

# Chapter 1: The Identity of Jesus

## *John 1:1–18*

The prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18) accomplishes two critical goals that shape the way that we will read the rest of this book. First, this introductory section frames how we ought to understand what John is trying to teach us about Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Word made flesh. Marianne Meye Thompson helpfully compares the format of John’s Gospel to a modern “docudrama” that “makes use of historical data and material, but presents it in such a way as to engage the viewer’s attention and interest, while presenting the director’s unique interpretation of the events recorded.”<sup>1</sup> Rather than developing our understanding of Jesus slowly and organically, John opens his Gospel with a clear, profound meditation on the nature(s), mission, and identity of Jesus Christ. As Leon Morris writes, “Where Mark begins with the gospel message and Matthew and Luke have their birth stories, John takes us back in his opening to the eternal purpose of God.”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, John writes his Gospel so that we will believe (John 20:31), and John’s initial method of accomplishing that goal is to state his conclusions in the very beginning of his book. Through the rest of the book, he will then prove those conclusions through Jesus’ words and deeds.

Second, John does not give a flat, single-dimensional statement about Jesus Christ, but the Evangelist introduces us here to the *multiple* themes that he will develop over the rest of the book, so that the prologue functions as “a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel, simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes.”<sup>3</sup> It is as though John holds up the precious diamond of Jesus Christ for all to see, and then he turns it quickly about, allowing every facet to sparkle briefly here at the beginning before returning later to examine each of those facets in more detail over the rest of his Gospel. These themes include Christ’s pre-existence as God, his relationship as Son to the Father, his incarnation as a human being, his work as re-creator, his function as light and life for the world, and his profound misunderstanding by “his own” people who should have recognized him immediately. In this way, the “prologue and the gospel story form an intrinsic unity and have been ‘attuned’ to each other”<sup>4</sup> like an overture to an opera by whetting “the appetite of the hearers, preparing them for the work to be presented, and bringing together themes developed in it.”<sup>5</sup>

In this prologue, John develops three main themes, with a multitude of other facets that support and clarify these three main themes. First, John identifies Jesus of Nazareth as God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Second, John identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Redeemer of the world. Third, John identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Mediator between God the Father and God’s people.

### **Jesus as Creator (John 1:1–8)**

The first verses of John’s Gospel are deservedly famous: “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). Here, John uses language that is simple, yet poetic and profound.<sup>6</sup> To understand John’s meaning

here, we need to examine (1) what he means by “In the beginning,” (2) the nature of the “Word” (*logos*), and (3) the relationship of the Word’s being *with* God, and (4) what John means by writing that the Word *was* God.

### In the Beginning Was...

By using the language, “in the beginning,” John is clearly referencing Genesis 1:1, where we read that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Here, though, John is giving us additional information about God’s creative process by telling us that the *logos* “was” in the beginning. This idea, however, is not terribly surprising if we only consider the first phrase: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1a). Indeed, the creation story in Genesis 1 demonstrates that God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning *by* his spoken word, so that there is little difficulty in reconciling Genesis 1 with John 1 if we simply say that the “Word” was God’s “agent of creation (vv. 3–4), what we might call the ‘originator’ of all things.”

John, however, is telling us something beyond offering a simple reminder that God created the heavens and the earth by his word. It is not simply that the Word “was” in the beginning as the means of bringing forth creation (although that is true), since the imperfect tense for the Greek word “was” suggests instead that, when the beginning happened, the Word was already there.<sup>8</sup> The *logos*, then, “transcends” the beginning of time and the beginning of creation—that is, the *logos* transcends the “beginning” spoken of in Genesis 1:1.<sup>9</sup> Or, to put it another way, “There never was a time when the Word was not.”<sup>10</sup>

### ...The Logos

But what does John have in mind when he speaks about this *logos*? On its own, *logos* can indeed mean “word” in the sense of speech, but it can also describe “reason,” “meaning,” “idea,” or, more broadly, “wisdom,” which is why our word “logic” is related to *logos*.<sup>11</sup> The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the word *logos* frequently to refer to the “word” of God.<sup>12</sup> If we understand God’s Word as his Wisdom—that is, as an attribute of God—then we do not have much of a problem squaring John 1:1a with the Old Testament. As the church father Augustine of Hippo famously asked, “is there anywhere he [God] could be without his Word and his Wisdom...?”<sup>13</sup> God could not be God apart from his Wisdom, so anyone who accepts the authority of the Old Testament could easily affirm the idea that God’s *logos* existed in the beginning “with God” (John 1:1b).

### The Logos Was With God

John, however, means something still more than to say that the Word is merely one *aspect* of God’s nature. Instead, when John writes about the *logos*, he is telling us about a *person* who is the Word and Wisdom of God, and John clarifies this meaning in the second and third phrases of John 1:1. In the second phrase, John uses a surprising preposition to describe the fact that the Word existed “with” God. The word “with” is not the normal word for “with” (*sun*), but rather the word *pros* (toward), which we might translate by saying that “the Word was *facing* God” or even “the Word was face to face with God,”<sup>14</sup> since the word *pros* is related to the Greek word *prosopon* (“face”) in a very similar relationship to what exists between the English words for “facing” and “face.”

While this word *pros* can indeed mean “with,” it generally means “with” only in the sense of an intimate, personal relationship, which means that the *logos* John describes should be distinguished from God in some way, albeit an intimate way.<sup>15</sup> The Word, then, is a different person from God who already existed from before the beginning of creation. Therefore, the Word is a distinct person from God, but the Word is not a person who was *created* by God.

### The Logos Was God

In the third phrase, John transforms Old Testament categories altogether: not only did the Word already exist in the beginning, and not only is the Word personally distinct from God, but now John adds: “and the Word was God” (John 1:1c). The personal Word that existed from the beginning with God is also *himself* God. Importantly, John tells us that “the Word was God,” not “God was the Word,” since “the latter would have meant that God and the Word were the same; it would have pointed to an identity. But John is leaving open the possibility that there may be more to ‘God’ than the ‘Word.’”<sup>16</sup> By telling us that the *logos* is God, but that God is *more* than the Word, John gives us the first insight into the nature of the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternally begotten Son of the Father (cf. John 1:14). Through the rest of his Gospel, John will then work through this initial statement to unfold more regarding the riddle of the Trinity by expanding on and clarifying the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: one God, three Persons.

### Why “Logos”?

Now that we see the full picture John is building in each of the three phrases in John 1:1, we need to ask the question, Why does John choose the word *logos* to describe the Second Person of the Trinity? This is especially important when we consider that the word *logos* carried a lot of baggage, since Greek philosophy and religion had already used the term to communicate ideas that were antithetical to what John is telling us about the Son of God.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the word *logos* uniquely communicates two ideas about the Son of God that John wants us to know from the outset.

First, *logos* communicates the intimacy of relationship of the Son to the Father. While the Son and the Father are two distinct persons, describing the Son as the Word of the Father does not allow us to imagine too great of a divide between the two persons, which is critical if we are going to maintain the idea that the Father and the Son (along with the Holy Spirit) are indeed one God who exist as three persons. The Word of someone cannot exist on its own, but is intimately connected to the Speaker. Moreover, the Speaker cannot reveal himself to anyone else apart from communicating by his Word. As Calvin writes, “as Speech is said to be among men the image of the mind, so it is not inappropriate to apply this to God, and to say that He reveals himself to us by his Speech.”<sup>18</sup>

Second, by describing the Second Person of the Trinity as the Word of God, John forces us to grapple with the relationship of this *logos* to the word of God that appears throughout the Old Testament. From the beginning, God created the world by his word, and then God gave his word to his people at many times and in many ways (cf. Heb. 1:1), so that sometimes we even read that the word of God “came” to the prophets.<sup>19</sup> All along, was God telling us about his eternal *logos* who was with him in the beginning, and who was *himself* God? Craig Keener is probably right to suggest that John is trying to communicate to us that the *logos* is nothing less than the *embodiment* of God’s written word, Torah.<sup>20</sup>

## Logos as Creator

Naturally, John has much that he needs to tell us about such a significant person as this Word. Most urgently, John first focuses on telling us that the Word is the *creator* of all things: “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.” (John 1:3–4). Importantly, these verses teach unflinchingly that the Word created all things, so that not one thing that exists came into creation apart from the Word’s creative power. If that is the case, however, this text also affirms that the Word is *not* part of the created order, for if there was a time when the Word was “not” (as the heretic Arius attempted to argue), then the Word would not have been able to create *all* things, for God would have needed to create the Word without the aid of the Word.<sup>21</sup>

Even the language of “light” and “life” have to do with creational themes. In the beginning, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3) on the first day. Then, God later filled the heavens, the seas, and the earth with living creatures on the fifth and sixth days (Gen. 1:20–31), so that the book of Genesis identifies God alone as the source of life. John, though, has identified the Word who was with God in the beginning as God, so he wants us to know that we must acknowledge the Word also as the source of light and life.

Additionally, John is introducing us to two of the main themes that he will explore in his Gospel: Jesus as true life, and Jesus as true light. John will use the word “life” fifty-four times in his Gospel, and John will have much to say about the quality of life that Jesus brings through the rest of this book.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, John will later tell us exactly what it means when Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 7:12). For now, however, John merely tells us that the Word embodies life, and that the Word’s life is the light of men.

## Misunderstanding the Word

What John has described in the first four verses of his Gospel is remarkably good news. And yet, John does not fail to let us know about the challenges surrounding his message concerning the Word in whom is life, and who shines as the light. In John 1:5, John writes: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Part of the reason that John here mentions darkness has to do with the ongoing theme of the Word as Creator that he has been developing, since, in the beginning, “darkness was over the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2) before God created the light that filled creation.

More than that, John is introducing a theme that we will encounter repeatedly in this Gospel: specifically, this is the first hint we get about the ongoing *misunderstanding* of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. D. A. Carson writes, “Whatever is made of the ‘messianic secret’ motif in Mark, the obvious parallel is the ‘misunderstanding’ theme in John.”<sup>23</sup> It is only part of John’s intention to reveal to us the truth about Jesus Christ; his parallel intention is to explain the chief ways in which Jesus was misunderstood, and to give us the testimony and the insight so that we may eventually put our faith in Jesus and be saved (John 20:31). Here, when John writes that the darkness has not “overcome” the shining of the light, he most likely does not mean to say that the darkness did not “overpower” or “extinguish” the light, since this verse appears to be written in a parallel manner to John 1:10b and 11b, which have to do with the world’s lack of understanding and receiving Christ.<sup>24</sup> On that basis, it is better to understand John 1:5b as “the darkness has not understood it.”<sup>25</sup>

On this basis, the Gospel of John will also place repeated emphasis on the two sources of information that help humanity to overcome their own misunderstanding of Jesus as the Christ: through the signs that Christ will perform, and through the testimony offered by credible witnesses supporting Jesus.<sup>26</sup> In John 1:6–8, we meet the first authoritative witness, John the Baptist: “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.” Indeed, John’s testimony will be the first that we will consider in the next section of the Gospel as we look at John 1:19–34 since John was sent specifically to introduce Jesus to Israel as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and as the Son of God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33–34).

While this section about John the baptist in John 1:6–8 seems, at first, a bit out of place in the middle of the prologue, the purpose of this passage seems to be to introduce us to the first witness who will bear testimony about Christ (“the light”), lest he be misunderstood by us too. The Evangelist introduces us here to John the Baptist as the first witness so that we might “believe” (John 1:7).

### Jesus is the Creator

On the whole, the main purpose of John 1:6–8 is to lead us to believe that Jesus is the Creator, which John understands to be critical for our faith. Jesus is the Word who was in the beginning *facing* God who himself *is* God, and the one through whom all things were made, so that apart from him nothing was created. Why specifically does John want us to appreciate Jesus’ identity as the Creator?

In part, John wants to lead us to recognize that, if Jesus is the Creator, then he is the God to whom we owe all our allegiance. If he created us, then we exist by him, from him, and for him. More than that, if he is the Creator in whom is life (John 1:4), then we cannot exist in any meaningful, joy-filled way apart from him. John wants us to believe in Jesus not only so that we can be *correct* in our thinking, but so that we can be reconciled to our Creator, from whom our sin has alienated us. If we misunderstand Jesus, we will not merely be *wrong*, but we will not find life anywhere else. We will remain in darkness, failing to understand the light of men who has come to give life. John opens us his Gospel here so that we will make no mistake about the stakes of believing upon the Jesus to whom he is bearing witness.

### Jesus as Redeemer (John 1:9–13)

This Jesus—the Word who created all things, in whom life is found, and who lives as the light of men—does not merely exist. Rather, this Jesus has a mission to accomplish. John writes:

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. (John 1:9–13)

Jesus came into the world as the true light, despite the fact that the world did not know him, and even his own people (the people of Israel with whom God had a covenantal relationship) failed to receive him. But, John explains that all who receive Jesus become the children of God. What should we make of this?

### The Mission of the True Light

Intriguingly, John insists that the “true light, which gives light to everyone” came into the world. Although John has not yet informed us the scandalous truth that the Word must become flesh in order to come into the world (John 1:14), this statement is still shocking by itself. The eternal Son of God who created all things owes nothing to his creation. Quite the opposite, but we creatures owe all things to our Creator, and yet we nevertheless see that it is the mission of the Son of God to condescend from his glory in order to come to us.

Compounding the condescension of the Son, we find the next two affirmations that not only the world but God’s own people would neither know him nor receive him by faith. Oddly, an essential part of Jesus’ mission is to endure rejection, misunderstanding, marginalization, mockery, and scorn. The Word will not experience an easy victory when he comes into the world; most immediately and commonly through his time on earth, the Son of the Father will experience outright rejection.

We should not think, though, that the world and “his own” succeed in officially casting off Jesus through their failure to receive him. Instead, John says that the “true light...gives light to everyone” even in view of the fact that not all will receive him. The point is not that the mission of the true light coming into the world would be an absolute success in terms of bringing every last human being to a place of enlightenment; rather, the mission of Jesus would be a true success in the sense that his true light “shines on every man, and divides the race” between those who reject him and those who come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing find life in his name.<sup>27</sup>

### The Right to Become Children of God

Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus will state categorically that he did not come into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17). While some indeed will be condemned because of their rejection of Jesus, the purpose for which the true light came into the world was for salvation—to give those who believe in him the right to become children of God. This “right” is not something that is inalienably ours, for in fact we were alienated from our claim to God when the human race fell into sin in the garden of Eden. Instead, this “right” is given to us through nothing more than God’s free, unmerited grace to all those who believe in the name of Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

What extraordinary love that God has lavished upon us to call us—and, even to *make* us—his children (1 John 3:1)! For God to take us into his own family through Christ is nothing that we could accomplish by ourselves, for being born into the family of God cannot come by blood (that is, genealogical descent), nor the will of the flesh nor of the will of man (that is, not by any person’s desire to procreate), but only through God himself (John 1:13). But, make no mistake: John insists that this right to become God’s child comes through belief in Jesus alone. In no other way can we become the children of God.

## Jesus is the Redeemer

What John communicates to us in this second section of his prologue is that in Christ, the Creator became the Redeemer. God was not willing to allow his creation to move unchecked into destruction, but he instead sent his Son into the world that we might be saved through faith in him. As Redeemer, Jesus will heal the brokenness that entered into his creation through sin, saving all those who look to him in faith. Once again, John confronts us with the necessity of faith in Jesus, for apart from Jesus we cannot become children of God.

### Jesus as Mediator (John 1:14–18)

In the final section of his prologue, John finally makes explicit the way in which the eternal *logos* would come into the world: through taking upon himself the entirety of human nature (apart from sin):

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. (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. (John 1:14–18)

Here, John introduces us to the final major theme that he will explore in this Gospel: Jesus came to be the Mediator between the Father and us.

## The Word Became Flesh

To begin, John reveals that the eternal Word—the Word who was *with* God in the beginning and who himself *is* God—became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This remains an extraordinary statement to this day, but it would have been far more extraordinary in the day in which John was writing. At that time, gnosticism was the popular religious idea in the world (at least, in the wider world outside of Judaism), teaching that the realm of the spirit is good, while the realm of the material is evil.<sup>29</sup> For the Word to become flesh would have been a crude, defiling activity for pure spirit in the minds of gnostic thinking.<sup>30</sup>

But indeed, the Word *became* flesh. This was no mere appearance, something that only *seemed* to be the Word in flesh. Instead, the Word united himself to the fullness of human nature (apart from sin) so that “the deity of Christ can no more be abstracted from his humanity than the reverse.”<sup>31</sup> This mystery is profound, and Christians have wrestled with its significance for the last two thousand years. How can the eternal *logos* enter as a human being into time? How can the infinite God empty himself by taking on the limitations of humanity? How can the Word possibly become flesh? Because of the inherent difficulties of this question, the Christian church must engage with questions about the person and natures of Christ in each generation. In general, however, the two main guidelines for orthodox Christology are that (1) we must never separate Christ’s humanity from his deity, but we must instead uphold the unity of his personhood as the God-man, and (2) we must

never confuse the distinctions between Christ's humanity and his deity, but we must uphold the differences in his two natures.<sup>32</sup>

And yet, John teaches to us that the Word's becoming flesh was not an end in itself, but only the prerequisite toward accomplishing the mission that Jesus came to accomplish. In John 1:14–18, John unfolds three aspects to Christ's mediation that depend on the Word's becoming flesh.

### Mediating the Presence of God

First, John explains that the Word became flesh to mediate the *presence* of God to us when he writes that the Word became flesh “and dwelt among us...” The word for “dwelt” might be more literally translated as “tabernacled,” since this is the word used to describe the pitching of the tent of the tabernacle that the people of Israel set up as they wandered through the wilderness.<sup>33</sup> The tabernacle, though, was far more than a portable worship center, but the tabernacle was the place where God himself dwelt in the midst of his people (Ex. 25:8). John writes here something profound, then: it will no longer be a building (whether the tent of the tabernacle or the solid structure of the temple) where God will dwell with his people, but he will now do so directly as the Word made flesh in their midst.

More than that, if the Word made flesh is indeed the tabernacled presence of God in the midst of his people, then the incarnation of Jesus marks the first event of the *new* creation. When God gave his people instructions for building the tabernacle through the mediator Moses, God told his people to build a replica of the garden of Eden.<sup>34</sup> For example, the tabernacle was filled with garden imagery, including a golden lampstand that is purposefully designed to look like a tree, with a “stem,” “calyx,” “flower,” “branches,” and “almond blossoms” (Ex. 25:31–40). Also, just as the garden of Eden had been filled with food for God's people to eat (Gen. 2:16), so also God commanded that the priests regularly set bread of the Presence on a table in the holy place (Ex. 25:30), and then God gave the bread to the priests to eat after it was replaced with fresh bread to set before God each Sabbath day (Lev. 24:5–9). Additionally, God set a source of wisdom in both places: in the garden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:17); in the tabernacle, a copy of his law, which resided in the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:16). Finally, the ark of the covenant was protected by images of cherubim (Ex. 25:17–22), just like the entrance to the garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:24).

The tabernacle, therefore, was a restoration of creation *before* sin, a remnant of the goodness of the old creation in the middle of the corruption of the fallen creation. Furthermore, by recalling the glory of the garden of Eden, the tabernacle anticipated the hope of glory that God would bring through *new* creation “as if to say, this [the tabernacle] was God's new creation of his dwelling place on earth.”<sup>35</sup> By causing the Word to become flesh and *tabernacle* among us, God begins in earnest to renew his fallen creation. In Jesus, God will dwell in the midst of his people freely and without hindrance, just like Charles Wesley's line: “Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel!”<sup>36</sup> And yet, the work of Jesus will accomplish more than for God to dwell near to us. Through Jesus, God comes near to us for the purpose of recreating us as the tabernacle that brings new creation to all things, in the words of Isaac Watts, “far as the curse as found.”<sup>37</sup>

### Mediating the Glory of God

Second, the Word became flesh to mediate to us the glory of God—specifically, to mediate to us



the glory of God in a way that we might *see* it. The ESV's translation, "and we have *seen* his glory," hides the fact that John does not use the common word for "seen," but instead a word that "indicates careful and deliberate vision which seeks to interpret its object."<sup>38</sup> The sense John gives is that he (along with the other eye-witnesses) *beheld* and *gazed upon* the glory of God in the Word made flesh. This is a remarkable thought, since we tend to imagine that the incarnation made Jesus to look common, rather than glorious, and that is true in one sense. Jesus emptied himself of his glory by taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), so that, on the surface, "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him...and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:2–3).

And yet, from another perspective, John is telling us that is precisely in the medium of his incarnation that God allowed human beings to gaze upon his glory. Herman Ridderbos writes:

For however much the incarnation of the Word in the man Jesus of Nazareth is also the occasion for human unbelief (cf. 1:45; 6:42; 7:27, etc.), this does not alter the fact that in 1:14a, as in 14b, "flesh" is clearly not the means by which the glory of God is concealed in the man Jesus but the means by which it is revealed before the eyes of all. The flesh is the medium of the glory and makes it visible to all people. By means of the incarnation God has visibly appeared among humankind. And—we may immediately add—the entire Gospel of John is proof of it: proof of that abundant glory, a glory manifested before the eyes of all.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, God's glory is displayed in his humility and his suffering. John presents this insight in seed form here, but this insight becomes one of the most important themes in John's Gospel, growing slowly as we see Jesus' revealing his glory, but nevertheless rejected by his own. Ultimately, this theme culminates when Jesus prays for, "Father, glorify your name" (John 12:28), which the Father promises to do through lifting his Son up on the cross (John 12:29–33). At the heart of the message of John's Gospel is the scandalous claim that God's glory is revealed primarily through humility and suffering.

In order to understand the degree to which we can behold the glory of God in Jesus, we must follow John's clarification about the relationship between the two. John writes that we behold the glory of the Word, "glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Clearly, John is asserting some kind of a similarity here by identifying that the Son is the "only Son from the Father." This uniqueness in relationship means that the glory of the Son reveals the *same* glory of the Father, since the glory of the Son is "*full* of grace and truth." John does not explain exactly how the glory of the Son can be the same glory of the Father here, but this will be a theme to which we return over and over again until Jesus makes the link explicit when Philip asks, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John 14:8). To this request, Jesus responds, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (John 14:9–10).

The revelation of God's glory in Jesus' incarnation becomes all the more extraordinary, then, when we consider God's words when Moses asked, "Please show me your glory" (Ex. 33:18). Notice, this is the same question that Philip asks Jesus! While Jesus assures Philip that the disciples have already seen the glory of the Father in him, God tells Moses that he cannot give Moses all that he has

requested. God graciously offers to give a glimpse of his “goodness” (Ex. 33:19), but God cannot show Moses the fullness of his glory, explaining, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Ex. 33:20).

Notably, when God did pass by Moses, God showed Moses his goodness by proclaiming the way in which he is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14):

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (Ex. 34:6–7)

In this proclamation, God proclaims that he is both a gracious God and a truthful God. He is gracious in the sense of showing mercy, being slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and forgiving iniquity. He is truthful in his faithfulness to keep steadfast love for thousands and in his resolution to punish the guilty. John’s phrase “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14 “is almost certainly directing his readers to Exodus 33–34.”<sup>40</sup> What Moses saw in part, and only for a moment, Jesus allowed his disciples to gaze on the glory of the Father throughout the time that he was with them.

This seems to be the reason that John the Evangelist again compares Jesus to John the Baptist, writing, “(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’)” (John 1:15). While we will explore this statement more fully in the next chapter, when the Baptist repeats this statement in a fuller context (John 1:30), for now we should see that the Baptist is testifying to something profound about Jesus: this Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father who so completely reveals the Father’s glory that he will later truly say, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

### Jesus vs. Moses

Before moving on to the third mediation of Jesus, we should pause to observe a crucial point. Just as the tabernacle of the Word made flesh transcends the tabernacle that Moses built—both in terms of the immediacy of God’s presence and the reality of the new creation mediated through each respective tabernacle—so the Word made flesh allows us a better glimpse of the glory of God than even Moses received on top of the mountain. Here again, John introduces us to an important theme that he will develop through the rest of his Gospel: Jesus is greater than Moses.

Importantly, John does not portray the relationship between Moses and Jesus as one of two antagonists, but rather as a relationship of promise and fulfillment. What Moses began to accomplish incompletely, Jesus fulfills entirely. John makes the contrast explicit in John 1:16–17: “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.” The word “upon” in the phrase “grace upon grace” is the Greek word *anti*, which does not mean “opposed to,” but rather, “in place of,” although not in the sense of a violent substitution. Moses is not kicked to the curb; rather, the project that Moses began finds its accumulative fulfillment in Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

## Mediating God

Third, the Word became flesh to mediate God himself to us. In John 1:18, the Evangelist builds on the idea of seeing God in Christ to write, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Jesus is the “only God” who is at the Father’s side, and therefore uniquely qualified to make the Father known. Once again, John does not clarify *how* Jesus makes the Father known yet, but he will do so through the remainder of this Gospel.

Instead, John gives us here a marvelous word to contemplate how Jesus has “made him known”: the word here is *exēgēsato*, the word from which we get our word, “Exegete.”<sup>42</sup> This is the only place in the Gospel that John uses this word, but it means something like, “telling the whole story”—that is, telling the whole story of God the Father.<sup>43</sup> Jesus does something more than merely mediating the presence of God by his tabernacling work through the incarnation, and he does more than mediating the glory of God. In Jesus, God mediates *himself* to us.

## The Identity of the Word Made Flesh

The prologue of John’s Gospel, then, accomplishes a very specific goal: John intends to make explicit the true identity of Jesus from the beginning. This is where thinking of this Gospel as a docudrama is helpful, since docudramas often begin in such a way as to make the thesis clear from the outset, and then working its way through the material to prove that thesis. In this way, John’s Gospel is *deductive* by first stating the conclusion regarding the identity of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God explicit *before* giving evidence to back that conclusion up, whereas the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are more *inductive* by describing the public ministry in such a way that builds, slowly but surely, up to the same conclusion.

John the Evangelist writes this way because, more than anything else, he wants you to *believe*. He pulls back the curtain into the eternal decrees of the Father and the Word who not only created the world, but purposed to redeem the world through the incarnation of the Son, who would mediate God’s presence to humanity. There is much more evidence that John will give to bolster his claims, but everything starts here, with the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, in whom was life and the light of men, who came to give us the right to become the children of God through faith.

## Notes

1. “Some incidents, persons, or themes may be treated in great detail; others can be glossed over more quickly. Events need not be recounted in strict chronological order, although at some point an overview of significant incidents leading up to a main event or grand finale will probably be included. The end product, if well done, will be carefully and deliberately crafted, shaped by the director’s interests as well as by the subject matter and form, with the hope that will inform, entertain, and involve the viewer.

Like a docudrama, the gospel of John uses historical data and material, sifted through the sieve of the author’s viewpoint, the readers’ interests and concerns, and the standard conventions that govern the particular form of art or literature. It is not created out of whole cloth, any more than a docudrama is. But creative freedom is exercised in telling the story. The gospel writer has been selective in his use of material (20:30; 21:25), arranging it in a broadly chronological framework with interpretive freedom. The book makes explicit its retrospective vantage point; that is, it interprets the story of Jesus, already knowing how that story ends, and

in light of the events that follow after Jesus' death and resurrection (2:22; 7:39; 13:7)." (Marianne Meyers Thompson, "John," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman, III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 409–10.)

2. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 63–64.

3. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 111.

4. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Exegesis*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 17–18.

5. George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 5.

6. On the poetic nature of the prologue—including its possibility of being an early hymn—see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 334–37.

7. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114.

8. The imperfect tense "was" conveys the idea of an ongoing existence in the past, which preceded "the beginning." This word "was" stands in contrast with the aorist tense "were/was made" (John 1:3) which conveys a specific time when creation was brought into existence, before which time creation did not exist. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 114.

9. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 25.

10. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 65.

11. "Word and language are the means by which human beings enter into an intellectual relationship with their environment, esp. with other human beings. More than a mere cipher, a word or a concept was, for the ancients, a means of ordering phenomena and ideas....(Because words, as the shape and form in which we express our thinking, count as one of the highest distinguishing characteristics of human beings, the Bible also speaks of the self-communication of God in the category of the word, right up to the Johannine identification of God with the Word.) Against this background, λόγος acquired rich content among the ancient Greeks..." ("λόγος," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed., ed. Moisés Silva, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 128–29.)

12. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 115.

13. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 2nd ed., trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), Book II.7, 102.

14. So, R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 32–33, and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1953), 70.

15. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 116–17.

16. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 69.

17. For an extensive summary of these Hellenistic uses, see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 339–50.

18. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. I, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 26. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.vii.i.html>>

19. "Considering how frequently John quotes or alludes to the Old Testament, that is the place to begin. There, 'the word' (Heb. *dābār*) of God is connected with God's powerful activity in creation (cf. Gn. 1:3ff.; Ps. 33:6), revelation (Je. 1:4, Is. 9:8; Ezk. 33:7; Am. 3:1, 8), and deliverance (Ps. 107:20; Is. 55:1). If the LORD is said to speak to the prophet Isaiah (e.g. Is. 7:3), elsewhere we read that 'the word of the LORD came to Isaiah' (Is. 38:4; cf. Je 1:4; Ezk. 1:6). It was by 'the word of the LORD' that the heavens were made (Ps. 33:6); in Gn. 1:3, 6, 9, etc. God simply speaks, and his powerful word creates. That same word effects deliverance and judgment (Is. 55:1; cf. Ps. 29:3ff.). When some of his people faced illness that brought them to the drink of death, God 'sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave' (Ps. 107:20)." (Carson, *The*

*Gospel According to John*, 115.)

20. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 334, 350–63.

21. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 71.

22. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 38.

23. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 52.

24. “A translation that is gaining favor takes οὐ κατέλαβεν to mean did not overcome, did not overpower, did not put out or extinguish. We believe that this is wrong. Whereas in form the three clauses of verses 5b, 10b, and 11b are very similar, it would seem probable that they are also similar in meaning. We have here a striking illustration of parallelism:

‘the darkness αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν (verse 5b);

‘the world did not acknowledge him (verse 10b);

‘his own did not welcome him” (verse 11b).

It is immediately evident that the rendering ‘did not overpower’ (for verse 5b) does not fit into this parallelism. The translation did not appropriate (or did not apprehend, as in the A.R.V.) is much better.” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 73–74.)

25. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 40.

26. “In this Gospel there are seven who bear witness to Jesus. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity does this—the Father (5:31–32, 34, 37; 8:18), Christ himself (8:14, 18; cf. 3:11, 32; 8:37), and the Spirit (15:26; cf. 16:14). The works of Jesus bear witness (5:36; 10:25; cf. 14:11; 15:24), as does sacred Scripture (5:39; cf. 5:45–46). A sixth witness is John the Baptist, while seventh is the variety of human witness consequent on the ministry of Jesus, that of the disciples (15:27; cf. 19:35; 21:24), the Samaritan woman (4:39), and the multitude (12:17). This emphasis on testimony should not be minimized. Testimony is a serious matter; there is a legal air about it. It is clear that our author wants his readers to take what he writes as reliable. He is insistent that there is good evidence for the things he sets down. Witness establishes the truth.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 80.)

27. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 124.

28. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 60–61.

29. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 41.

30. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 91.

31. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 50.

32. John Calvin writes, “The plain meaning therefore is, that the Speech begotten by God before all ages, and who always dwelt with the Father, was made man. On this article there are two things chiefly to be observed. The first is, that two natures were so united in one Person in Christ, that one and the same Christ is true God and true man. The second is, that the unity of person does not hinder the two natures from remaining distinct, so that his Divinity retains all that is peculiar to itself, and his humanity holds separately whatever belongs to it. And, therefore, as Satan has made a variety of foolish attempts to overturn sound doctrine by heretics, he has always brought forward one or another of these two errors; either that he was the Son of God and the Son of man in so confused a manner, that neither his Divinity remained entire, nor did he wear the true nature of man; or that he was clothed with flesh, so as to be as it were double, and to have two separate persons. Thus Nestorius expressly acknowledged both natures, but imagined two Christs, one who was God, and another who was man. Eutyches, on the other hand, while he acknowledged that the one Christ is the Son of God and the Son of man, left him neither of the two natures, but imagined that they were mingled together. And in the present day, Servetus and the Anabaptists invent a Christ who is confusedly compounded of two natures, as if he were a Divine man. In words, indeed, he acknowledges that Christ is God; but if you admit his raving imaginations, the Divinity is at one time changed into human nature, and at another time, the nature of man is swallowed up by the Divinity.” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According*

to *John*, 46. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom34.vii.iii.html>>

33. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 91–92.

34. For all the material in this paragraph, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 66–80.

35. Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 88.

36. Charles Wesley, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,” in *Trinity Hymnal*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 203.

37. Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World! The Lord is Come,” in *Trinity Hymnal*, 195.

38. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 85.

39. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 49.

40. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 129.

41. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 56.

42. “Since the concept God implies eternity, it is evident that the expression the only begotten God must refer to Christ’s trinitarian sonship. All other types of sonship imply a beginning in time, irreconcilable with the idea of deity. Besides, the added clause who lies upon the Father’s breast indicates a relation of abiding closeness between the Father-God and the Son-God. Because Jesus Christ is the Son in the highest sense of the term, he knows the Father thoroughly. Therefore it is he who made him known. He alone is qualified to be the Interpreter or Exegete (the verb is ἐξηγήσατο) of God. This does not mean that he gives us an adequate knowledge of God, so that, after all, the finite would begin to grasp the Infinite; but that he expounds to us with reference to the being of God whatever is necessary for our complete salvation and for a relative knowledge of his work in creation and redemption, so that we may by means of them glorify our Maker and Redeemer.” (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 90.)

43. Köstenberger, *John*, 50.