

**PEOPLE OF GOD THINK ABOUT GOD
KNOWING THE UNKNOWABLE GOD**

JOHN 1

March 11, 2020

John 1:1-3 (Directly from the Greek)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.

This one was in the beginning with God.

All things through him became, and without him became not one thing which has become.

In the Hebrew Bible, Genesis is named by its opening words *in the beginning*.

Gospel of John opens with the same words.

In the next few verses in *John* the themes of light and darkness are recalled (as in Genesis).

However, in *John* the *beginning* is not the start of creation.

It refers to the period before creation when the Word simply was.

Writer of *John* uses the Greek word *logos* (Word) to refer to Jesus.

Intent: Jesus is the living, breathing Word from God sent to reveal God and his kingdom.

Logos bridged the gap between the Jewish and Greek worlds (common in Greek philosophy).

Jewish concept of the Word (Hebrew: *dabar*) of God was rooted in the Old Testament.

Since Jews did not use the name of God this Hebrew word became their substitute.

It came to mean some sort of message from God to humans.

It was often in the form of a command, reprimand, or announcement.

Sometimes it was spoken through angels or prophets, but other times God spoke directly.

Other References to *logos*:

Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, used the word five hundred years before Christ.

He used it to describe his vision of a worldwide force of reason which governed the universe.

He believed all things happened according to this *logos*.

Among Greek-speaking Jews the *logos* came to be viewed as a force sent from God.

In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the writer described the death of the firstborn in Egypt in this way:

Thine Almighty word (logos) leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne.

Philo (a first-century Alexandrian Jew) blended Greek and Jewish ideas together.

In his writings he compared God's creation to the building of a great city.

He attributed the orderly arrangement of this great city to the *Logos of God*.

Targums started to be written down in Aramaic for Jews who no longer spoke Hebrew.

Jews used the Aramaic word *memra* (word) as the personal manifestation of the presence of God.

In Exodus 19:17 – *Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God* became

Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet the Word of the Lord.

Feminine equivalent of *Logos* is *Sophia*, which means *Wisdom*.

In Sirach 24 there is a story of God granting Wisdom permission to dwell on earth.

Earth proved to be an inhospitable place for Wisdom, so God gave wisdom in the *Book of Moses*.

Word was with God and God was the Word

God was the Word is a crucial text pertaining to the identity of Jesus.

First thing to note:

And the Word was with God (ton theon – the God – with the article)

And the Word was God (theos – without the article)

When Greek uses a noun it almost always uses the definitive article.

When Greek does not use the definite article with a noun it becomes more like an adjective.

It describes the character and the quality of the person.

Writer did not say that the Word was *ho theos*.

Use of the article would have meant that the Word was identical with God.

Instead the Word is the very same character and quality and essence and being as God.

Prologue distinguishes between God and the Word.

At the same time it emphasizes their unity.

Emphasis on the creative role of the Word countered Gnostic heresy.

Gnosticism stated that matter was evil and therefore was not created by God.

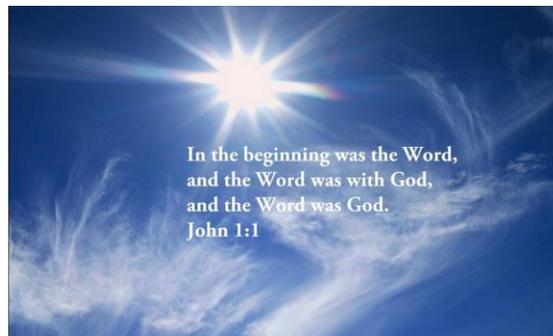
For them the Old Testament God of creation was evil.

He was different from the New Testament Father of Jesus (who was good).

Writer countered that line of thought directly . . .

All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that has been made.

Verse 3 does not state that all things were created by the Word but through the Word.



John 1:4-5 (Directly from the Greek)

In him life was, and the life was the light of the men.

And the light in the darkness shines, and the darkness it not overtook.

Verses 4-5 introduce the themes of life and light shining in the darkness.

Both are important themes in Genesis 1 and throughout this gospel.

More than one-quarter of all the references to *life* in the New Testament are found in *John*.

It usually refers to eternal life.

Life that Jesus offers is more than mere physical existence.

It is life in relationship with God and in this sense it equates with salvation.

First creative act by God in Genesis was light and brought order to the formless void.

Light brought by the Word is the first step toward bringing order into the chaos of our lives. In both the Old and New Testaments *light* and *darkness* are metaphors for good and evil. It also contrasts order from chaos, security from danger, joy from sorrow, and truth from lies. Verb *shines* is in the present tense indicating an on-going action. Light that was shining for the people of Israel continues to shine today. Darkness stands for the state of mind in which humans fail to welcome the light. Promise is that the darkness did not (and will not) overcome the light.

John 1:6-8 (Directly from the Greek)

*There was a man, having been sent from God, name to him John.
This man came for witness, that he might witness concerning the light.
That all men might believe through him.
He was not that light – but that he might witness concerning the light.*

John the Baptist renewed the prophetic tradition after four hundred years of silence. Writer clearly establishes John the Baptist as subordinate to Jesus. Other gospels call him John the Baptist to distinguish him from John, the son of Zebedee. This gospel refers to him only as John and makes no mention of John, the son of Zebedee. Traditional explanation is that John, the son of Zebedee, is the author of the gospel.

Greek word for witnessing (*matureo*) is the word from which we get *martyr*. Persecution of Christians in India continues to escalate and is sanctioned by Indian officials. Last month a man chased a group of Christians to *anoint* them with water mixed with cow dung. Intent was to *purify* them from their faith.

Purpose for *John* is very much like the purpose of the gospel itself (belief that Jesus is Messiah). Reason for this repeated emphasis in gospel is because the prophet John was famous. He had his own disciples and it was a source of confusion and possible rivalry. Even the historian, Josephus, had more to say about John than about Jesus. Writer of the gospel went to great lengths both to acknowledge his status and that of Jesus.

John 1:9-13 (Directly from the Greek)

*It was the true light which enlightens every man coming into the world.
In the world he was, and the world through him became, and the world him knew not.
To his own things he came, and his own people him received not.
But as many as received him, he gave to them right children of God to become,
to the ones believing in the name of him, who not of blood nor of the will of the flesh
nor of the will of man but of God were born.*

Greek word for world (*kosmos*) in this gospel is a world in rebellion against God (a dark world). Fact that the light and love of God comes into the *kosmos* is not an endorsement of the world. It bears testimony to the capacity of God to love in spite of the disobedience of the people. True light came to enlighten everyone and not just Israel. Light came into the world where Jesus could be seen and experienced. Light was to enlighten human understanding. But the world failed to recognize him and rejected him and crucified him.

But we should not judge the people of the past because the world is still in rebellion.
We are all sinners in need of the grace of God.

In this gospel, Jesus is the Son (*huios*) of God and is the only one who is called *huios*.
This Son is empowered to bring those who receive and believe in him into the family of God.
Children of God are brought into his family by his action.
Jewish people traced their ancestry to Abraham and established themselves heirs to covenant.
Writer emphasized that it was the faith of Abraham that set him apart.
Those who embrace faith in God are his natural heirs.

John 1:14 (Directly from the Greek)

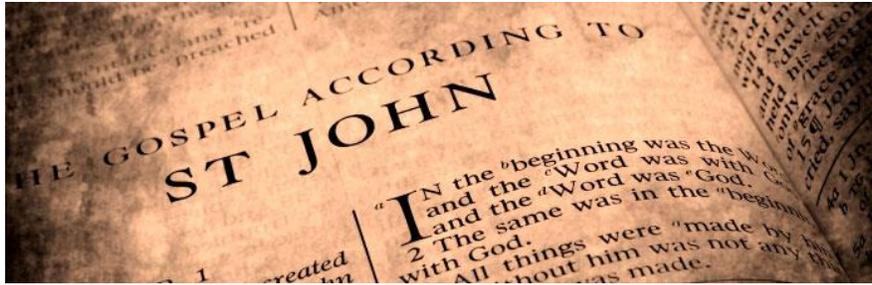
*And the Word flesh became and tabernacled among us.
And we beheld the glory of him, glory as of an only begotten from a father,
full of grace and of truth.*

Verse is the centerpiece of the Prologue.
Greek word for flesh is *sarx* and is both a bold and almost vulgar word.
It focused on bodily indulgence rather than on Godly service.
In the New Testament it was most frequently used as a contrast with that which was spiritual.
Remember that some Greeks believed that all matter was evil.
Thought of God becoming *sarx* was unimaginable.
Paul used the word to speak of the sins of the flesh.
One analogy is that God climbed into our sewer to deliver us from our sewage.
Writer may have used this stark language to counter Gnostic or Docetic heresies.
Docetism (important in Gnosticism) taught that body of Christ was not human.
As a result they believed that his sufferings were only apparent.

Greek word for tabernacled is *eskenosen* was quite familiar to the Jewish people.
During their wanderings in the wilderness God commanded them to build the tabernacle.
It was an elaborate and beautiful tent that served as the symbol of God's presence in their midst.
God who dwelled among them in the tabernacle now chooses to dwell among them in Jesus.

Greek word for grace is *charis* and the word for truth is *aletheia*.
Use of *charis* in the New Testament has its root in the Hebrew word *hesed*.
In the Old Testament *hesed* speaks of the lovingkindness, mercy and faithfulness of God.
In this gospel the Word embodies grace and dispenses it in its fullness.
Grace of God is beyond measure and sufficient to cover our sins (no matter how numerous).

Truth is that which is real and untainted by falsehood.
Jesus is truth personified as *the way, the truth and the life*.
Opposite is also true!
Living according to untrue principles can rob people of their freedom.
See Chapter 4 of the book we are reading for Lent (by Jerry Sittser)!!!
Church is to teach the truth that we find embodied in Christ through Scriptures and Spirit.



John 1:15-18 (Directly from the Greek)

John witnesses concerning him and has cried out saying:

This man was he whom I said –

The one after me (coming before me) has become because first of me he was.

Because of the fullness of him we all received, and grace instead of grace

because the law through Moses was given, the grace and the truth through Jesus Christ became.

God no man has seen never.

The only begotten God (the one being in the bosom of the Father) that one declared him.

Prologue has already mentioned John as the one who bore witness to the light.

Now the writer mentions him again as bearing witness to the person who is the light.

Mention of John in the Prologue prepares us for his witness to Jesus found in vs. 19-34.

In vs. 17 we have the first mention of Jesus' name.

Until now the identity of the Word has been a mystery and now it is stripped away.

We learn that Jesus Christ is the one who brings God's grace and truth to us.

To help people understand God's intent for their lives, God gave the law to people of Israel.

Jesus took the revelation of God's will to the next level.

All people could experience the fullness of God's grace and truth.

When Moses asked to see the glory of God, God said that he could not see his face.

Now because of Jesus we can see God clearly.

Vs. 1 declares that the Word was God and vs. 18 declares that the Son is God.

It marks its beginning and its ending (inclusio).

John 1:19-51

Witness of John the Baptist is crucial to the start of Jesus' ministry.

John made it clear that he was not the Messiah.

He was sent to *make straight the way of the Lord*.

John witnessed to his own disciples and said of Jesus – *Behold, the Lamb of God*.

Result was that the two disciples stopped following John and started following Jesus.

Having accomplished his witnessing task John faded from the story.

We see him once more in this gospel when his disciples ask him about Jesus (3:30).

Vs. 29- 51 bestow a number of titles on Jesus –

Lamb of God (a man who was before John) (one on whom the Holy Spirit remained)

Son of God

Rabbi, Messiah, Rabbi (Son of God, King of Israel)

Jesus completes the Christology with his own declaration as the Son of Man.

Behold, the Lamb of God References

Lamb was provided by God to Abraham for a sacrifice in the place of Isaac.

Paschal (Passover) lamb whose blood saved Israelites from death.

It paved the way for their deliverance from Egypt.

We have the lamb from the Suffering Servant Songs of Isaiah 53.

Sheep were sacrificed daily in the temple to redeem the people from their sins.

In Jeremiah 11:19 the gentle lamb was led to the slaughter.

In Revelation 5:5 the lamb has overcome evil.

Conquering lamb crushes the evil powers of the earth.

In vs. 29 sin is singular.

It suggests that the Lamb of God deals with the totality of sin in one sacrifice.

It is significant that the Spirit remains (*meno*) on Jesus.

Verb occurs frequently in this gospel and its also translated as *abide*.

It describes a relationship that is deep and abiding rather than trivial or passing.

Jesus has a deep and abiding relationship with the Spirit.

He gives the disciples that kind of relationship as well.

John acknowledges that he did not truly understand the unique identity of Jesus.

It came to him when he witnessed the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism.

Assignment for March 17

Knowing the Unknowable God

From the *Gospel of John*

Chapters 14 and 16

