



WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods

Advanced Class: How We Got Our Bible?

Alpha and Omega Ministries

<http://www.aomin.org/>

Alpha and Omega Ministries is a Christian apologetics organization based in Phoenix, Arizona. James White, director, is a professor, having taught Greek, Systematic Theology, and various topics in the field of apologetics for numerous schools. He has authored or contributed to more than twenty four books, including [The King James Only Controversy](#), [The Forgotten Trinity](#), [The Potter's Freedom](#), [The God Who Justifies](#) and [What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an](#). He is an accomplished debater, having engaged in more than one-hundred sixty five moderated, public debates with leading proponents of [Roman Catholicism](#), [Islam](#), [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), and [Mormonism](#), as well as critics such as Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and John Shelby Spong.

John 1:1 – Meaning and Translation

BY James White

(This information sheet is divided into two sections – the first explores the meaning of John 1:1, and the second addresses the more technical subject of the correct translation of the verse. The second portion will be of interest to those who are faced with the New World Translation of Jehovah’s Witnesses and its rendering of the last clause of this verse as “the Word was a god.”)

Section I

John 1:1-3, 14, 18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth... No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

The prologue to John’s Gospel has long been a center of controversy when discussing the Deity of Christ, and naturally so. One can hardly read the above sentences without catching a glimpse of One Who is far beyond the realm of simply human; even far beyond the realm of the angelic. The *logos*, the Word, was in the beginning, was with God, and was God. The Word created all things, and there is absolutely nothing in existence that the Word did not create. Remember that the original readers of John’s Gospel would not have already read verse 14, and they would not have the preconceived knowledge that the Word is identified as Christ. Try to detach yourself from that knowledge for a moment, and imagine what kind of being you would be imagining while reading about this Word. Certainly one can hardly conceive of a higher Being.

To understand what John is saying, we must delve into the verses themselves and analyze them carefully. We must bear in mind that we are reading only a translation of what John wrote, and hence some mention will have to be made of the Greek language.

John’s first assertion is that “In the beginning was the Word.” Which beginning? Considering the whole context of the prologue, many have identified this beginning as the same beginning mentioned in Genesis 1:1. But most see that the assertion of the Apostle goes far beyond that.

The key element in understanding this, the first phrase of this magnificent verse, is the form of the word “was,” which in the Greek language in which John was writing, is the word *en* (the “e” pronounced as a long “a” as in “I ate the food”). It is a timeless word – that is, it simply points to existence before the present time without reference to a point of origin. One can push back the “beginning” as far as you can imagine, and, according to John, the Word still is. Hence, the Word is eternal, timeless. The Word is not a creation that came into existence at “the beginning,” for He antedates that beginning.

John is very careful in his language at this point. Throughout this section, John carefully contrasts the Word, and all other things. He does so by consistently using **en** of the Logos, the Word, and by consistently employing a totally different verb in reference to all other things. This other verb is “to become” (**egeneto**). It is used of John the Baptist in verse 6, of the world in verse 10, and the children of God in verse 12. Only when we come to verse 14 does John use “to become” of the Word, and that is when the Word “became flesh.” This refers to a specific point in time, the incarnation, and fully demonstrates John’s intentional usage of contrasting verbs.

John is not alone in this. Jesus contrasted Abraham’s “becoming” with His own eternal existence in John 8:58 in the same way. The Psalmist contrasted the creation of the world with the eternity of God in Psalm 90:2 (LXX) by using the same verbs found in John 1:1 and 14. Hardly seems coincidental, does it?

“His full and living revelation. Jesus did not just come to tell us what God is like - He Showed us. He is the revelation of God.”

We have seen that the Word is eternal. Much has been said about how John got the term “Logos,” the Word. Some say he borrowed it from Greek philosophy, a sort of philosophical subterfuge. No one would argue that John just simply left the Logos as he found it among the philosophers. No, he filled the Word with personality and identified the Word not as some fuzzy, ethereal essence that was the guiding principle of all things, (as the Greeks thought), but as the eternal Son of God, the One Who entered into time, and into man’s experience as Jesus of Nazareth. The “Word” reveals that Jesus is the mind of God, the thought of God, His full and living revelation. Jesus did not just come to tell us what God is like – He showed us. He is the revelation of God.

John did not stop here, however. He did not leave us to simply know the eternity of the Word. The next phrase says, “and the Word was with God.” Again we find the verb “was” cropping up, again pointing to the timelessness of the subject at hand. The Word was **with** God. The preposition John uses here is quite revealing. It is the Greek word *pros*. It means “to be in company with someone”¹ or to be “face-to-face.” It speaks of communion, interaction, fellowship. Remember that this is an eternal fellowship, a timeless relationship. “*Pros* with the accusative presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other.”²

This phrase, if taken completely alone, would be very confusing, since John has already asserted the eternity of the Word. Now he clearly distinguishes between the Word and God. He asserts that they are distinguishable. “God” and “Word” are not interchangeable terms. Then, is John talking about two “gods?” Can more than one being be fully eternal? John was a monotheistic Jew. He could never believe in more than one Being Who can rightly be called “God.” How then is this to be understood?

This phrase must be taken with the one that follows. We read, “and the Word was God.” Again, the eternal **en**. John avoids confusion by telling us that the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus, as we know Him as the Word, does not constitute everything that is included in the Godhead. In other words, John is not teaching the ancient heresy known as Sabellianism, which taught that Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are simply three different aspects of one

person, i.e., Jesus **is** the Father, the Father is the Spirit, and so on. Instead, John here asserts the full Deity of Christ, while informing us that He is not the Father, but that they (“God” and the “Word”) have eternally co-existed.

This last phrase has come under heavy fire throughout the ages. The correct translation of this passage is here given, and anyone interested in the technical aspects of the argument are referred to Section II. Basically, the passage teaches that the Word, as to His essential nature, is God. John does not here call the Word “a divine one,” as some polytheistic Greek might say. He did not use the adjective, **theios**, which would describe a divine nature, or a god-like one. Instead, he used **theos**, the very word John will use consistently for the Father, the “only true God” (John 17:3). He uses the term three times of Jesus in the Gospel, here, in John 1:18, and in John 20:28. It can not be doubted that John would never call a creature **theos**. His upbringing and Jewish heritage forbade that.

How then are we to understand these two phrases?

Benjamin B. Warfield said: “And the Word was with God.” The language is pregnant. It is not merely coexistence with God that is asserted, as of two beings standing side by side, united in local relation, or even in a common conception. What is suggested is an active relation of intercourse. The distinct personality of the Word is therefore not obscurely intimated. From all eternity the Word has been with God as a fellow: He who in the very beginning already “was,” “was” also in communion with God. Though He was thus in some sense a second along with God, He was nevertheless not a separate being from God: “And the Word was” — still, the eternal “was” — “God.” In some sense distinguishable from God, He was in an equally true sense identical with God. There is but one eternal God; this eternal God, the Word is; in whatever sense we may distinguish Him from the God whom He is “with,” He is yet not another than this God, but Himself is this God. The predicate “God” occupies the position of emphasis in this great declaration, and is so placed in the sentence as to be thrown up in sharp contrast with the phrase “with God,” as if to prevent inadequate inferences as to the nature of the Word being drawn even momentarily from that phrase. John would have us realize that what the Word was in eternity was not merely God’s coeternal fellow, but the eternal God’s self.³

The Beloved Apostle walks a tight line here. By the simple omission of the article (“the”, or in Greek, ho) before the word for God in the last phrase, John avoids teaching Sabellianism, while by placing the word where it is in the clause, he defeats another heresy, Arianism, which denies the true Deity of the Lord Jesus. A person who accepts the inspiration of the Scriptures can not help but be thrilled at this passage.

John goes on in verse two to reiterate the eternal fellowship of the Father and Son, making sure that all understand that “this one,” the Word, was (there it is again) in the beginning **pros ton theon**, with God. Their fellowship and relationship precedes all else, and it is timeless.

As icing on the cake, John then precludes anyone from misunderstanding his claim that Jesus is eternally God by writing verse 3. “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” One can hardly be more inclusive than that. There is simply nothing that is existent anywhere that was not created by the Word. He created

everything. Obviously, therefore, if one can be described as creating everything, one must be the Creator, and certainly not a creation. The Word is the Creator. All people reading John's words would understand that the Creator is God, not some lower being created by God to do the work for Him. By not qualifying his statement, John assured that we could correctly understand his intention and his teaching concerning Christ, the Word. He is eternally God, the Creator.

Section II

En arche en ho logos, kai ho logos en pros ton theon, kai theos en ho logos.

Almost all the controversy surrounding John 1:1 revolves around the fact that the **theos** of the last phrase **kai theos en ho logos** is anarthrous, i.e., it has no article. Some have gone so far as to assert that the correct translation, therefore, is "the Word was a god," basing the argument on the lack of the definite article **ho** before **theos**. What does the lack of the article indicate? Is it necessary to what John is saying?

I begin with the most quoted scholar on this subject, Dr. A. T. Robertson:

And the Word was God (kai theos en ho logos). By exact and careful language John denied Sabellianism by not saying **ho theos en ho logos**. That would mean that all of God was expressed in **ho logos** and the terms would be interchangeable, each having the article. The subject is made plain by the article (**ho logos**) and the predicate without it (**theos**) just as in John 4:24 **pneuma ho theos** can only mean "God is spirit," not "spirit is God." So in 1 John 4:16 **ho theos agape estin** can only mean "God is love," not "love is God" as a so-called Christian scientist would confusedly say. For the article with the predicate see Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 767f. So in John 1:14 **ho Logos sarx egeneto**, "the Word became flesh," not "the flesh became Word." Luther argues that here John disposes of Arianism also because the Logos was eternally God, fellowship of the Father and Son, what Origen called the Eternal Generation of the Son (each necessary to the other). Thus in the Trinity we see personal fellowship on an equality.⁴

As Robertson made reference to his voluminous **Grammar** in the above quotation, I will include it in its entirety:

The word with the article is then the subject, whatever the order may be. So in John 1:1, **theos an ho logos**, the subject is perfectly clear. Cf. **ho logos sarx egeneto** (John 1:14). It is true that **ho theos an ho logos** (convertible terms) would have been Sabellianism. See also **ho theos agape estin** (1 John.4:16). "God" and "love" are not convertible terms any more than "God" and "Logos" or "Logos" and "flesh." Cf. also **hoi theristai angeloi eisin** (Mt.13:39), **ho logos ho sos alatheia estin** (John 17:17), **ho nomos hamartia**; (Ro. 7;7). The absence of the article here is on purpose and essential to the true idea.⁵

Note that Robertson translates the phrase, "the Word was God." His argument is summed up well in the following passage:

A word should be said concerning the use and non-use of the article in John 1:1, where a narrow path is safely followed by the author. "The Word was God." If both God and Word were

articular, they would be coextensive and equally distributed and so interchangeable. But the separate personality of the Logos is affirmed by the construction used and Sabellianism is denied. If God were articular and Logos non-articular, the affirmation would be that God was Logos, but not that the Logos was God. As it is, John asserts that in the Pre-incarnate state the Logos was God, though the Father was greater than the Son (John 14:28). The Logos became flesh (John 1:14), and not the Father. But the Incarnate Logos was really “God only Begotten in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18 correct text)⁶

In light of Dr. Robertson’s comments, it is indeed unbelievable that some will quote from the above section and try to intimate that Robertson felt that Jesus was less than the Father because he quoted John 14:28. A quick look at his comments on John 14:28 in **Word Pictures in the New Testament**, volume 5, page 256 refutes this idea.

To recap, Robertson says that 1) the translation of the phrase **theos en ho logos** is “the Word was God.” 2) That the anarthrous **theos** is required for the meaning. If the article were present, this would teach Sabellianism, as then **theos** and **logos** would be convertible terms. 3) That the article before **logos** serves to point out the subject of the clause.

H. E. Dana and Julius Mantey utilize John 1:1 to illustrate the usage of the article to determine the subject in a copulative sentence:

The article sometimes distinguishes the subject from the predicate in a copulative sentence. In Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, 1:4:6, **emporion d’ en to korion**, and *the place was a market*, we have a parallel case to what we have in John 1:1, **kai theos en ho logos**, and *the word was deity*. The article points out the subject in these examples. Neither was *the place* the only market, nor was *the word* all of God, as it would mean if the article were also used with **theos**. As it stands, the other persons of the Trinity may be implied in **theos**.⁷

Again, these scholars are pointing out the use of the article to show the subject against the predicate in a clause. They, like Robertson, point out that since **theos** is anarthrous, it shows that it is not convertible with **logos** and vice-versa.

Dr. Kenneth Wuest, long time professor of Greek at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, commented on this verse:

The Word was God. Here the word “God” is without the article in the original. When it is used in this way, it refers to the divine essence. Emphasis is upon the quality or character. Thus, John teaches us here that our Lord is essentially Deity. He possesses the same essence as God the Father, is one with Him in nature and attributes. Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter, the teacher, is Very God.⁸

Wuest in his **Expanded Translation**, renders John 1:1:

In the beginning the Word was existing. And the Word was in fellowship with God the Father. And the Word was as to His essence absolute deity.⁹

Notice that Wuest brings in the idea that the anarthrous predicate noun has a characterizing effect, and that it refers more to the nature of the subject of the clause than to an identification of it. This is right in line with what Robertson said – that the Logos is not all of God, and that you cannot say “the God was the Logos.” The very context (**kai ho logos en pros ton theon**) demonstrates this fully. Those who would assert that the Logos is to be identified with all of God (i.e., Jesus is the Father and the Father is Jesus – Sabellianism) find an insuperable problem here.

It is good to note Vincent’s comment that here “John is not trying to show who is God, but who is the Word.”¹⁰ The Logos is the central character here. Hence, when we see that the Word was, as to His nature God, we can understand exactly how He can be with God and yet be God.

F. F. Bruce’s comments on this passage are valuable:

The structure of the third clause in verse 1, **theos en ho logos**, demands the translation “The Word was God.” Since **logos** has the article preceding it, it is marked out as the subject. The fact that **theos** is the first word after the conjunction **kai** (and) shows that the main emphasis of the clause lies on it. Had **theos** as well as **logos** been preceded by the article the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also “with God”. What is meant is that the Word shared the nature and being of God, or (to use a piece of modern jargon) was an extension of the personality of God. The NEB paraphrase “what God was, the Word was”, brings out the meaning of the clause as successfully as a paraphrase can...So, when heaven and earth were created, there was the Word of God, already existing in the closest association with God and partaking of the essence of God. No matter how far back we may try to push our imagination, we can never reach a point at which we could say of the Divine Word, as Arius did, “There was once when he was not”.¹¹

Another scholarly source along this line is found in the **Expositor’s Greek Testament**:

The Word is distinguishable from God and yet **Theos en ho logos**, the Word was God, of Divine nature; not “a God,” which to a Jewish ear would have been abominable; nor yet identical with all that can be called God, for then the article would have been inserted...¹²

A slightly different tact is taken by another group of scholars. These scholars refer to what is known as Colwell’s rule, named after E. C. Colwell, who first enunciated his rule in the **Journal of Biblical Literature** in 1933.¹³ The rule says, “The absence of the article does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John.”¹⁴ This is the view taken by Morris, Metzger, Griffith and others. Though Colwell’s rule is not exceptionless, it is a valuable guide. At the very least, it is a good guide to translation in this case. Those scholars who see the verse in this light are not necessarily in contradiction with the others already cited. First it should be noted that Robertson and Nicoll had passed away before the work of Colwell, and their comments reflect this. Also, both approaches lead to the same conclusion – the passage teaches the Deity of Jesus Christ. Some scholars see the anarthrous **theos** as emphasizing the nature of the Word, and all agree that it is not simply an adjectival type of description, saying that Christ is merely a “god-like one.” A more recent authors work (March 1973) bears on this issue as well. Philip B. Harner did an extensive study of anarthrous predicate

nouns which was published in the **Journal of Biblical Literature** as well.¹⁵ His research led to some realignment in viewing Colwell's rule, it is true. It should also be noted that his article has been used extensively by those who would deny the Deity of Christ and mistranslate this passage. Sufficient at this point is a quotation from Harner's article itself:

But in all of these cases the English reader might not understand exactly what John was trying to express. Perhaps the clause could be translated, "the Word had the same nature as God." This would be one way of representing John's thought, which is, as I understand it, that **ho logos**, no less than **ho theos**, had the nature of **theos**.¹⁶

The authoritative reference source, **Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, is quite direct on John 1:1:

A similar ascription is more common in the Johannine writings, and for the most part incontestable. John 1:1 says of the Pre-existent: **kai theos en ho logos**... The lack of the article, which is grammatically necessary in 1:1, is striking here, and reminds us of Philonic usage. The Logos who became flesh and revealed the invisible God was a divine being, God by nature. The man born blind has some sense of this when, after his healing, he falls down in believing adoration before Christ, who addresses him with the divine "I" (John 9:38). The final veil is removed, however, when the Risen Lord discloses Himself to Thomas and the astonished disciple exclaims: **ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou** (John 20:28). In John 1:1 we have Christology: He is God in Himself. Here we have the revelation of Christ: He is God for believers.¹⁷

To summarize: The phrase **kai theos en ho logos** is most literally translated as "and the Word was God." (Robertson, Bruce). The reason that **theos** is anarthrous is both that it is the predicate nominative (Robertson, Dana and Mantey) and that it is demanded by the fact that if it had the article, it would be then interchangeable with **logos**, which is contextually impossible. (Robertson, Dana and Mantey, Bruce, Nicoll) Colwell's rule also comes into play at this point. We have seen that the majority of scholarship sees the **theos** as indicating the nature of the Word, that He is God as to His nature. The noun form is here used, not the adjectival **theios**, which would be required to simply classify the Word as "god-like."

Hence, John 1:1 teaches that the Word is eternal (the imperfect form of **eimi, en**), that He has always been in communion with God (**pros ton theon**), and hence is an individual and recognizable as such, and that, as to His essential nature, He is God. Anything less departs from the teaching of John, and is not Biblical.

What about "a god?"

Until 1950, an extra section dealing with a translation of John 1:1 as "the Word was a god" would not have been necessary. No one would dare publish such a "translation." However, in 1950, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society published its own translation of the Bible, **The New World Translation of the Greek Scriptures**. This version translates John 1:1 in this way. A number of appendices have appeared in the **NWT** attempting to defend this translation by making reference to many of the same scholars that have already been quoted. Aside from the

comment of **The Expositor's Greek Testament** above, the following from F. F. Bruce sums up the truth pretty well:

It is nowhere more sadly true than in the acquisition of Greek that “a little learning is a dangerous thing”. The uses of the Greek article, the functions of Greek prepositions, and the fine distinctions between Greek tenses are confidently expounded in public at times by men who find considerable difficulty in using these parts of speech accurately in their native tongue.¹⁸

A footnote appears after the comment on the article, and it says:

Those people who emphasize that the true rendering of the last clause of John 1.1 is “the word was *a* god”, prove nothing thereby save their ignorance of Greek grammar.

This translation violates the following principles:

1) Monotheism in the Bible – certainly it can not be argued that John would use the very word he always uses of the one true God, **theos**, of one who is simply a “god-like” one or a lesser “god.” The Scriptures do not teach that there is a whole host of intermediate beings that can be called “gods.” That is gnosticism.

2) If one is to dogmatically assert that any anarthrous noun must be indefinite and translated with an indefinite article, one must be able to do the same with the 282 other times **theos** appears anarthrously. For an example of the chaos that would create, try translating the anarthrous **theos** at 2 Corinthians 5:19. There is simply no warrant in the language to do this.

3) It ignores the position of **theos** in the clause – it comes first, and is emphatic.

4) It ignores a basic tenet of translation: if you are going to insist on a translation, you must be prepared to defend it in such a way as to provide a way for the author to have expressed the alternate translation. In other words, if **theos en ho logos** is “a god,” how could John have said “the Word was God?” We have already seen that if John had employed the article before **theos**, he would have made the terms **theos** and **logos** interchangeable, amounting to Sabellianism.

5) The translation tears the phrase from the immediately preceding context, leaving it alone and useless. Can He who is eternal (first clause) and who has always been with God (second clause), and who created all things (verse 3) be “a god?” 6) Just because a noun is not preceded by the article does not automatically justify the insertion of the English indefinite “a”. This is a gross oversimplification of the facts, a practice unfortunately common amongst those who are not properly trained in the Greek language. I am aware that this is a serious charge, however, the facts reveal that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has consistently refused to name any of its NWT translators, and of those who have been discovered, none had any more than two years of Greek and no formal Hebrew.¹⁹

Others could be added, but this is sufficient. There is obviously no scholarly support for the rendering of “a god,” and there is massive scholarly argument against it. It is not a valid translation in any way.

Footnotes:

- 1. Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature edited by F. W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) p. 719.**
- 2. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 6 vols., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1932), 5:4**
- 3. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ, (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), p. 53.**
- 4. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 5, pp. 4-5.**
- 5. A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934) p. 767-768.**
- 6. A. T. Robertson, The Minister and His Greek New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977) pp. 67-68. shows that it is not convertible with logos and vice versa.**
- 7. H. E. Dana, Julius Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950) pp. 148-149.**
- 8. Kenneth Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, vol. 3, "Golden Nuggets," p. 52.**
- 9. Wuest, Word Studies, vol. 4, p. 209.**
- 10. M. R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 1, p. 384.**
- 11. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 31.**
- 12. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament, 5 vols, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 1:684.**
- 13. E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament" (Journal of Biblical Literature, 1933) pages 12-21. See also discussion in footnote, Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 77.**
- 14. Morris, The Gospel According to John, p. 77.**
- 15. Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns, Mark 15:39 and John 1:1" (Journal of Biblical Literature, March 1973), 92:75-87.**
- 16. Harner, pg. 87.**
- 17. Gerhard Kittel, and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964) vol 3:105-106.**
- 18. F. F. Bruce, The Books and the Parchments, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), p. 60-61.**
- 19. This information was made available during a trial in Scotland, Douglas Walsh v. The Right Honorable James Latham Clyde, M.P., P.C., etc., Scotland, 1954. I include this to demonstrate the non-scholarly, non-factual approach utilized in defending this erroneous translation.**

The Prologue of the Gospel of John

BY James White

Chapter 1

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

This verse provides the framework not only for the prologue that encompasses verses one through eighteen, but for the entire Gospel itself. The prologue functions, I believe, as an “interpretive window” for the entire Gospel. John means us to read the rest of his work with the foundational understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ, as presented in these verses, clearly in mind. It is just the rejection of the lofty teaching of these verses that has caused the myriad of inconsistent and illogical interpretations of the words of Jesus later in the Gospel.

1.1 takes us back beyond creation itself. Some refer the “beginning” here to that of Genesis 1.1, and this may be so, but the verb “was” (Gr: en, imperfect of eimi) takes us before whatever “beginning” we may wish to choose. The continuous action in the past of the imperfect tense of the verb indicates to us that whenever the “beginning” was, the Word was already in existence. In other words, the Word is eternal – timeless – without a “beginning.”

Note also the fact that John will very carefully differentiate between the verbs “was” and “became” (Gr: egeneto, the aorist form of ginomai). The reason for this, I believe, is that he wishes to emphasize the eternal, non-created nature of the Logos over against the finite, temporal, created nature of all other things. This will come sharply into view in 1.14.

Just why John chose to use the Greek term Logos is a matter of quite some debate. The term had great meaning in Greek philosophy as the impersonal but rational ordering principle of the universe. The Logos is what made sense out of the universe. But John does not use Logos in just this way – in fact, he radically alters the use of the word while still maintaining some of the inherent meaning it would have for his readers. The Logos of John is personal – the Logos is not an ordering principle but rather a personal being. As John’s explanation of the Logos unfolds, we shall see that the Logos makes God known and is, in fact, incarnated in Jesus Christ. For John, then, Jesus Christ is the revelation of God in the flesh (1.14) but He did not start revealing God at that time – instead, His relationship to God the Father (1.18) has always been one of revelation – the Logos always makes God known for it is the Father’s gracious choice to be revealed *by* the Word. This will be important as well in seeing that John clearly identifies Jesus Christ as YHWH in different ways – sometimes through the usage of the phrase “I Am” (Gr: ego eimi) and sometimes by direct ascription, as in John 12.39-41/Isaiah 6.1.

“and the Word was with God...” “The Apostle John walks an exceptionally fine line in this verse. In the first clause he asserts the eternity of the Logos. Now he states that the Logos is personally eternal – that is, that the Logos has been in communion and communication with God for eternity as well. The verb is the same as the first clause, and the preposition pros (“with”) pictures for us face-to-face communication. John does not yet identify those persons for us – we must wait till verses 14 through 18 to see that John is speaking of Jesus Christ the Son and God

the Father. What he wishes to emphasize here is the personal existence of the Logos in some sense of distinction from “God” (i.e., the Father). The Logos is not the Father nor vice-versa – there are two persons under discussion here.

The third clause of this verse has occasioned great debate and controversy, mainly due to the fact that the Greek word for God, *theos*, does not have the definite article (“the”) before it. Some pseudo-Christian or Arian groups have said that this means that the Word was a “god” or a god-like being like an angel (Jehovah’s Witnesses). But is this the case? Other Christian scholars have put great weight into the idea that the term *theos* is being used as an adjective to describe the Logos, and that is why John did not put the article there.

Actually, the answer to the whole question seems fairly obvious, even to a first-year Greek student. The third clause of 1.1 is a copulative sentence – that is, it follows the form “The (noun) is (predicate nominative). In Greek, one distinguishes the subject of a copulative sentence by which noun has an article in front of it. For example, in 1 John 4:8 we have the last clause reading “God is love.” Now, in Greek this is *ho theos agape estin*. There are two nominative nouns in this sentence – God (*theos*) and love (*agape*). However, the first noun, God, has the article *ho* before it. This indicates that “God” is the subject of the sentence, and love is the predicate nominative. It would be wrong, then, to translate 1 John 4:8 as “Love is God.” The only way to make the two nouns interchangeable is to either put the article with both nouns, or to not put the article there at all. As long as one has the article and the other does not, one is definitely the subject and the other the predicate. Hence, 1 John 4:8 does not teach that all love is God, nor that God and love are interchangeable things. Rather, the term “love” tells us something about God – it functions almost as an adjective, describing the noun (God) that it modifies.

We have the same situation in 1.1c. The Greek reads, *kai theos en ho logos*. Notice that the term Logos has the article *ho* while the term *theos* does not. This tells us that the subject of the clause is the Logos. Hence, we could not translate the phrase “and God was the Word” for that would make the wrong term the subject of the clause. Hence, the term “God” is the predicate nominative, and it functions just as “love” did in 1 John 4:8 – it tells us something about the Logos – and that is, that the nature of the Logos is the nature of God, just as the nature of God in 1 John 4:8 was that of love. Now, John does emphasize the term “God” by placing it first in the clause – this is not just a “divine nature” as in something like the angels have – rather, it is truly the nature of Deity that is in view here (hence my translation as “Deity”). Dr. Kenneth Wuest, long time professor of Greek at Moody Bible Institute rendered the phrase, “And the Word was as to His essence absolute Deity.”

Before summing up the verse, then, let the reader note that when groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses quote from Dr. Philip Harner’s article on the nature of anarthrous (=without the article) predicate nominatives, they don’t understand what they are talking about. Harner accurately pointed out that the anarthrous predicate nominative functions as a descriptive term rather than a specific term. Problem is, the Jehovah’s Witnesses make “God” in John 1.1 just as definite as the translations they attack! The point Harner is making is that it is not the definite “God” that is in view, far less the JW translation of “a god” (both are definite) but rather the nature of the Logos that is important.

Hence, 1.1 tells us some immensely important things. First, we see that the Logos is eternal, uncreated. Secondly, we see that there are two Divine Persons in view in John's mind – the Father and the Logos. Thirdly, there is eternal communication and relationship between the Father and the Logos. Finally, we see that the Logos shares the nature of God. These items will be important for a proper understanding of many of the statements made by our Lord in this book. It seems to me that John felt it was vitally important that we understand the majesty of the Person of Jesus Christ right from the start. We will see these concepts played out through the rest of the book.

2. He was in the beginning with God.

This verse ties together some of the concepts of 1.1 and reiterates them. It takes the “beginning” of 1.1a, and the “with God” of 1.1b, and puts them together to emphasize (I feel) the eternal nature of the relationship between God and Logos. Also, it might be noted that literally the phrase reads “This one was in the beginning with God...” referring specifically to the Logos.

3. All things were made through Him and without Him was nothing made which has been made.

Here we see the fact of the “uncreatedness” of the Logos asserted, for the Logos is the **Creator!** All things **were made** “through” Him. He is the agent of creation. But, lest one should think that He Himself was created, and then all other things were made through Him as a second-workman, John makes sure to add “and without (or “aside from”) Him was nothing made which has been made.” There is nothing in the created order that was not made through the agency of the Logos. This is important for John. The Gospel of John draws heavily from the Old Testament, and hence we should make sure to look into what this means from an Old Testament perspective. Yahweh said in Isaiah 44:24, “I am Yahweh, who has made all things, who alone stretched Out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” Surely here we see the first direct allusion to an astounding fact that will underlie much of John's discussion of Jesus – that Jesus is Yahweh! Not only this, but John will quickly add a second startling fact – Yahweh is tri-personal – i.e., Father, Son and Spirit! I feel that John is carefully explaining how he, a monotheistic Jew, can call Jesus “Lord” and “God” (20.28) and yet still maintain that the Father and Son are separate Persons, and that there is but one God!

The fact of the creatorship of Jesus is found in other NT writings as well, most notably in Paul's discussion in Colossians 1:15-17, and in Hebrews 1:1-3. Given the wide variety of literature in which this concept is found, it is evident that this belief was foundational to the Christian community, and certainly was not some late emendation that evolved over time in the Church, as is so commonly asserted by liberal scholars.

One punctuation difficulty should be addressed. Some translations (following Nestle's Greek text) will render the punctuation differently, resulting in “and without Him was not anything made. That which was made in Him was life...” Basically, this view sees what was created by the Logos was life, not all the created universe. This reading does have the support of nearly all the early church Fathers up to the time of Chrysostom; after that, the consensus shifted to reading it as it is translated above. I see some real problems with the resulting text if this punctuation

variant is allowed to stand. First, the “all things” of verse 3 does not fit with “life” of verse four. Secondly, the resulting “that which was made in him was life’ is extremely awkward – in fact, more awkward in Greek than in English! It seems by far the best to punctuate the passage as it has traditionally been done since the time of Chrysostom.

4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John here asserts that the Logos is the source of life (again, OT references to Yahweh could be produced in regards to Yahweh being the source of life). But John then says that this life “was the light of men.” What does this mean? It seems to me that the author is thinking of the fact that all that is owes its existence to the Logos, including man himself. The Logos gives meaning and purpose to man. Man, as created by the personal Logos hence has purpose, meaning, a goal in life. All is not chance. Life is not a roll of the cosmic die. We are not fashioned by impersonal, unfeeling celestial forces. It may be here that the philosophical elements of the logos idea are most prominent in John’s mind, or should I say that it is here that John allows the non-Christian meaning to have its greatest expression while not in any way surrendering the distinctives of the Logos that he has already asserted. The logos of philosophy was the guiding principle – the ordering force of the universe. The Greeks looked to the logos as their guiding light, so to speak. Possibly the idea of the laps as one that guides or gives light is here taken over by John and filled with personal meaning. All men, irrespective of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Logos incarnate (1.14) are still lighted by His creative acts and providential blessings. I feel this is John’s idea here.

5. And the light Is shining in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Here we encounter a structure that will occur over and over and over again in the Gospel of John – that of dualism. We see two opposites here – light and darkness. It has been on this basis that many have accused John of accepting or having leanings toward Gnosticism, which is dualistic to the core. But if we look closely at John’s words, we will see that he disagrees with Gnosticism at the most basic levels. Certainly he sees opposites and often speaks in opposites. We will see over and over that John will use two meanings for the same word, sometimes at the same time (as he may just do in this verse – see below). But John is not personifying these opposites. God is still creator of all that is, which to the Gnostics was a terribly horrid concept. God is still providentially in control. The Logos, actually takes on physical, human flesh in 1.14 – so John’s opposition to the most basic concepts of Gnosticism is clearly delineated.

Here, then, is the first pair of opposites – light and darkness. This pair will reoccur in the teachings of Jesus. What does it mean that the light is shining in the darkness? Possibly this refers to the fact that the light of the Logos shines despite man’s condition in sin (i.e., darkness). Is there significance to the present tense of ‘shining’? I think so – I believe this refers to the continuous action of the shining of the light of the Logos – that light cannot be extinguished or overcome.

The Greek term translated “overcome” (Gr: katalambano) is capable of numerous meanings, two of which are possible in our context. One is to overcome or conquer, and I feel that this is the best understanding in 1.5, for there will always be conflict between light and darkness in John’s

thought. But, another possible meaning is ‘to comprehend’ or ‘to understand.’ In fact, one lexicon says of this term in 1.5, “It is possible that in 1.5 a word play involving both meanings may be intended, something which is typical of Johannine style.” I agree, though I lean toward the sense “to conquer.”

6. There came a man sent from God whose name was John. 7. This one came for a testimony in order that he might testify concerning the light in order that all might believe through him. 8. This one was not the light but [he came] in order that he might testify concerning the light,

Verses 6-8 form somewhat of an excursus. John here introduces the forerunner to Christ, John the Baptist. It is interesting to note that the author uses a different verb (mentioned above) of John – carrying on that important differentiation of verbs. John’s ministry is validated when the author states that John the Baptist was “sent by God.” There are some writers who feel that John was reacting against a continued presence of disciples of the Baptist, even later into the first century. Though there may be some merit to the idea, it certainly does not seem to be a major reason for the writing. John is careful to assert that the Baptist’s mission was one with divine approval.

The purpose of John’s ministry, however, is given by the author as one of testimony – of witnessing. The greek term *martureo* (noun form used here) means ‘to give witness or testimony’ and it appears often in John’s Gospel (47 times). We derive our English term “martyr” from it. John the Baptist was sent by God to ‘testify of the light’ – which seems to clearly refer here to the Lord Jesus Himself. His was a preparatory work, so that “all might believe through him.” He was not to be gathering disciples for himself, but rather gathering a group of those who would follow and believe in the light, when that light came. It is important to remember that some of the most important of Jesus’ disciples came from amongst John’s followers (see below).

John then makes sure that it is clear that the Baptist was not the light, but rather one whose mission it was to point to the light.

9. Which was the true light, which lights every man by coming into the world.

John returns then from his brief discussion of the Baptist (which he will pick up later) to the subject of the Logos once again. We must remember that the purpose of the prologue is to identify and describe one person – the Logos. So here John asserts that the Logos, is the true light (in opposition, we would think, to many “false’ lights who had come before and would come after). But how is it that the “true light” “lights every man by coming into the world”? First, there are more than a few ways of rendering the final phrase of this verse. The difficulty lies in just how one is to take the participle *erchomenon* (= “coming”). I take the participle to be a “circumstantial instrumental’ – that is, the participle refers to the means by which the action of the main verb is accomplished. In this case, that would mean that every man is ‘lighted’ by the coming into the world of the one who does the lighting – viz, the Logos. It is difficult to say just what it means that all men have received light because of the coming of Christ into the world.

There are about as many opinions as to just how to work that out as there are interpreters of the Gospel.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know him.

One of the major questions facing the understanding of this verse is the time frame involved. To what is John referring? He uses the timeless *en* that we saw in 1.1 when he says that ‘He w in the world...’ which would suggest to me that he is referring to a pre-incarnational time where God the Son, in His providence, was active in the world.

John also asserts, again, the created nature of the world and the identity of the Creator. But, despite the fact that He created the world, “the world did not know Him.” Many have referred this to the rejection of Christ, and again this takes us back to the question of the time frame. We know that in verse 14 we get a particular historical anchor to work with – the incarnation. But it seems that John is not particularly worried about keeping some chronological order intact. But just where he refers to post-incarnation before 14 (which it seems rather certain that he does) is hard to say. Personally, I feel he does so in verse 11 (“He came unto His own...”) though even here a case could be made for the other side. So, if the phrase “the world did not know Him” is actually pre-incarnational, to what does this refer? Some commentator’s have suggested, not without plausibility, that there are actually two thoughts in John’s mind – that this section refers to both the pre-incarnational period, as well as to Jesus’ ministry. The dualistic usage would not be out of character for our author.

To complicate the matters even more, how is John using the term ‘world’ (Gr: *kosmos*)? Unfortunately for us, John uses this very term in many different ways – you can’t pin down any one usage, that’s for sure! So does the “world’ refer to all creation, to all men, to only those men who reject Christ – who? It is obviously impossible to dogmatize here, but it would seem that there is a subtle shift of meaning for the term ‘world’ even within this very verse!

11. He came unto His own things, and His own people did not receive Him.

The first phrase might be rendered “He came home...” and is so suggested by Leon Morris. The exact phrase occurs at John 19:27 where John (we assume) takes Mary “into his own home...” The neuter gender used here seems to indicate that Jesus came to those “things” that were His – the created order. But, what many translations don’t show you is that the first “His own” is different from the second “His own” (see LIV for example – above translation does differentiate between the usages). The second clause refers to coming to one’s own people and not being received by them. It seems hard to see how this could not refer to Jesus’ ministry, for who was His ‘people’ before He took flesh and dwelt amongst us? Sadly, the continued fact of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah will be a part of the very fabric of the story to follow.

12. But as many as did receive Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to the ones believing in His name, 13. which ones are not born of bloods neither of the fleshly will neither of the human will but they are born from God.

To those who receive Him (in obvious contradistinction to those of His own people who rejected Him), He gives authority to become the children of God. Note that one is not a child of God simply by virtue of being a human being – John will very, very carefully choose his terms in regards to this issue. In fact, it should be noted that John will never call anyone ~‘Son of God (or ‘son’) other than Jesus Himself. The LIV renders this “sons of God” but that is misleading – the Greek term is tekna (children) not huioi (son).

It seems that the author is paralleling “receive Him” and “believe in His name.” It does not seem wise to differentiate between the two descriptions.

Those who believe are then described in a very curious way in verse 13. **Those who believe are “not born of bloods...”** The term is plural, though often translated in the singular. There are many, many ideas as to just what this refers to. First there is the problem of a minor textual variant that has led some to think that this is referring to Jesus, and hence to the Virgin Birth. But the evidence against this variant seems overwhelming. Secondly, it seems that the entire verse is trying to make only one point – that being that the act of regeneration (or more obviously, the fact of being born into God’s family) is not a human action and does not have its ground in human desire, action, or will. It is not an action that is based upon anything within the person, including race or parentage. Rather, if one is born into God’s family, that is the direct action of God **and** God alone. I realize that much more could be speculated upon in this verse, but I feel that this is the main idea that is being communicated.

14. And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the unique one from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We approach here a signal verse that ranks amongst the most important Christological passages in the Word. Jn 1.1, 1.14, 1.18, 8.58, 10.30, and 20.28 all are massively important, and if you add to these such passages as Phil. 2.5-11, Col. 1.13-17 and Hebrews 1.1-3, you have most of the material that has been debated for years and years in regards to the Person of Christ.

First, note that the Word became flesh. It was not the Father who was born in Bethlehem. Some early heretics such as Praxeas and Noctus, and most notably Sabellius, taught just such a thing. But the Church has always rejected such a concept, for it is pre-eminently unbiblical.

Secondly, note that the Word became flesh. The Word did not just seem to be flesh – He became flesh. The Word did not just dwell inside flesh, but He was joined to flesh, and lived as a man. Note also that right here John for the first time uses the aorist verb *egeneto* of the Word. As mentioned before, John had up to this time only used the imperfect form of *eimi* to refer to the logos and His eternal nature. But here John uses a verb that points to a specific place in time, and the reason is clear. The Word did not eternally exist in the form of flesh; rather, at a particular point in time He became flesh. This is the incarnation. To me, this use of the verb proves beyond all question that John’s differentiation between *en* and *egeneto* is specific and intentional.

Thirdly, note that the Word became flesh. To this the Gnostics and the Docetics would cry “heresy” for neither group could think of such an absurdity. See, both groups felt that all matter was inherently evil. So, the Docetics came up with the idea that Jesus only “seemed” to be here. The Greek word for “seem” is *dokein* from which we get ‘Docetic.’ They would circulate stories about Jesus walking along the seashore with a disciple, and when the disciple turned around he would see only one set of footprints – his own. Jesus wasn’t really human, so He didn’t leave footprints, or so the Docetics thought. There is a marked anti-docetism in John’s writings (see especially the introduction to 1 John).

1.14 is the clearest statement of the incarnation we have; yet, it answers almost no questions about the mechanics of the incarnation. How did the Word become flesh without ceasing to be the Word (it is evident from the language that the Word did not stop being the Word – He simply became flesh). How was the divine Logos joined to the human nature? These questions would not find even a creedal formulation until 451 A.D. at the Council of Chalcedon, and even then all we really have a positive statements that assert what we know, and exclude any errors on those points – but the formulation does not answer the questions of “how”. The mystery of the Incarnation is a great one, and, given its unique character, one that only God can explain.

John says that He tabernacled amongst us. The term was used of ‘pitching a tent’ and this would seem rather appropriate, given the character of the One who became flesh! Some see a connection here with the Old Testament term *sh^ecan* from which we get the ‘shekinah glory’ of God. The Hebrew term refers to the dwelling place of God, and hence by extension, the dwelling place of the glory of God. Jesus is described as having the “glory of the unique one from the Father”, hence the connection seems to be well founded. There seems to be more anti-docetism in John’s thought here (some have conjectured that John wrote this in response to some who took Paul’s teaching of a ‘cosmic Christ’ beyond what Paul actually said, and John is trying to reinforce the teaching that Jesus was true God and true man, not just one or the other) for he gives testimony of the fact that we have seen His glory... The believers had not just heard about Him, or thought they saw Him, but they actually saw His glory.

The “glory” is that of the “unique one from the Father.” The term *monogenes* has been translated for a long time as “only-begotten.” This is not necessarily a wrong translation, but a bad one. It is bad in the sense that the idea of generation” or “begettal” is absent from the term as we have it. See, originally it was thought that *monogenes* came from two Greek terms, *monos* meaning “one” and a verb *genaio* which means to beget. But, we have discovered through further study that it actually comes from *monos* and a noun *genes* which means ‘kind or type.’ Hence, *monogenes* means “one of a kind’ or “unique’ rather than “only-begotten.” I feel this is very important to John’s thought. Jesus is the “unique one from the Father.” There are none other like Him in any way. He is the total and complete and only revelation of God to man, and as such can utter such words as 14.6 without sounding blasphemous!

Jesus is described by John as being “full of grace and truth.” Basically this seems to mean that Jesus is the source of grace and truth, most probably because He is grace and truth. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s grace, and God’s truth. When one needs grace, one turns to Jesus. When one searches for truth, one is searching for a person – Jesus Christ.

15. John bore witness concerning Him and cried out saying, ‘This is He of whom I said, the One coming after me has been made higher than I because He existed before me.’

John is intent on making sure that his readers understand the role of John the Baptist as a forerunner and herald of the coming King, who is Jesus. So he here quotes the ‘testimony’ of John concerning Jesus, and, following with the context, tells us that John knew of the supernatural character of Jesus the Messiah, for he states that Jesus ‘existed before me.’ Now, chronologically Jesus was born after John, but John is not referring to chronological age. He is referring to absolute being Jesus was ‘before’ John, for as we have already seen, Jesus is before all things – He, as the Logos, is eternal. Because of this, Jesus holds the pre-eminent position above John.

16. Because of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace; 17. for the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

This section doesn’t seem to be a continuation of John’s statement in verse 15, though it could be. It would seem somewhat strange, however, for John to have such an in-depth knowledge of the nature of Jesus and his mission. I have punctuated the translation so as to have this section as commentary on the part of the author.

The term “grace” appears here three times – and that will be it for the rest of the entire book! This is somewhat of a “minor mystery” as Morris has put it.

There are two ways to take the first clause “one, that all mankind has benefited in some way from the work of Jesus Christ – that in some way “all” have received of His “fulness.” The other way, and seemingly the proper way, is to see it as referring particularly to the redeemed, for our reception of the fulness of Christ is clearly stated elsewhere, and the next clause seems to modify the first by identifying that which we have received – that is, grace upon grace.

Most probably the phrase *charin anti charin* is a way of expressing a fulness of grace – the literal translation “grace against grace” doesn’t seem to make any sense.

John somewhat parallels some of the thought of the writer of Hebrews when he contrasts the avenue by which law was introduced by God – that is, by Moses – and that of the entrance of grace, by Jesus Christ. I think there is an important connection between law and grace that is only alluded to here, but is expressly taught by Paul – that is, that the law functions to show man his sin, and Jesus then saves them from their sin. It is law first, then grace. We are steeped in our culture today with a ‘gospel presentation’ that skips the first part – Jesus is held out as a way out of our problems, a way to have a nicer, fuller life. His grace becomes yet another self-help method that is peddled as working real well. The first part, that of law and our sin, is left out, for we know that the natural man will not have anything to do with such a teaching. Yet, the order is the same – God introduced the law first, then demonstrated His grace in Jesus Christ. We would do well to maintain the Biblical balance.

Two things are said to have come through Jesus Christ – grace and truth. Grace we know is not just unmerited favor – it is demerited favor – that is, it is favor and mercy given to one who not only doesn't deserve it, but actually deserves wrath and punishment instead. Through Jesus Christ, we can know the Father, and that is all made available only by God's grace.

“Truth” in John is not the bare intellectual concept of that which is real and right over against that which is false and in error. Truth is a person in John 14:6, and is the embodiment of the entire system called ‘Christianity’ in John's thought. To know the “truth” is to be a Christian, to know Christ, and to follow Him. Knowing the “truth” in John is not simply knowing facts, but knowing Christ.

18. No one has seen God at any time; the unique God, the one who eternally exists in relationship with the Father, this One has made Him known.

This verse not only closes the Prologue, but it gives us vital information that, had the Holy Spirit not provided this to us, would have caused no end of problems. Verse 18 ties up the loose strings on the central issues of the Prologue and provides a transition into the terminology that John will use for the rest of the Gospel.

He first asserts that no one has ‘seen God at any time.’ Now, the Old Testament tells us that men have indeed seen God in the past – Isaiah saw God on His throne in Isaiah 6; Abraham walked with Yahweh in Genesis 18. So what does John mean? He defines for us that the one he is speaking of here is the Father – that is, no one has seen the Father at any time. OK, then who was it that was seen by Isaiah or by Abraham?

John tells us – the unique God. Here the phrase is in monogenes theos. There is a textual variant here. Many manuscripts have monogenes huios (unique Son) – and the KJV follows this tradition. But the strongest reading is “unique God.” How are we to understand this?

The term “monogenes” is used only of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus is here described as the “unique God” – John is not asserting a separate deity from the Father. Rather, this ‘unique God’ is the one who is eternally in fellowship with the Father. Even when discussing the “separateness” of the Father and the Son as persons, John is quick to emphasize the unity of the divine Persons in their eternal fellowship together. Here John teaches, again, the eternal and central fact of the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The unique God makes the Father known – He “explains” Him. What we know of the Father we know because of the revelation of the Son. We know what the Father is like because we know what Jesus is like. Here the Son's function as the revelator of the Father is clearly set forth, and this is directly in line with the usage of the term Logos in the Prologue. Other New Testament writers use the same theme – for Paul Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” and for the writer of Hebrews Jesus is ‘the express **image** of His (the Father's) person...’ Both writers (or maybe just one writer if Paul indeed wrote Hebrews) are emphasizing the role of Jesus as the revealer of the Father. In the same way, this answers the above question regarding who it was, in John's opinion, that was seen of Abraham and Isaiah. We have already had occasion to note that John will directly assert that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus in the person of Yahweh (12:39ff), and

could it be that this is the explanation for Jesus' statement in John 8:56? Did Abraham "see the day of Jesus" when he walked with Him by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1)?

With this John transitions into his story of the Gospel. But one must never let the facts of the Prologue slip from view. John truly intends for the awesome majesty of the subject of the Prologue – the Logos in human flesh, Jesus the Son, the Revealer of the Father, Creator of all things, Light and Life, bringer of grace and truth – to remain in the forefront of our thinking. It is only when we follow John's advice that we can correctly interpret and understand the passages that follow. So many misinterpretations of the clear evidences of the deity of Christ provided by John are based upon the disjunction of the Prologue and its message from the rest of the book. This is a tragic mistake. John has begun his book with a set of blueprints that we are wise to follow.