

## LESSON #2 CHAPTER 1:1-18

**The Prologue: A Hymn to the Eternal Word**

Divine Attribute: I Am

Theological concept: The WORD, LOGOS

Geographical location: -

Chapter Structure

1:1-5 The Logos is the Ultimate Arche of the universe

1:6-18 The Mystery of Word Became Flesh

Spiritual Principles:

P1 Christ is pre-existing and self-existent, never once he was not.

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A. Today's lesson...

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This is the prologue of the gospel of John. Bible scholars generally agreed that it is a hymn of praise rendered to the eternal Word in the early church era. John began the Gospel with this hymn in order that we may see the Word that is revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, is not a set of principles or rules that govern the operation of the universe, but is the eternal God before Whom all creatures will worship and serve!

With this prologue, we will read the Gospel of John from an angle that is different from reading the other three gospels. Under John's guidance, we shall see that we are not following a rabbi who surpassed all other rabbis with his miraculous work and deep spiritual knowledge, but we are following the God who enthrones in heaven and is worshipped by the heavenly host, the Redeemer of mankind and the ultimate destroyer of Satan!

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B. 1:1-5 The Logos is the Ultimate Arche of the universe

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*"<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." 1:1-5*

1. **The Arche of all things** – 1:1a *"In the beginning was the Word"*

The source of all things refers to the first cause or the very beginning of the universe. It has been a subject of passionate interest of philosophers throughout history and across cultures. Since 6<sup>th</sup>BC many great Greek philosophers have attempted to provide an answer to it. Here are four of them, three came from Miletus and were traditionally considered to be the first philosophers in the Western world. From them we can understand the backdrop of this prologue.

The first is Thales of Miletus, (born c. 624–620 BC —died c. 548–545 BC), he was one of the legendary Seven Wise Men of antiquity. He is remembered primarily for his cosmology that water as the origin of the universe because water is the essence of all matter.

Anaximander, (born 610 BC, Miletus—died 546 BC) was the student of Thales, who first developed a systematic philosophical view of the world. He disagreed with Thales that everything could have originated from a particular element; instead, he held that everything originated from the apeiron, which means “infinite,” “unlimited,” or “indefinite”

Anaximander has a student named Anaximenes (flourished c. 545 BC). He was a Greek philosopher of nature. Anaximenes substituted *aer* which means “mist,” “vapour,” “air” for his predecessors’ choices.

In 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, one of Plato’s student Xenocrates (396/5 – 314/3 bc) of Chalcedon was a Greek philosopher and mathematician. He proposed that the universe is ruled by a self-moving number.

These are great thinkers and great thoughts. But they are the products of human reason. And human reason is created, limited and polluted, and are bound to have errors and are fallible. They are not the truths.

John was neither a philosopher nor thinker. Yet he boldly made a completely different proclamation that none of the great philosophers had ever thought of. He said, “*In the beginning was the Word*”. The Word “Logos” in Greek is a familiar term to the Roma-Greco world. Logos in Greek is understood as the set of principles or rules that is governing the operation of the universe, from astrology to entomology to microbiology; they believe that logos exists in every system and everything great and small in nature.

“*In the beginning was the Word*” These words are not the enlightenment he attained after 3 years of discipleship with Jesus. If it was then it be the product of his reason and would be equally unreliable as all other philosophical theories. “*In the beginning was the Word*” are the very words the Holy Spirit inspired him as he was graciously chosen by God to receive the special revelation.

This verse is in parallel with the first verse in the creation account in Genesis.

“*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Ge 1:1) In Ge 1:1 the *beginning* refers to the beginning of the time and the temporal world. But in John 1:1, the word ‘beginning’ is ‘*arché*’ in Greek, which means **before anything came into being**. It is infinitely way before the beginning of Genesis 1:1. In John 1:1-2:12 John purposefully wrote in parallel with the seven-day creation account in Genesis chapter one. In this parallel, the Genesis records the first creation work of God while JOHN records the beginning of the re-creation work of God. In both creating work the Word is the agent.

## 2. *The Word is He – 1:1b “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

“*and the Word was with God*” tells us that the Word exists in the eternal realm, a realm that transcends the created world. In other words, *where God is, there is the Word*. The Word is greater than the universal principles that the Greek philosophy could perceive. Verse 2 says that the Word is not it, the Word is **He**. The Word is a person in eternity.

At the same time, “*the Word was with God*” eliminates that God and the Word are the same person. Therefore, “*and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” alludes to the multiple-person character of God. So now we know that in the ‘*arché*’ God is the only One existing and there are at least two persons in God – the Word and God.

Verse 2 says, “*He was in the beginning with God*” may seem like a repetition of the second clause in verse 1, but it is not. It states that the Word was with God right from ‘*arché*’, i.e. the Word has always been with God, there is never once He was not with God. In fact, **there is not**

once he was not! This implies that the Word is not created. He is self-existent, he is from everlasting to everlasting, the *I am who I am*. (Ex 3:14)

**Reflection:** O Lord Jesus, now I begin to understand why you prayed in great agony in the garden of Gethsemane for the cup to be taken away. It is the cup of separation from God. It has never happened since the very beginning. O Lord forgive me for being slow in understanding the great sacrifice you have made to save me! I want to love you deeply. Help O precious Lord!

3. **The Word is the Agent of Creation** – 1:3 *“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”*

*“All things were made through him”* tells us that the Word is the agent of the creation of the temporal world as well as all things in the eternal realm. As the creator is higher than the creature, He is higher than everything, including angels. In Genesis chapter one, all things came into being by the words that came from the mouth of God, *“God said”* (Ge 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 20, 22, 24, 26). In Prov 8:22-31, the Word was personified and described as being the active architect, engineer and master workman of the Creator:

*“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of old.*

*23 Ages ago I was set up,*

*at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

*24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.*

*25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth,*

*26 before he had made the earth with its fields,  
or the first of the dust of the world.*

*27 When he established the heavens, I was there;  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,*

*28 when he made firm the skies above,*

*when he established the fountains of the deep,*

*29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,*

*when he marked out the foundations of the earth,*

*30 then I was beside him, like a master workman,*

*and I was daily his[d] delight,*

*rejoicing before him always,*

*31 rejoicing in his inhabited world*

*and delighting in the children of man.”*

Therefore God saw that everything He has made *was very good* (Ge 1:31). As in Romans 11:26 *“ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.”*

*“and without him was not anything made that was made.”* 1:3b Again this seemingly repetitive clause has been a strong refute to the heresy of Arianism proposed by Arius, the elder of Alexandria church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. He taught that even though all things came from Jesus, Jesus was the first being that God created. “Once” he claimed, “the Son did not exist.” John 1:3b is one of the biblical reference that the Council of Nicaea used to denounce Arianism.

4. **The Word is the arché of morality** – 1:4,5 *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

Verse 4 brings out the relationship of the Word and God’s crowned creation, man. The Word has life, it is the life of God (5: 26), it is also the very beginning of life, it begets life. *“and the life was the light of men”* When God breathed into Adam’s nostrils, life from the Word entered man and Adam became a living creature (Ge 2:7). There is light in man – conscience and morality.

Verse 5 points out the relationship of the Word and the fallen world. *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* The darkness here refers not to the darkness before creation (Ge 1:2), but the darkness of fallen morality that engulfs the world since the fall. Man’s morality has been corrupted by sin (1Jn 1:5-7). From the Word comes only the physical world, but also morality, as God commented after the completion of the creation of man, *“It is very good”* Ge 1:31

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### C. 1:6-18 The Mystery of Word Became Flesh

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From verse 6 onwards, the Word that pre-exists in eternity came into the history of the temporal world. He is the man Jesus. What we shall see is as the prophet Isaiah foretold seven centuries before John wrote the Gospel,

*“But, as it is written,  
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him” —”* Isa 64:4

1. **God prepares a witness** – 1:6-8 *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”*

The pre-existent Word came into the created world to save sinners. He condescended into the world in the likeness of man, and pitched his tabernacle in the dark world. God has prepared a man to be the witness the mighty cosmic act of the Word’s condescending from eternal realm to the temporal realm, and to call man to respond to the Incarnate Word. This witness is John the Baptist. He is said to be *sent from God* because his mother was aged and barren and God made a life conceived in her (Luke 1:7). The chief purpose of John the Baptist’s life is to bear witness to the coming of the true light that illumines the way to eternal life.

2. **Two kinds of responses** – 1:9-13

*“9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

The world was *“his own place”* because it was created through him. *“his own people”* refers to God’s chosen people Israel. God made a covenant with them to deliver them from darkness, they received God’s law from Moses, and were looking forward eagerly to the coming of the long-promised Messiah. Yet when the Word came to them as Jesus they rejected him and crucified him!

Praise God that God did not forsake mankind because of Israel's unfaithfulness. God has chosen a people for himself before the creation of the world. They are given the right to become children of God and the promise of eternal life. They live in the perfect providence of God. God sends the Holy Spirit to regenerate them with faith and the life of God, so that they may receive the Word as their Saviour, their Lord and their God.

To become children of God is a right that comes from God. Without faith in Jesus no one can receive this right. Thus, the Word divides mankind into two races according to individual's response to Him. One race believes Jesus Christ and shall live eternally. The other race rejects Jesus Christ and remains condemned for eternal death.

### 3. **Word became flesh** – 1:14-18

*“14 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. 15 (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.’”) 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”*

John coined a great term **“Word became flesh”**, in three words this term refutes all kinds of erroneous claims about the person of Jesus – his humanity and divinity. In 2<sup>nd</sup> century there were the Docetism and Ebionism. Docetism claimed that Jesus had never possessed a real body and hence denied Jesus' humanity. Ebionism believed that Christ never become flesh, he was a Spirit that temporarily possessed an ordinary human being named Jesus. Christ' spirit came onto Jesus at baptism and left him when he was on the cross.

*“Word became flesh”* affirmed that the pre-existing Word became a real man, he came as every man does - conceived as a foetus in the womb of Mary (by the Holy Spirit), forming the body in the womb and born when the time is ripe, went through infancy, childhood, teenage and adolescence. This is critically important because the chief purpose of his coming is to bear our sins as a man like you and me, not as God.

The literal translation of v.18 is *“No one has ever yet seen God. The only begotten God, the One being in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known.”*

The word *“Only begotten”* is *monogenés* in Greek. It is a composite word from *misthōtós* which means "one-and-only", and *genos* which means "offspring, family, race, nation, class, kind'... etc." Jesus is the only begotten God means his being is not created, he is unique and one of its kind. It does not mean there was a time when he is not and then God brought him into being. He is *the only begotten God*, He is not only the Son of God, He is God the Son. He is God! *“the One being in the bosom of the Father”* being in the bosom is synonymous to special intimacy. In Greek it carries the meaning of union. The Son of God is in a special union with God. Here we see the first and second persons of God the Trinity.

So God the Son came into the world to living in the world, holy as He is, he did not isolate himself from the sinful world. Instead he lived among sinners. The nature reveals to us God's mighty work of creation. But in at the man Jesus, we see God himself, as Jesus himself assured his disciples, *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”* 14:9 And as Hebrews speaks about Jesus Christ as the *exact imprint of God's nature*” Heb 1: 3 *“He has made Him known”* The Greek word is *exégeomai* which means “to explain, to unfold, to lead the way.” From this word comes the English word exegesis. Jesus explains God to us and interprets His will for us. *“I am the way, the truth and the*

*life, no one goes to the Father except through me.”* 14:6 We cannot know God apart from knowing Jesus Christ. Thus we say that Jesus is the special revelation of God.

John said that we have received the fullness of his grace, one grace after another. Grace is God’s kindness and favour bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. Indeed our being, our call to God, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sin, adoption into God’s household, eternal life... are the sovereign grace of God. As a matter of fact, all who believe in Jesus is living in the grace of God, receiving it time and again, and unceasingly. Some are answers to our prayers, some are given without us asking, all are mercies and love of God. Praise God that He deals with us on the basis of grace and truth, because if God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive!

John has never mentioned the name of the Word in history until v.17 when he said “*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” Condemnation comes from the Law but the saving grace came through faith in him, When the law said, “do this and you shall live”, the Word said, “believe me and you shall live forever!” “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” John 3:17

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#### D. Closing

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The Holy Spirit that reveals it to John also reveals it Paul who wrote another hymn of praise to the eternal Word:

*6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,[b] being born in the likeness of men.  
8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of  
death, even death on a cross.  
9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every  
name,  
10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the  
earth,  
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Php 2:6-11

The pre-existing God has come for us. Dear brothers and sisters, do you realize how majestic, glorious and powerful is Jesus? He has come to find his own. Are you willing to go wherever He sends you, so that others may see the light of your life and believe in Jesus?