

The Word

*In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God,
and the Word was God (John 1:1 NLT).*

Context

Who: As with the synoptic Gospels, the authorship of John has been debated by the scholars for years. However, tradition tells us that the narrative was authored by the beloved disciple. Further, tradition tells us John and Jesus were cousins; some biblical evidence for this is commonly found in Jesus admonition to the beloved disciple to care for his mother after his death.

What: John is concerned with the revelation of Jesus as the Word, the Eternal Son. Moreover, he wishes to make clear the Word became flesh and provided redemption for the people of God. John is concerned to convey the truth that Jesus, the word made flesh, is the light of the world. Thus, the first verse is an entry to John's primary concern, that Jesus is the true light which gives light to every man. This was the purpose of the Word coming into the world. John also starts his gospel with terminology drawing the attention of the reader to a "beginning." As with the other gospel writers, John is concerned with a new beginning as much as he is with the "beginning" of the Word.

Where: It is commonly believed that John wrote this while in Ephesus. John writes about events that took place in Palestine.

When: John's account concerns the ministry of Jesus Christ from about A.D. 27 to A.D. 30. Internal markers almost require this Gospel was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that any part of the New Testament was written after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70.

Why: It seems John's primary concern is evangelistic. He presents Jesus of Nazareth as the Eternal Word, the Light, the great I Am. The person who reads or hears John's narrative will see the character and nature of Jesus presented through his works and words. John wants his audience to recognize this is not a mere man but God made flesh.

Content

Almost every student of Greek learns the first verse of John's Gospel early in their studies; Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. The connection to the first verse of Genesis as rendered in the Septuagint cannot be missed; Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

At the same time, the reader is startled by a sharp departure from the Septuagint. Genesis says "in the beginning God made" but John's account says "in the beginning the Word." Like the other gospel writers, John says his narrative heralds a new beginning. Yes, in the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth but we must also recognize that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Indeed that Word is the active agent. It is not merely a thing but is a person. The truth of the statement must be apprehended to understand the rest of the gospel.

To say the word was with God is to recognize eternal fellowship between the Word and God. Indeed, the word was God – is God! John tells his audience the only way to make sense of his narrative is to start at the beginning with the word who is God. That word made flesh is the one who brings light to all men.

It has been fashionable in the past to connect John's use of the term "word" (λογος) to the Greek understanding of λογος as reason. That does not seem to be John's intention.

Consideration

This new beginning announced by John concerns the word who is God. It is a beginning wherein the word made flesh speaks words of life. John unequivocally announces God as the originator of this new state of affairs where the light of all men came into the world with words of life. The word who is God made flesh must be accepted as he is. The words of life spoken by God made flesh must be accepted without modification. This bold proclamation of John is anathema to the modern world.

John does not try to explain how it can be that the one true God is plural persons. This opening line does not speak of the Holy Spirit but the stage is set for the idea of Trinity. But, here in the first line, John wants to drive home the point that the subject of his narrative – Jesus of Nazareth – is not a mere man but God in the flesh. He is of everlasting. He has always been and it is through him that all things have come into being.

Moreover, the word made flesh is not the peripheral of godhood but is in intimate fellowship with God. John's choice of the Greek term πρὸς "implies not just proximity, but intimate personal relationship." Certainly, the reader of this account must be willing to spend time in meditation concerning this assertion but a more developed understanding will recognize this as an affirmation of eternal fellowship. The word was not a shirt-tail relation but was truly "with God" in loving fellowship.

Now, more astounding, the word was God. This last clause could be translated as "and what God was the word was." In other words there one the same. The first part of article 2 in the 39 articles of religion says "THE Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father." This is more than the human mind can really understand. We grasp it to a certain extent but if we press to deeply we find ourselves floundering about in things too difficult for us to understand.

The punch of John's opening line is that this Jesus has always been in full fellowship with God and indeed is God. That truth is just as powerful today as it was 2000 years ago. It was a difficult concept in the first century; he remains so today.

If we can get a hold of this fact it is life-changing. Certainly, when someone first confesses Christ as Savior they will not understand all of these things. But there is no excuse for the seasoned Christian to be ignorant of this theology. Perhaps it is ignorance

of this truth that renders too many Christians ineffective in realizing the gospel promises in the modern world. Understanding and apprehension of John's first line is earth shattering.

Jesus changed everything.

God came to earth and died for us.

How could anyone remain unmoved by that truth

Study Questions

- 1. What is John's primary concern with his opening line?*
- 2. What are the three principles found in the first line of John's gospel?*
- 3. What is the obvious difference between the opening line of the Septuagint and John's gospel.*

If you would like input on your answers to the study questions you may message me through myFaithBase.com or email me at mfb@davidericwilliams.com