

## Reading the Old Testament Through John John the Baptist

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

*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn. 1:3-5).*

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

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 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 have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:9-14).*

*John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known (Jn. 1:15-18).*

### **The Word and God (John 1:1-5)**

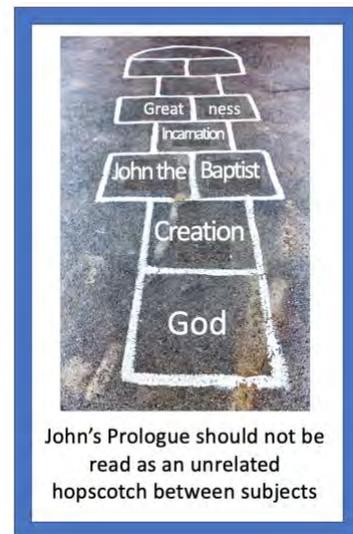
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to come back in and write it at some point!

## The Word and John the Baptist (John 1:6-8)

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

Among the four gospels, John's uniqueness is on display in many ways. One is John's extensive prologue found in the first 18 verses of the gospel. Some see the prologue almost as a game of hopscotch, with John skipping back and forth among various subjects. This would not, however, be a fair way to read the gospel. John's prologue centers on one subject – Jesus, the Word of God—and is intricately interwoven with repeated ideas, vocabulary, and clear purpose.

Each section of the prologues makes most sense when taken into account in light of the other sections. The first two verses discuss the Word and God. John 1:3-5 center on the Word and creation. John 1:6-8 focus on the Word and John the Baptist. John follows this with verses 9-14, which consider the incarnation of the Word. The prologue concludes in verses 15-18, examining the Greatness of the Word.



Deeply embedded in this second section on the Word and John the Baptist are contrasts that distinguish John from Jesus, John's words from Jesus the Word, and even the humanity of John as opposed to the deity of Jesus. Also embedded in the Greek of the passage, and not to be overlooked by the modern reader in any language, is the clear implication on how people choose to live in the presence of a God who writes history. Each of these considerations are set out most clearly in the Greek, and considering the original language opens some profound doors into John's message.



**WARNING:** This section repeatedly references the Greek vocabulary (and one verb construct) used by John in writing the gospel. The Greek should not be shunned but embraced. It will give a much greater understanding of the import of what John writes in today's passage, so rather than skimming over the Greek sections, get a stiff cup of coffee and read on!

## JESUS AND JOHN – A CONTRAST OF INDESCRIBABLE DIFFERENCE

At first glance, in English, it seems that John 1:5 puts John in the same category as Jesus, just with a later start. John 1:1 begins, “In the beginning **was** the Word.” John 1:5 says that, “There **was** a man sent from God.” Both verses have that English verb, “*was*.” One might assume John used the same verb in Greek, as the translations have in English. But John didn’t. The English translations fail to inform the reader of John’s message in the Greek. In the Greek, John does not in anyway mean or suggest that John the Baptist “was” in the same sense that Jesus “was.” The Greek contains two entirely different words translated “was.”

This section of John’s prologue introducing John the Baptist starts with an interesting Greek phrase, *Egeneto anthrōpos* (Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος). Look carefully at each word, because they give clues to their meanings in the English words that have derived from each.



*Egeneto* – made, came into being, was born

*Egeneto* has in its spelling our modern word “gene.” Our genes are our genetic codes (“genetic” being another related word) that we have from birth. *Egeneto* was a Greek expression for something that was born or came into being, something that was created or made. We can still see vestiges of the Greek word in other English words like “generator” and “generation.”

The second word is *anthrōpos*, a word that has given us the English word, “anthropology.” *Anthrōpos* references a human being, just as anthropology is the study of human beings.

The two words together are translated in both the English Standard Version and the New International Version as, “There was a man...” The way John has written this, in the original Greek, doesn’t align with John 1:1, “In the beginning was the “word.” Instead, the Greek of John the Baptist “There was a man...” stands in contrast to the “In the beginning was the word” passage. The John 1:1 passage uses the ordinary verb “to be” in the imperfect tense. The word *en*, (ἦν) has a semantic range of “exist” as well as “to be.” The impact of the *en* in the passage, “In the beginning was the Word” is that the Word (Jesus) *already existed* or *already was* at the beginning. This is the polar opposite to John. John *was* in the sense that he was created, he came to be, he was born.” Jesus *already was*. Jesus *was*, as God, *already present* when time began, when the universe came to be. Jesus was NOT made. He



God of God, Light of Light,  
Very God of Very God,  
**Begotten, not made,**  
Being of one substance with the Father;  
By whom all things were made....

This distinction between Jesus the begotten and John the Baptist (and all others) who are made was carried further in the creed now termed The Athanasian Creed (likely written around 100 years later), which states,

The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone: **not made**, nor created: but **begotten**.

John's contrast of the important John the Baptist as one who was made is an elevation of Jesus, the unmade maker.

#### *JOHN THE BAPTIST – CHOOSING TO LIVE GOD'S PURPOSE*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought excitement and entertainment to everyone's home. Music is available on demand, most any song by any artist playable with a moment's notice. Televisions and computers play the show/movie of choice anytime day or night. Computers also occupy an ever-increasing attention as one can find or do most anything electronically. In a related fashion, people are connected to work and responsibility like never before. Few jobs are 9 to 5. Emails, texts, and cell phone calls make people available to work or respond to others 24/7.

One effect of the connected 21<sup>st</sup> century is a busyness unlike earlier eras. The busyness can inhibit the opportunity for thought and reflection that is found in "down times," those times when one is unreachable or not experiencing the mind-numbing effect of television. Busyness and mental preoccupation both can contribute to a lost sense of purpose. Life can become a treadmill where work is done, food is prepared and eaten, emails are answered, texts are posted, instagrams and snapchats are shared, and spare moments are spent being entertained binge-watching a show or keeping up with a reality tv family.

But the true fullness of life is not a treadmill. Life is not simply going through the motions. God has a purpose for each person, and each person can choose to pursue that purpose.

The passage set out above explains God's purposing in human lives using John the Baptist as an example. John the Baptist fits squarely into the prologue's focus on Jesus because the relevant purpose of John the Baptist is unfolded in the Baptist's

role in the ministry and life of his cousin, Jesus. John doesn't stop his mention of John the Baptist by saying he was "born" or "made," the *egeneto anthropos* noted above. The Baptist didn't stumble accidentally into his opportunities of live. Serendipity didn't give the Baptist the "right place at the right time" to play his role with Jesus. This was God's pre-ordained plan for the Baptist. John gives that in his Greek verb.

Right after the first two words detailing John the Baptist being made, John continues with the statement that John the Baptist was "sent from God." Again, the Greek word used is important. The verb translated "sent" is the Greek root *apostellō* (ἀποστέλλω). Careful examination of the Greek word gives insight into its meaning as one recognizes the English idea of "postal" present. In English when one "posts" a letter, or uses the "postal service," one is intentionally sending correspondence forth to a selected designation. This idea is present in the Greek word as well.



When someone would *apostellō* another, it meant that one was sending the other out for some objective or purpose. This happens in a lot of passages that John will write further in the gospel. Certain Jews "sent" (*apostellō*) priests and Levites to ask John the Baptist who he was (Jn. 1:19). God "sent" (*apostellō*) his Son into the world to save the world (Jn. 3:17). The Chief Priests and Pharisees "sent" (*apostellō*) officers to arrest Jesus (Jn. 7:32).

A particular insight into John's usage of *apostellō* is also found in the *Torah*, those first five books of the Old Testament also known as "the Books of Moses," or in English: Genesis<sup>3</sup>, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In those books, God frequently "sends." The Jewish translators of the *Torah*, who put their translations into circulation centuries before John was writing, used this Greek word *apostellō* to speak of God's sending for a purpose.

In Genesis 19:13, God "sends" (*apostellō*) angels to Sodom and Gomorrah to demonstrate the city's depravity. In Genesis 24:7, 40, God "sends" (*apostellō*) an

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<sup>3</sup> In the original Hebrew, the books of the Bible bear the names of their first word. So the first book is termed, "*Bereshit*" because that is the first word in the Hebrew original of Genesis. It is translated, "In the beginning." In English, the book titles are based on content. Genesis is so named because it is a story of "beginnings," the root idea behind the English word, "genesis." Relevant to this lesson is that the word "genesis" also came from *egeneto*, the Greek word explained earlier above encompassing the ideas of coming into being or being born.

angel to help Abraham's servant. Over and over Joseph talks of God having "sent" (*apostellō*) him to Egypt to preserve the life of his family.

Perhaps most salient to John's writing in this passage is the passages in Exodus that speak of God "sending" (*apostellō*) Moses to Egypt to garner the Israelites release from Pharaoh. In the memorable story of Moses encountering the burning bush, God says over and over he will send (*apostellō*) Moses:

"Come, I will send (*apostellō*) you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ... Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent (*apostellō*) me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent (*apostellō*) me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent (*apostellō*) me to you' (Ex. 3:10, 13-15).

Moses didn't stumble into his role as rebel leader. Moses didn't simply opt to have a terrifying adventure (and headache) in his old age (he was 70 at the time). Moses was sent by God. God had a purpose, and he selected Moses to be his emissary, sent to accomplish certain tasks.

As one reads the Moses account further in the Greek version popular at the time John wrote his gospel, something interesting happens when Moses considers what God is sending him to do. God is "sends" (*apostellō*) Moses, doesn't want to go! Moses doesn't want to be "sent."

In Exodus 4:13, it reads that Moses responded to God,

"Oh, my Lord, please send (*apostellō*) someone else."

That Moses would try to refuse to fulfill the mission God "sent" (*apostellō*) him to do was very serious. The words immediately following Moses' attempted refusal says that it "kindled God's anger"! (Ex. 4:14).

Ultimately, Moses went as sent, going first to Aaron to explain and enroll Aaron as his helper. The key to Moses explaining what might seem to the world as a fool's errand is found in the word (*apostellō*). God had *sent* Moses to do this thing.

Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent (*apostellō*) him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do (Ex. 4:28).

Moses would frequently return to the concept of God having sent him. Even when complaining about the unfolding of events. After Pharaoh not only refuses to let the people go, but intensifies their work load, Exodus 5:22 reads,

Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send (*apostellō*) me?”

Moses was challenging the purpose behind God’s sending.

With this brief background of the significance of someone whom God selected and sent for a purpose, one sees that John is not lightly writing that John the Baptist was made by God (*egeneto*) and sent by God (*apostellō*). The question then arises, what was God’s purpose for John the Baptist? Or, *why* did God send John the Baptist? The writer John explains immediately in the next verse.

He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him (Jn. 1:7).

John the Baptist wasn’t simply born to exist, to live day-by-day, to sleep, eat, go to work, have a family, retire, and eventually die. John the Baptist was sent by God to bear witness that Jesus of Nazareth was God’s Messiah for Israel and Savior for the world. Jesus was the Messiah that all should trust to deliver them from sin and sin’s consequences, most notably, death.

In the Greek, by use of the “subjunctive mood,” for the verb translated “to bear witness,” one could also translate the phrase emphasizing that John the Baptist “*might* bear witness” or “*could* bear witness.” This was John’s calling, but John got to choose whether or not he would walk in the calling. In the same way, and also with the Greek subjunctive mood, the verb “believe” is cast, so that John bore witness so that “all *might* believe.” Each person confronted by the witness of John had a choice to make. Everyone didn’t choose to believe, but everyone had the option or choice.

The message of God’s plan and human choice isn’t isolated to John the Baptist. In Ephesians, Paul explained that all believers have a purpose before God. God saved believers for more than some combination of existing, living day-by-day, sleeping, eating, going to work, having a family, retiring, and eventually dying. Before bringing his children into his family, God prepared a chore list for them! God had purpose picked out ahead of time.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For *we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them* (Eph. 2:8-10).

The idea of John the Baptist being sent, of Moses being sent, should not only instill in the reader an understanding that Jesus was unlike any other, and hence God sent someone special just to bear witness to that truth. But the idea should also resonate in the reader an understanding that each person has purpose – divine purpose – in this life. Everyone should live seeking that purpose, with a willingness to do what God sent them to do.

A model of this attitude is found in the prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter six, after encountering God in his throne room, Isaiah hears God proclaim,

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send (*apostellō*), and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send (*apostellō*) me” (Isa. 6:8).

This should be everyone’s response to God’s calling. If God is sending me, I will go! Being sent by God should instill in each a sense of purpose, but also a sense of humility. Life is no longer about what I accomplish for *me*. Life is about what God does through me as the one who purposed my life and sent me to do his good works. God gets the glory, and God gets the credit.

This is modeled in the life and words of John the Baptist, who was quizzed over whether he was jealous that Jesus garnered so much attention,

John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’” (Jn. 3:27-28).



The image of tapestry weaving speaks to me of God’s hand in history. I, and everyone else, get to decide what kind of thread I wish to be, but even with that individual choice, everyone is active in God’s hands as God weaves through time to create the history that will culminate in the coming of his kingdom at the right time and in the right manner.

The integration of human/divine interaction is at play in the verses of John examined today. The passage introduces John the Baptist, and it does so in an interesting way. John the Baptist's ministry was set out by God. John was made to testify to Jesus so that the world might come to faith. John then chose to do that very thing God made him to do.

The world would be a better place, life would be much more satisfying to the believer, if every encounter, every moment was lived with a conscious recognition that God made *me* for a purpose in this moment, in this encounter. If I can treat people as God wants me to, if I can embrace in love as God made me to, if I can control my selfish desires and urges, and put God's purposes first, then I will fulfill my calling, and do as I was sent to do. This should be one's objective in life.

### **The Incarnation of the Word (John 1:9-14)**

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 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 have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:9-14).*

This next section of John's prologue speaks to Jesus as the incarnate word. John uses phrases and vocabulary well known by any ancient student of the Old Testament in its Greek translation. This most commonly used version of the Old Testament Scriptures in the larger, non-Jerusalem based, Mediterranean, Jewish community sets up in multiple ways in just these short few verses.

#### *JESUS AS LIGHT*

This metaphor for Jesus was used already in John, but is repeated here with focus on the effect of Jesus as the light coming into the world. The metaphor would resonate with People weaned on the Old Testament.

For example, Psalm 27 begins acknowledging that YHWH, the LORD is both "light" and "salvation," as well as the "stronghold" of "life" that removes "fear." John grabs that designation for Jesus. (John will again state that "God is light" in his first

epistle” (1 Jn 1:5). For John, there is no doubt that Jesus is the “true” or “genuine”<sup>4</sup> light, Jesus brings salvation into darkened, sinful lives. As life, Jesus secures and holds an eternal life for those who place their trust in him.

The Psalmist made his one request and goal, to

dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple (Pslm 27:4).

John will explain in his gospel that Jesus brings his followers into the house of the Lord. In Jesus, one gazes upon the beauty of the Lord. One sees God’s love manifested in the midst of hatred, ignorance, hostility, selfishness, and other dark sins. John notes that in Jesus, one sees the “glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

The psalm ends with an affirmation that the Psalmist will “look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Pslm 27:13). This was done and is done in looking upon Jesus, the light and life of God who walked this earth shining salvation and eternal life.

The Psalms also contrast the ways of the light to darkness, as John has done.



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<sup>4</sup> John uses the adjective *alēthinos* (ἀληθινός) to describe the light. The range of meaning for *alēthinos* in English includes “true,” “genuine,” “trustworthy,” “authentic,” and “real.” Jesus wasn’t “a light.” He was the genuine and reliable light. He was the authentic light with all that entailed.

John knew that factually, even though Jesus came into the world as the true light, many embraced darkness instead. In Psalm 36, darkness is contrasted with light. The “wicked” live lives oriented to sin, proud of their own insight and without fear of God. God, on the other hand, is full of steadfast love and righteousness. God provides in abundance for his children, sheltering them and providing a refuge.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light (Ps. 36:9).

The Psalm sets God up as the reference point for a perspective that is true, not deceitful. John tells his readers that Jesus is this life and light. Jesus reveals sin for what it is, and points the willing to the way of life. Jesus evidences the steadfast love of God that gives eternal security to those of faith.

This role of Jesus as light in the darkness, and the rejection of him and his light was prophetically explained in chapter 42 of the prophet Isaiah. Verse 16 explains,

And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.

### *JESUS – THE REJECTED LIGHT*

Isaiah was a prophet who prophesied roughly from 740-700BC in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. God used Isaiah to predict the coming Assyrian conquest of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. The people did not see the conquest coming, and they naively lived without regard to God, his law, his covenant, or his promises. The conquest occurred by the strong arm of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (726-723BC).

Isaiah equated the numbness and foolish non-recognition of this coming destruction to the reception of the Messiah in the later days. Many of his prophetic words were understood by the Jews to be of the coming Holy One, the Messiah. The early church recognized these prophecies as not only pointing to Jesus, but being fulfilled in him. Isaiah is one of the Old Testament books most frequently quoted or referenced in the New Testament.

Isaiah 2:1-2:5 is one passage that speaks of the coming Messiah. It frames the coming in the “latter days” which is the biblical term for the period between the Messiah’s coming and his ultimate return. The New Testament church knew they lived in the “latter days.” People we still live in them today. For Isaiah’s prophetic vision, the house of the Lord was to be established and “lifted up” (a term used by

Jesus to speak of his crucifixion in John 3:14) so that “all nations” and “many people” would come to the Lord for teaching and instruction to “walk in his paths.”

Isaiah says this will be the “Word of the Lord,” again a term captured by John, that goes out from Jerusalem as a judge who would bring ultimate peace where swords are beat into plowshares. Isaiah called this a time for the people to leave darkness and “walk in the light of the Lord.”

As fulfilling as Jesus was of these prophetic promises of Isaiah, Jesus also fulfilled the prophecies about being a rejected Messiah. Isaiah equated the numbness and foolish non-recognition of this destruction coming to Israel to the reception of the Messiah in the later days. Isaiah cried out the word of the Lord to Israel as a light, but Israel treated God’s word, as they would God’s coming Messiah – something spurned and rejected.

And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken (Is 8:14-15).

Paul applied this passage to those who refused to believe in Jesus as Messiah in Romans 9:30-33. John echoes it in his prologue.

### *JESUS AS TABERNACLE*

John 1:14 is recognized by many as a key verse, if not the key verse in John’s gospel. In it, John leaves no doubt about the Word’s identity. “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*” This remarkable truth can get lost if one doesn’t remain cognizant of the start of John’s gospel where he detailed the Word was in the beginning and intimately involved with creation. Those are the verses where John explained the Word was God. Now John details God became human. This is the incarnation.

John explains that this incarnation of God was not an overnight visit. The Word made flesh “dwelt” among humanity. The word that John as used for “dwelt” is the Greek verb *skenoō* (σκηνόω). The Greek word is rooted in the idea of “pitching a tent,” was used in everyday speak in the sense of “to live,” “to take up residence,” or “to dwell.” It was used when one moved to a location to live. (The modern word “scene” comes from *skenoō*.)

But to the ears of John’s audience that knew the Greek version of the Old Testament, the word meant something much more significant. It is a very important word in the Old Testament. The word’s noun form translates the Hebrew word *mishkan*

(משכן). This was the Old Testament word for the tabernacle built at God's instruction.

Exodus 25 and 35-38 explained in excruciating detail how the Israelites were to go about building the tabernacle. The people were to contribute to its construction, showing the human role in its incarnation. It was to contain an ark, with a mercy seat that would become very important in the purification of the peoples' sin.



God blessed specific individuals with the skill necessary to bring about a precise construction of the tabernacle and its accompanying pieces. Moses specified that these workers had the skills because the Lord “has filled them with the skill to do every sort of work” (Ex 35:35). Thus, they made the ark, the altar of sacrifice, the lampstands, the priestly garments, and the tent itself.

It was the place where the glory of God descended to earth, to the amazement of the people:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-40:35).

In the tabernacle, the people experienced the presence and guidance of God. When the glory of God was on the tabernacle, the people stayed put. When the cloud of glory moved from the tent, the people would pack up the tabernacle and follow (Ex 40:36-40:38).

In Numbers 7, all the tribes consecrated the tabernacle, indicating the role that God's presence should play in the life of all Israel.

At this early stage, John is laying groundwork for the understanding that much of the Old Testament has found a superior level of fulfillment and meaning in Jesus and his new order.

John is telling his readers that Jesus was the real tabernacle or meeting place of God and humanity. In Jesus, one can see the precise mercy seat, altar, and other appurtenances of the tabernacle, as John will explain throughout his gospel.

In the tabernacle, or the tenting of the Word as flesh, John demonstrates a fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies and images. As an example, the prophet Zechariah lived late compared to most Old Testament prophets. Zechariah was active in the southern kingdom of Judah *after* the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity. He began prophesying in the second year of King Darius, which would be about 520BC. True to his name (“Zechariah” can be translated, “Yahweh remembers”), a good bit of his prophecies targeted the times when the Lord would come to his people in glory.

The people in Zechariah’s day had lived for over a generation in captivity in Babylon. Many had returned to Judah, but many also stayed in Babylon, Egypt, and other lands outside the Promised Land. The people were sensitive to the idea of dwelling in foreign lands and of the opportunity to dwell in Jerusalem – “home.”

In Zechariah 2, the prophet proclaimed that something unusual was happening in Jerusalem. There was a time coming where walls were no longer necessary. God would be setting up a Jerusalem where he would be the protector. And while the people of God had been spread abroad in lands, the day was coming when they would return to the land of promise and not just Jews, but Gentiles would join in the community of God. This would come about as God “roused himself from his holy dwelling” and chose “Jerusalem” and the “holy land” as the place where he would come.

And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you (Zech 2:11).

The idea of dwelling with God had given meaning to the temple before its destruction. Not because the temple was inordinately special itself, but because it was signifying the presence of God among his people.

John points out that not only did Jesus become a tabernacle, dwelling with humanity as the presence of God, but in a real sense, as one beholds Jesus, one beholds God and his glory. This is a concept that has strong roots in a significant event in the life of Moses. Consistent with the rest of John, it is a clear illustration that Jesus was far beyond Moses. Moses pointed to Jesus.

After the golden calf incident (Ex. 32), the Lord commanded Moses and the people to leave Sinai. In their journeys, Moses would erect the “Tent of Meeting” (Ex 31:7). It was there that Moses would “meet with the Lord,” signified by a cloud coming down and guarding the entrance. Moses would converse with the Lord “face to face,” but that is not meant in a visual sense. It is in the sense that one will talk out loud and visit with a friend (Ex 33:9-11).

On one occasion, Moses asked God for the favor of getting to behold God's glory.

Moses said, "Please show me your glory" (Ex 33:18).

God's response not only told Moses he would not visually meet with God, but it also gives the significant language John would use over 1200 years later.

And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (Ex 33:19-33:23).

God was not to be seen by anyone. Moses could not see his glory. This was true *until* the incarnation. For John tells his readers that as Jesus was the Tent of Meeting (a part of the tabernacle), in Jesus one beheld the Glory of God!

### **The Greatness of the Word (Jn. 1:15-18)**

*John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (Jn. 1:15-18)*

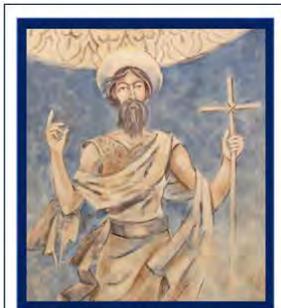
This final prologue section proclaims the greatness of Jesus, the Word made flesh. The prologue has brought the reader from before creation, up through the incarnation, and finishes with the completed ministry and work of Jesus on earth. Tying the previous sections together, Jesus is the one greater than the Baptist as one who pre-existed the Baptist. Jesus is greater than Moses. Jesus has beheld God, just as God at the side of the Father.



Reading this section of John in the Greek reveals some interesting aspects of John's thought process through his use of verb tenses. For example, in verse 15 one reads in the English Standard Version that "John bore witness about" Jesus. In the New International Version, one reads "John testified concerning" Jesus. Yet in the Greek, one reads, "John testifies about/concerning" Jesus. John used the present tense of the verb, rather than a past tense used by the translators.

Are the translators daft? Of course not! The Baptist's testimony about Jesus is clearly in the past time-wise as John was writing. The Baptist is long dead. He died even before Jesus died. The translation is accurate if we are considering English as it should be written, dating back to the King James of 1611, which reads, "John bare witness of him." But reading in the Greek, one doesn't get confused about when the Baptist bore witness. Yet at the same time one is impressed that for John, it seems the witness is still true and present at the time of writing.

The "witness" the Baptist "bore" was, in fact, still present in multiple ways. First, one can read how John still heard the voice of that testimony the many decades later. As a trial lawyer, I can look back on decades of trials and certain highlighted witnesses and their testimony still rings in my ears as if I am hearing it today. But there is a second sense in which the Baptist was still an active witness to John and others.



The Greek verb μαρτυρέω (martyreō) not only spoke of ones who gave testimony, but also ones who gave their lives in support of the testimony.

By the time John was writing his gospel, the verb he used had taken on an added meaning. The verb μαρτυρέω (martyreō) originally spoke of one who gave favorable testimony regarding another. But over the course of the first century, *martyreō* became a word that also spoke to people who willingly gave their lives in support of their testimony. Looking closely at the Greek word shows how our English word "martyr" came directly from it. The Baptist was martyred, he was beheaded. John knows that martyrdom was brought about because of the testimony the Baptist made in alignment with his calling from God. The martyrdom had occurred, but was still active and present.

The Baptist's testimony concerning the Word was not transitory. It had occurred in the past as John wrote, but it was still active and always will be.

As to the Word, John then writes that "from his fulness we have all received grace upon grace." These are interesting word choices, and John will expand upon them in the coming pages of his gospel. The ideas may be best understood in light of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This subject is worthy of a slight diversion from the

text into the pages of church history, for this subject will come up again and again in John.

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The Gospel of John was written between 70 and 90AD. The early church tradition is unanimous in teaching that John's gospel was written from Ephesus (Asia Minor) a city which took on special importance in the early church because of John's presence and work there.

Irenaeus, writing from Lyon around 185AD, cited the Ephesian church's strong apostolic tradition,

Then, again, the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles (*Against the Heresies*, 3.1.4).

Irenaeus, also emphasized John's residence and his authorship of the fourth gospel after the synoptics were composed, explaining,

Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia (*Against the Heresies* 3.1:1).

Church historian Philip Schaff summarized the acclamations of the early church that,

Jerusalem was approaching its downfall; Rome was not yet a second Jerusalem. Ephesus, by the labors of Paul and of John, became the chief theater of church history in the second half of the first and during the greater part of the second century (*History of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans 1989, Vol. 1, at 425).

The church at Ephesus was started by the apostle Paul, as detailed in the Book of Acts. Paul lived there, ministering for several years, and he kept close emotional ties to the believers there (Acts. 18:19-21; 19:1-20:1; 20:17-38). Paul wrote the book called "the Epistle to the Ephesians" around 61-63AD. While scholars parse differences over whether Paul or one of his students wrote Ephesians, and scholars parse over whether Ephesians was written to the church in Ephesus or written as a regional letter to go to the churches around Ephesus, regardless, one can see that the Ephesian church claimed the letter and it existed from the earliest known collections of Paul's letters as one to the church in Ephesus.

Not surprisingly, then, if the Ephesian church had the benefit of Paul’s letter, treasured it, read it over and over, studied it, dissected it, and claimed it as their own, then the language of Paul’s letter would have permeated the church, becoming their vocabulary, their thoughts, and their expressed theology.

With John living in Ephesus, teaching in Ephesus, and writing from Ephesus, it is expected one would find the church’s vocabulary and theology drawn in part from Paul’s letter, expressed in John’s gospel. Over and over that proves to be the case, as the Gospel of John – exclusively of all other New Testament writings – uses phrases and concepts from Ephesians.

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In the gospel of John prologue, the idea of Jesus having a “fullness” from which the believers receive “grace upon grace” is a concept that would resound fully to the Ephesians and others. The very plan of Christ, according to Paul in Ephesians, was in the “fullness” of God’s time, to unite all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). This was done as God blessed those in Christ, “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3), having “lavished” forgiveness “according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:8).

The greatness of the Word is based first and foremost on who the Word is – God. But the greatness of God isn’t simply in his unsurpassed power and might. Despots have great power and might, but that doesn’t confer on them “greatness.” The true greatness of God is seen in how he uses his power and might. God acts for his people.



John’s gospel will unfold the redemptive story as a love story. The love story is rooted in Jesus’ love for his followers. (“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Jn. 15:13). John taught his readers that Jesus came because, “God so loved the world...” (Jn. 3:16). The love story isn’t simply one that flowed from God and Jesus to humanity, but love is the consistent theme

even of the relationship between Jesus, God the Son, and God the Father. John explain that Jesus acted also out of love to the Father (“but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father” Jn. 14:31). The love of Son to Father flowed both ways. (“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” Jn. 15:9)

So, in his prologue, John lays out the greatness of the loving Word as a giving source of “grace upon grace.” This phrase is more literally translated by the N.I.V. which

gives “grace instead of grace.” The idea of God’s lavishness of this grace is apparent. But beyond that, a picture is painted of a grace that never runs out. Grace is continually replenished. The grace of God doesn’t cover the sins of his people once, expecting perfection thereafter. The grace of God is constant. As Paul wrote the Ephesians decades earlier,

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us (Eph. 1:7-8).

When John writes “we have all received” this lavish grace from the fullness of Christ, one can again hear echoes from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that this fullness is found in the church. The church is the “we” who have all received this blessing. Paul wrote of,

the church, which is his body, the *fullness* of him who *fills* all in all (Eph. 1:22-23).

Again, Paul uses these themes as he explained that the church had received,

the *immeasurable riches of his grace* in kindness toward us *in Christ Jesus* (Eph. 2:7).

This will resound through John’s gospel, but the initial proclamation that from the fullness of Christ a lavish grace is received should not be read over too quickly!

As John also does repeatedly in his gospel, John contrasts this grace received from the Word with Moses. Moses was a conduit. Moses was the one *through whom* the Law was given. John knew, and it was factual, that Moses didn’t author the Law. The *Torah* (the Hebrew word for “Law”) is what is commonly known as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, also called “the Books of Moses.” These books were based on what God revealed to Moses. Moses didn’t create them himself. This is why John writes with a passive verb saying the Law “was given” *through* Moses.

In a, the distinctive way, the grace and truth “came” through Jesus. John’s word translated “came” is the same “*egeneto*” discussed in great detail earlier. This is the word that references something being born, created, or coming into being. John has already said that nothing that came into being did so without Jesus. Through Jesus everything that has come into existence, came into existence.

So, John writes that Moses was a conduit for the Law, whereas Jesus himself was the source of grace and truth. John is proclaiming in clear terms that Jesus is the

greatest of all. Jesus's greatness is on a whole different scale than even Moses, the greatest prophet Israel had ever known.

The concept of "grace and truth" over against the limitations of the "law" are also concepts that would resound in the ears of those intimate with Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians two, Paul spoke not only of the "grace" that saves people apart from "works," but in a few verses later explained that Christ abolished the limited "law of commandments" reconciling Jews (who received the Law) and Gentiles (who did *not* receive the Law) into one body (Eph. 2:8-16). The grace and truth of Jesus went beyond Israel's borders, unlike the Law given through Moses.

In a final proclamation of this truth, with a reference back to Jesus as the true tabernacle, the true meeting place of God with humanity, John returns to the idea of Moses wanting to see God's face, to behold his glory, as recorded in Exodus 33. As discussed above, Moses wished to see God's glory, but was unable to see any more than a smidgeon (the "back" of God, is the expression used in Exodus 33:23). Jesus, however, is the only God, at the side of the Father. Jesus has beheld God fully.

With this prologue complete, John is ready to begin his narrative of the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in ministry.