

Exegetical Notes, John 1:1-18

“Can We Trust the Biographies?”

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John 1:1-18

Verse 1-2

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

- The Gospel of John opens with the same words as does the book of Genesis, “In the Beginning.” The phrase references the time when God began the act of creation, the moment when the world was called into existence.
- The Gospel of John says that at that time the Word was with God. It uses the male singular pronoun, “He,” in referring to the Word, implying that the Word is a person as opposed to a thing.
- This word is distinct from God as it is “with” God. Yet it is part of God because it “was” God. This is a great mystery. The word is distinct from God yet it is God and it was with God before the beginning since it was present at the beginning. How this is possible is beyond our ability to understand.

Verse 3

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

- See Colossians 1:16. Christ, the Word was the active force in creation.

Verse 4-5

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

- The Word brought life to humankind. In fact, Jesus Christ is “The Way, The Truth, and the Life.” He brings eternal life to human beings. In him death dies. See John 14:6.

- This Life is also Light to a world walking in the darkness of death. Jesus declared himself to be “The Light of the World.” See John 8:12.
- In Psalm 36:9 these themes are combined.
- This light shines into the darkness, but the darkness does not comprehend its meaning or its presence. Death cannot understand what Jesus is about.

Verse 6-9

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

- The “John” referred to is not the John who authored the Gospel of John, but John the Baptist.
- John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus, the Light of the world. Jesus was coming into the world and John’s purpose was to prepare the way for him.

Verse 10

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

- Jesus was both coming into the world and in the world. The text means that the reality of who Jesus was at that moment was breaking over the world. But he already was in the world since he was the Word, the agent through whom God spoke the world into being, but the created order did not recognize.

Verse 11

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

- Though he had created it all, it did not recognize him as its creator and so did not extend to him his rightful place nor did it give him the respect he was due.

Verse 12-13

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

- Salvation is by the grace of God received by faith. Those who trust Jesus, who believe that he will save them, will be saved.
- This salvation is a right extended to those who believe. As such it cannot be denied them or taken from them.
- Those who believe in Jesus become God’s children, but this adoption into the family of God is not by natural descent of human will. It is entirely the act of God.

Verse 14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- By some unknown and unexplainable process, the Word which was with God at the moment of creation and pre-existed with God before creation, took upon himself the full limitation of human flesh and lived among us as a man. (The word is “tabernacled among us. It would have reminded the Hebrews of the wilderness tent in which YHWH came to them before the first Temple was built.” This process is called the incarnation. Only God understands how it was possible.
- Those who were here on earth at that time fully saw the glory of the incarnate Word.
- Even in the flesh, Jesus was distinctly the Son of the Father. He was the “One and Only.” There was and there never will be another like him. This is because he was sent directly from the Holy One and was marked with grace and truth. Grace is God’s unfailing love which is extended to us without condition. Truth is knowing his faithfulness.

Verse 15

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”

- John the Baptist was the first one to testify that Jesus was the pre-existing Word sent from the Father. He is the first eye witness. See John 1:19-34

Verse 16-18

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

- God hides himself in the splendor of light. No one can look on him fully as he is. The sight is too amazing. However, Jesus took a human form and in his living showed us that God is loving and faithful. Thus, those who know Jesus have seen the Father who sent him. Jesus has shown us the fullness of God's grace and truth.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Can We Trust the Biographies?* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)