the son of Zebedee authored the Gospel. John the Baptist is one of the most important persons in the New Testament, being mentioned by name about ninety times. John 1:6-8 makes three points about this great man, in regard to his person, his work, and his position.

Concerning his person, John was “a man sent from God” (1:6). He was “sent” as an authoritative and personal representative of God, just like Moses (Exodus 3:10-15), the prophets (Isaiah 6:8; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; 35:15), and even Jesus Himself (John 3:17). Unlike Christ, who was both God and man, John was a mere “man”—a human being, rather than any other kind of being. Jesus is the eternal Word who became

¹⁰The identification “John the Baptist” is used in each Synoptic Gospel (see Matthew 3:1; 11:11, 12; Mark 1:4; 6:14; Luke 7:20, 33).

flesh, while John was merely flesh. John's limitation of the flesh is also noted by the word "came." This points to a definite moment in time, in contrast to the Word, who forever "was," indicating timeless existence (1:1, 2). "Came" is from γίνομαι (*ginomai*), the same word translated "made" (KJV; NIV) three times in 1:3, emphasizing the act of creation.

Regarding his work, John "came as a witness, to testify about the Light" and lead people to "believe" (1:7). Consistent with the purpose of his Gospel as stated in 20:30, 31, John wished to present evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. To that end, he gave signs and called attention to testimony from various sources. The noun "testimony" or "witness" (μαρτυρία, *marturia*) is a key word in John, occurring fourteen times in fourteen different verses. The related verb occurs thirty-three times in this Gospel, but only twice in the Synoptics (Matthew 23:31; Luke 4:22). Clearly, both the noun and the verb forms of the word rendered "witness" were important words for John, who used them more than anyone else in the New Testament. Although the Synoptic Gospels speak of John's preaching of repentance, the Gospel of John speaks of John only as one who bore witness to Jesus. Though John was the baptizer, references to his work of baptizing appear incidental (see 1:24–28, 31–33; 3:23; 4:1, 2); but the Gospel contains repeated references to his work as a witness (1:7, 8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26, 28; 5:33).

The author of the Gospel specified testimony from several witnesses concerning the deity of Christ: the Father (5:31, 32, 34, 37; 8:18), Jesus Himself (8:14, 18; see 3:11, 32; 18:37), the Spirit (15:26; see 16:14), the works of Jesus (5:36; 10:25; see 14:11; 15:24), the

Scriptures (5:39; see 5:45, 46), John the Baptist (5:33; see 1:19-36), and a number of human witnesses (15:27; see 19:35; 21:24). Witness or testimony is a serious matter as the legal means of substantiating a particular truth. John insisted that there is good evidence for what he claimed in his Gospel, and he wanted his readers to understand that his claims are trustworthy.

Regarding his position, John “was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light” (1:8). The contrast between Jesus and John continues to be emphasized. William Hendriksen noted this contrast as follows:¹¹

<i>Jesus</i>	<i>John</i>
Jesus “was” from all eternity.	John “came.”
Jesus is the Word.	John was a mere man.
Jesus is Himself God.	John was commissioned by God.
Jesus is the real Light.	John bore witness of the Light.
Jesus is the object of trust.	John was the agent through whom people came to believe in the Light.

John’s position in relation to the Word was one of subordination. This does not take away from John’s greatness. Jesus said that “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the

¹¹Adapted from William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. in one, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1953), 1:76.

Baptist" (Matthew 11:11); yet John always appeared in a secondary role. Although John chronologically (as far as the flesh is concerned) came before Jesus, the Christ takes precedence over him because He is the very Son of God and the hope of mankind. John's work was profoundly important because he brought to people's attention the true Light, the only way of expelling the darkness of sin in the world.

THE WORD INCARNATE

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:9–14).

The Light is "the true Light" (1:9a). The word "true" is from ἀληθινός (*alēthinos*), meaning "real, genuine, authentic." William Barclay said that other lights "were flickers of the truth; some were faint glimpses of reality . . . which men followed and which led them out into the dark and left them there."¹² In contrast to this, the Word was the true Light, the genuine Light of which all others are mere copies.

The Light came into the world. The phrase "com-

¹²William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 54.

ing into the world" (1:9b) could modify the word "Light" or the word "man"; both are grammatical possibilities. The statement may be about "every man coming into the world" (NKJV) or "the true Light . . . coming into the world" (NASB). The context of the whole passage indicates that it was the Light coming into the world. John did not speak of people "coming into the world," but he did elsewhere speak of the Light (Christ) coming into the world (3:19; 12:46). The emphasis is that the Light was now entering human history in a new way. Accordingly, though John explicitly referred to the incarnation in 1:14, here he hinted at it by discussing the coming of the Light into the world. The Word was the true Light, and He was coming into the world. This also fits with the beginning of 1:10, where John said, "He was in the world."

The Light "enlightens every man" (1:9c). It is not clear what John meant by this phrase. It may be helpful to ask what John did not mean. In view of the totality of biblical teaching, John did not mean that every person is literally enlightened. This would be tantamount to universal salvation and contrary to the fact that John, in the same context, said that "the world did not know Him" (1:10). Further, the Scriptures are clear in saying that many will be lost (Matthew 7:13, 14). Perhaps John was saying that God has revealed Himself to every person in the sense of natural revelation (Romans 1:20). He may have been saying, like Paul, that God's grace, which brings salvation, has appeared to all people (Titus 2:11). Although it cannot be concluded exactly what the phrase "enlightens every man" means, it can definitively be said that the activity of the Word itself

is what gives light to every person.

In 1:9, John made it clear that the true Light was coming into the world. Beginning with 1:10, John told how the Word (the Light) was received upon His entrance into the world by discussing both those who did not receive Him and those who did receive Him. First, a discussion of those who *did not receive* the Word must begin with the term “world” (κόσμος, *kosmos*). John gave emphasis to the Greek word *kosmos* by using it three times in 1:10, each time putting it at the beginning of the clause. The first time he used it, he said the Word (the Light) “was in the world,” that is, the realm inhabited by man. The verb “was” (ἦν, *ēn*) conveys the idea of continuity (see comments on 1:1); Jesus did not simply make a momentary visit, but was in the world continuously. The second time, John said “the world was made through Him,” indicating that the world owes its existence to the Word (see comments on 1:3). The third time, John said “the world did not know Him.” John shifted his meaning of the term “world” in this third instance. The first two uses refer to the earth and all that is therein, while the third time relates to people. Consequently, among those who did not receive the Word were people in general. They did not gain the intellectual knowledge of Jesus, nor did they really come to know Him in any kind of right relationship. This is significant in view of the fact that the Word (the Light) came to give light to every person (1:4; 8:12; 12:46).

Jesus was not only rejected by people in general, but by His own people in particular. John said that the Word came to “His own” (εἰς τὰ ἴδια, *eis ta idia*; 1:11a). John could just as well have been saying, “Jesus

came home.” The same expression is used in 16:32 to refer to the departure of the disciples, each “to his own home,” and also in 19:27, where John responded to the request Jesus made on the cross by taking Mary “into his home” (NIV). When the Word came to this world, He did not come as a trespasser; He was no foreigner. He came to His own home. The expression “His own” refers to Israel—both the land and the people who made up God’s family. It emphasizes that they should have been familiar with Him, that is, His coming and His claims. Nevertheless, John did not say that “His own did not know” Jesus when He came to them, but that “His own did not receive Him” (1:11b). The verb “receive” (παραλαμβάνω, *paralambanō*) may refer to the taking of a person to one’s side to welcome him. It is used of Joseph’s taking Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20, 24) and of Jesus’ taking believers to Himself in heaven (John 14:3). This is the kind of welcome Jesus should have received when He came home; but His own people, those who should have been familiar with Him, *rejected* Him.

When the Word came into the world, the world did not know Him; and when the Word came to His own, His own did not receive Him. Why did they reject Him? John suggested some reasons throughout his Gospel. (1) Some loved the darkness more than the Light (3:19, 20). (2) Some were afraid of what others thought (7:13; 9:22). (3) Some were misinformed about the facts (7:40–43). (4) Some were hardened by their traditions (9:13–16). (5) Some loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (12:42, 43).

Second, consideration should be given to those who *did receive* the Word. While some rejected the Word, others were receptive to Him. John did not say

that no one responded to the coming of the Word. Although the majority of the people did not respond to Jesus, some did; and the redundant grammatical construction “as many as received Him” (1:12a) emphasizes those who accepted Him. John described those who received Jesus as “those who believe in His name” (1:12c). This is not to say that all believers are genuine believers, but those who receive Him are the ones who demonstrate their faith by obedience to God’s will. To those who genuinely manifested faith in Him, “He gave the right to become children of God” (1:12b). The word “right” is from ἐξουσία (*exousia*) and does not mean mere ability, but “legitimate, rightful authority.” The privilege and right of those who are receptive to Christ—“those who believe in His name”—is that they may “become children of God.” This right or privilege is not inherent in man, but is something given by God to man.

John used the verb for “believe,” πιστεύω (*pisteuō*), ninety-eight times but never used the related noun πίστις (*pistis*). This fact seems to suggest that John wanted people to understand that faith is an activity; it is something that people do. To “believe,” or have faith in a biblical sense, is to trust God, to take God at His word. Faith is a response to God’s revelation; and while faith is necessary to be a child of God, mere belief is insufficient. Many examples of what it means to respond to God in faith could be given (see Hebrews 11). Genuine believers have the right, the power, or the liberty of action to become children of God; for, in their faith, they humbly submit to whatever God asks of them. The verse brings out well both the divine and the human side to becoming a child of God. It is the nature of God to give. Every

good and perfect gift comes down from God (James 1:17). He gave His grace for every man (Titus 2:11), and one aspect of that grace is the right He gave genuine believers to become His children.

John described those who become children of God as being “born . . . of God” (1:13). This truth is presented in great detail in Jesus’ interview with Nicodemus (3:1–21). This new family relationship is made actual through a birth process, but not one from any human origin. Here the importance of being born of God is emphasized by setting this concept against three negative descriptions concerning the origin of the children of God.

(1) The privilege of being children of God is “not of blood” (1:13b). In other words, it is not the product of physical descent (“natural descent”; NIV). In the Greek text, the word translated “blood,” αἱμάτων (*haimatōn*), is plural and literally means “bloods.” This plural “has been explained either as the mingling of blood from father and mother, or as depicting the long line of physical generation through one’s ancestors.”¹³

(2) The birth of children of God is not by “the will of the flesh” (1:13c). The term “flesh” (σάρξ, *sarx*), which has many connotations, in this case refers to sexual desire. The REB has “physical desire,” and the NLT has “human passion.”

(3) The new relationship of children of God cannot be explained by “the will of man” (1:13d). The Greek word for “man” is ἀνὴρ (*anēr*), which specifically refers to a “male” and is sometimes used for a “hus-

¹³Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1974), 33, n. 15.

band." The NIV translates the phrase as "a husband's will." It may have the same sense as "the will of the flesh." In this case, it refers to "the initiative usually taken by the husband in sexual intercourse resulting in procreation."¹⁴ Another interpretation is that "the will of man" more generally means "any human volition," that is, "power in man's will alone."

These expressions may be understood in view of the confidence the Jews had in their fleshly origin (see Matthew 3:9). It was a long-standing conviction of the Jews that God would be favorable to them because of who their "fathers" were. In any event, these phrases emphasize that no human agency is or can be responsible for such a birth. On the contrary, people are born again "of God." It is God, and Him alone, who can impart spiritual life. Although people are born of God, this happens by means of the Word of God (see James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). The details of such a birth are outlined particularly in John 3:1–8.

John had already alluded to the incarnation when he spoke in 1:9 of the true Light "coming into the world." Next, he said that "the Word became flesh" (1:14a). John revealed the astonishing fact that the Word, who is nothing less than God, "became flesh." "Became" (ἐγένετο, *egeneto*) is in the aorist, indicating an action at a given point in time. The change in the verb from 1:1 is striking. Verse 1 speaks of the eternal nature of the Word, while verse 14 speaks of a change of state in relation to the world of humanity. "Flesh" is from σάρξ (*sarx*) and emphasizes that the Word became human nature. John did not refer to the incar-

¹⁴Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 40.

nation in a soft way by saying “the Word became man” or “the Word took on a body,” but boldly said “the Word became flesh.” By the end of the first century, a group called “Docetists” believed that Jesus only “seemed” to live in the flesh. Jesus, for them, was just a phantom or an illusion while He was on this earth. On the contrary, Jesus did not simply “appear” to live a human life in order to avoid contaminating Himself by coming into contact with humankind; Jesus really became flesh. John expressed it well in 1 John 1:1, when he wrote that the Word of life was heard, seen, looked upon, and handled. He became weary and thirsty (4:6, 7); He was deeply moved and openly wept (11:33, 35); He bled and died (19:1, 30, 34). All of this could refer to nothing less than that which was flesh.

Verse 14 is the first time that the book indicates that the Word and Jesus are one and the same. Up to this point, the reader might understand the Word to be some “force” in the universe; but now, beyond dispute, it is clear that the very Word of God became flesh. He identified with human beings from birth to death. George R. Beasley-Murray put it this way: “The Logos in becoming $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$ participated in man’s creaturely weakness (the characteristic meaning of ‘flesh’ in the Bible).”¹⁵ Why did Jesus take on humanity? He became flesh in order to become *our* High Priest and be the sacrifice for *our* sins (Hebrews 2:17). Further, Jesus became flesh in order to sympathize with *us* (Hebrews 2:18). Jesus was tempted in all points just as *we* are (Hebrews 4:15). He did not overcome

¹⁵George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 14.

temptation just because He was God. If this were the case, He could not be an example for *us* (1 Peter 2:21). When He was praying in the garden, Jesus wanted to be spared His impending crucifixion. We can be thankful that He had a greater desire to do the Father's will (Luke 22:42).

The Word "dwelt among us" (John 1:14b). The term "dwelt" is from σκηνώω (*skēnoō*), which literally means "to pitch one's tent."¹⁶ It conveys the idea of someone moving into the neighborhood and taking up residence. It may mean that Jesus' stay on the earth was temporary—a real bodily existence, but temporary nevertheless. Although His stay on earth was temporary, He moved in. He changed His address. He grew up in the neighborhood, went to work, and got His hands dirty. In the Septuagint (LXX), the related noun σκηνή (*skēnē*, "tent") is frequently used for the tabernacle. Further, the related verb κατασκηνώω (*kataskēnoō*) is used in reference to the tabernacle where God "dwelt" among His people (Numbers 35:34; Joshua 22:19). John may have been thinking that his readers, quite familiar with the LXX, would recall the Old Testament teaching concerning the presence of God which guided His people. Consequently, John may have been suggesting that the flesh of Jesus was the new localization of God's presence on earth; Jesus became the replacement for the ancient tabernacle.

That John wanted his readers to recall the tabernacle seems clear from his reference in 1:14c to the "glory" of Jesus, for "glory" was associated with the

¹⁶In the New Testament, *skēnoō* appears elsewhere only in Revelation 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3.

tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). The glory of the presence of the Lord is linked with the *Shekinah*, meaning “dwelling,” and refers to God’s dwelling among His people.¹⁷ Jesus’ body was now the physical location of the divine presence. God had come to dwell among His people in a more meaningful way—not in a tabernacle, but in the flesh. People could touch Him; children could sit in His lap; individuals could eat with Him, walk with Him, and talk with Him. He was “God with us” (Mt. 1:23). The Word is the supreme revelation of the presence of God among human beings.

John wrote that “we saw His glory” (1:14c), indicating eyewitnesses among whom John himself was included (see 1 John 1:1–3). The verb “saw” is from *θεάομαι* (*theaomai*), which means “to gaze upon.” The English word “theater” is derived from the related noun *θέατρον* (*theatron*). These Greek words suggest more than a casual glance. They involve a long, hard look at what one is seeing, with a view to understanding its real significance. Jesus willingly made Himself available for questioning and observation, and the conclusion of those who carefully scrutinized Him is summed up in the word “glory.” When John and others saw the glory of Jesus, they saw His majesty, His dignity, and His splendor displayed in His flesh—both in His words and in His works.

To understand this better, we must note how “glory” is used in the Old Testament. In addition to the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34, 35), the glory of the Lord settled on Mount

¹⁷While the term “*Shekinah*” does not appear in the Bible, the concept of God’s glorious presence dwelling among His people appears in many texts (see Ex. 25:8; 40:34, 35; 1 Kings 6:13; 8:10, 11). The word is used in the Targums.

Sinai (Exodus 24:16, 17) and appeared during the wilderness wanderings (Exodus 16:10). This glory was manifested at the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10, 11), and it was also revealed to the prophets (see Isaiah 6:3). John was well aware of the teaching of the Old Testament about God's glory, but he did not simply repeat its teachings. He said something that was new. He saw "glory" (δόξα, *doxa*) as an important element in the life of Jesus. John used this noun and the verb "to glorify" (δοξάζω, *doxazō*) more than any other Gospel writer. He said that he and others saw the glory of Jesus' deity—"glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14d). The phrase "only begotten" is from μονογενής (*monogenēs*), meaning "only" or "unique." This Greek word emphasizes the relationship that the Father has with the Son. Jesus is God's unique Son; and although people can be sons of God, no other can be the Son of God as Jesus is.

The glory of His deity could be seen in different ways. (1) It was seen in the seven signs recorded by John and the miracles given in the other Gospels. Jesus "manifested His glory" when He performed His first sign at Cana by turning water to wine (2:11). (2) It was seen in His teaching. "The crowds" who heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount "were amazed at His teaching" (Matthew 7:28). Certain officers reported to the chief priests and the Pharisees, saying, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks" (John 7:46). (3) It was seen eminently on the mount of transfiguration, where Peter, James, and John "were eyewitnesses of His majesty." On this occasion, Jesus "received honor and glory from God the Father" as God said, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am

well-pleased" (2 Peter 1:16, 17). Unlike the other Gospel writers, John did not speak of this event, in spite of the fact that he was an eyewitness of it. If John wanted his readers to know about the event, it seems he would have said something about it here or elsewhere. John presented a picture of something new when he said, "We saw His glory." When John spoke of Jesus' glory, he made no attempt to focus on any single event—not even the transfiguration. Further, he did not characterize Jesus as a lofty, unapproachable person who was all about pomp and circumstance. On the contrary, he presented Jesus as One who was an obedient servant throughout His life and was ultimately glorified in His death (see 7:39; 12:16, 23; 13:31, 32) and exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:31).

The glory of God as manifested in the person of Jesus is "full of grace and truth" (1:14e). (1) Jesus is full of grace. John used the word "grace" (χάρις, *charis*) four times in the Prologue (1:14, 16 [twice], 17) and did not use it again in his Gospel. It means "goodwill" or "kindness" and conveys the notion that the favor demonstrated is undeserved. In no greater way can God's grace be seen than in the Word made flesh.

(2) Jesus is full of truth. "Truth" (ἀλήθεια, *alētheia*) is generally understood to be the opposite of "falseness" and is used in John in this way (8:45), but it seems also to have a wider sense. Jesus was full of truth; He declared the truth. He was no false messiah, but the true Messiah. He was not a shadow, but the real thing. He was truth itself (14:6).

(3) Jesus is full of grace and truth. When John spoke of the Word as flesh being full of both grace and

truth, he made it clear that these virtues are bound up with one another. The Word is not just grace, nor is the Word just truth—the Word is both grace and truth. They are not mutually exclusive. To take one without the other is to give an unbalanced view of the Word who became flesh.