THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN

1 The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 3 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 4 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

5 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 6 He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 7 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

8 The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. 9 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. 10 He came to his own home, and his own received him not.

11 He came to his own home, and his own received him not. Nevertheless, as many as received him, to them he gave power to become children of God, even children of God because of faith in his name. 12 That which was made through him was life. 13 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world received him not.

14 Yet even a number of the Pharisees received him, for they were not unanimous on the question of John's subordinate role to Jesus. 

15 John was a witness to this, bearing witness to the truth. 16 He was not the one to baptize with the Holy Spirit, yet John himself testified that Jesus is the one sent by God, and that people should receive baptism by him. 17 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 18 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 19 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

1:1–18 The Prologue functions like a musical overture, introducing the main themes of the Gospel to be developed in subsequent chapters: light (1:4), life (1:4), darkness (1:5), testimony (1:7), faith (1:12), glory (1:14), truth (1:17). This network of images and ideas is held together around Jesus the Word, who is portrayed as the Creator and Redeemer of all things. Similar poetic passages are found in Col 1:15–20 and Heb 1:1–4.

1:1 In the beginning: John traces the origin of the Word into eternity past, when God the Son was present with God the Father before time itself began (17:5). This opening verse of John is a direct allusion to the opening verse of the Bible. As in Genesis 1, the evangelist draws attention to light, darkness, life, and the spoken Word that brought all things into existence (1:1–5). It is implied that the universe, once created through the Word of God, is now being renewed through that same Word come in the flesh as Jesus Christ (1:14; Rev 21:1–5; Catechism of the Catholic Church [hereafter CCC] 241, 291).

1:2 was with God: Distinguishes the Word from the Father. They are not the same Person, yet they share the same nature in the family of the eternal Godhead (17:25–26) (CCC 254–56). was God: Or, “was divine”. This is the first and clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (5:18; 10:30–33; 20:28) (CCC 242).

1:3 life: Earthly life is a gift that is given and sustained by God through his eternal Word (Heb 1:3). Ultimately, natural and biological life points beyond itself to the supernatural and divine life that Jesus grants in abundance to the children of God (10:10; 2 Pet 1:4; CCC 1997). This new life comes to us when we give ourselves to Christ in faith (3:16; 20:31), and Christ gives himself to us through the sacramental action of the Church (3:5; 6:53).

1:4 light . . . darkness: Symbolic of the struggle between good and evil (1 Jn 2:8–11). Jesus himself is the true light (1:9) that drives away death, deception, and the devil (1 Jn 3:8). Other contrasts in the Gospel include flesh and Spirit (3:6), truth and falsehood (8:44–45), heaven and earth (3:31), and life and death (5:24).

1:6 John: John the Baptist, who fulfilled a divine mission to Israel (1:31) but was not the divine Messiah (1:20). Emphasis on John’s subordinate role to Jesus runs throughout the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that one of the aims of the evangelist is to win over the remaining band of John’s disciples who had not yet accepted Jesus (3:25–30; 5:36; 10:41). Support for this is found in Acts 19:1–7, where we learn that a contingent of John’s followers lived in Ephesus—the same city that tradition suggests John was sent to (cf. Acts 19:1–7). John’s followers lived in Ephesus—the same city that tradition suggests John was sent to (cf. Acts 19:1–7).

Word Study

Word (Jn 1:1)

Logos (Gk.): “word”, “statement”, or “utterance”. The term is used 330 times in the NT. The background of this concept in John is both philosophical and biblical. (1) Ancient Greek philosophers associated the Word with the order and design of the universe or with the intelligible expression of the mind of God as he sustains and governs it. (2) In biblical tradition the Word is the powerful utterance of God that brought all things into being at the dawn of time (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:6; Wis 9:1). (3) Another biblical tradition links the Word of God with the Wisdom of God, who was depicted as God’s eternal companion (Prov 8:23; Sir 24:9), the craftsman who labored alongside God at creation (Prov 8:30; Wis 7:22), and the one who remains a source of life for the world (Prov 8:35). John, it seems, has pulled these traditions together to say something entirely new: the Word of God is not so much an abstract principle or an audible power as it is a Divine Person: God the Son (Rev 19:13). This eternal Word, once a mediator of creation, has now become a mediator of salvation through his Incarnation (Jn 1:14; 3:17).

* Or was not anything made. That which has been made was life in him.