

THE PROLOGUE TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The first eighteen verses of John's Gospel are an introduction to the book as a whole. These verses, the prologue (foreword), are not so much an abstract or summary as they are intended to make the case for the significance of the account which follows, and to establish John's credentials as a witness to the later life of Jesus. In order to understand the foreword, a general conception of the book as a whole will be essential.

An overview of the Gospel of John

The gospel of John differs from the other three gospels in a number of ways. Many events and the majority of parables recounted in the synoptics, do not appear in John. Conversely, there are important events in the fourth gospel which do not appear at all in the other three. Unique to John are Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, and the raising of Lazarus. John is the primary source for the private discourses Jesus had with his disciples.

Leaving a reliable written record of the signs done by Jesus, witnessed by John himself, has as its goal that those who read it might believe. The themes of belief and unbelief are developed throughout. It is implicit that belief is intellectual assent to facts (propositions) but not without evidence. John is all about evidence.

John explores unbelief via the signs and miracles which Jesus accomplished. He records the responses of Jewish leaders to those miracles, identifying for us the subjective conditions of heart which lead to rejection and unbelief. The account of the healing at the Bethesda pool is a good example of John's treatment of this subject and is unique to the fourth gospel.

John is concerned that the facts surrounding the life of Jesus, particularly the signs and miracles attesting to His Messiahship, be reliably recounted. This concern he addresses by stressing that he and certain of his fellow apostles were eyewitnesses of these events.

Who is Jesus to John?

But these signs and miracles are evidence of what? The traditional view holds that the book is, first to last, evidence for the Divine ontological status of Jesus.

A.W. Pink makes this case: "In this book we are shown that the one who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary, who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from the scene, was none other than the Lord of Glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before '*the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*' (Titus 2:13)."

With a bit more doctrinal precision James Montgomery Boice writes this about the Fourth Gospel: "John, however, reveals Jesus as the eternal, preexisting Son of God who

became man in order to reveal the Father and to bring men access into eternal life through his historical death and literal resurrection. How do we know that? We know it because John says so. He writes, *“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).*

I can agree heartily with everything written by Pink as long as we don't define terms or discuss Titus 2:13 any further. And I can quibble only with the reference to the eternal preexistence of Jesus in Boice's piece. But I am quite sure that our differences go deeper to the very question of how they conclude that John's gospel is all about Jesus' place in the Trinity.

Boice has done us a favor by bringing to mind verses 30 through 31 of John 20. John gives us a summary statement of his book's purpose. That one verse describes the elements of John's literary project, giving an overview of the entire gospel. John, in effect, is saying:

“When Jesus was here he chose twelve men to whom he explained who He was and what He was all about. These disciples, and I, John, in particular were uniquely situated to be witnesses of the signs which Jesus accomplished that attested to his identity as the Son of God, the Messiah. (Upon His departure, he left us with the charge “to feed my sheep”, and he left us with the paraclete which would guide us into all truth.) It falls to me to give an account of those attesting signs which we witnessed. This book is about providing that reliable testimony by which you who read it might believe that Jesus, the Nazarene, is the Christ. This witness is part and parcel of feeding His sheep.”

If my expansive paraphrase above accurately describes the fourth gospel, then John's intent is not to equate Jesus with God, but rather to give grounds for hearers of the account to believe that Jesus was the unique Son sent by Yahweh. From first to last, John's gospel is about the central importance of the testimony to the signs done by Jesus. The object of that testimony is belief, and the object of that belief is assumed by the author, not explicated. More precisely, the thing to be believed is named, that Jesus is the Messiah, but what it means to be the Messiah is not explicated; that is assumed. This is essential to recognize because it means that the content of that belief cannot be derived from John, as the traditional view would hold. That derivation must be informed by a full-orbed understanding of the Old Testament prophetic picture of the Messiah; and this understanding John shared with his readers.

Why Logos?

During the 60 years between the resurrection and the penning of the fourth gospel, the church surely struggled to come to grips with the person of Jesus, the meaning of being his disciple, and of his place in the divine plan. That struggle included seeking and developing the terms and categories of thought which could best make sense of the church's experience. The New Testament authors used many well-worn terms, applying

them in new ways to the brand-new and unique experience of interacting with the Son of God.

Logos was among those words. It was used in the first century in broadly varied ways, from casual conversation to commerce, poetry, philosophy, and religion. Among those applications it had distinctive meanings, and within each application much variation and nuance (See Appendix 'C'). John chose it to open his book, and identified it with Jesus. Why? Why not choose 'bridegroom', or 'morning star', or 'Rose of Sharon', or 'bread', or 'shepherd', or 'balm of Gilead' or 'the door'? In the traditional view, if John had chosen any of these names instead, the interpretation of the prologue would have been changed not at all; and why not? Viewed through the eyes of Nicene Christianity, what word John chose is not important. He could have chosen any name or attribute of Jesus and made his point: "In the beginning was the Morning Star, and the Morning Star was with God, and the Morning Star was God. And the Morning Star became flesh and dwelled among us." ...No change.

Now straight away it must be said that apologists of orthodox Trinitarianism would not concede my above point. They would argue that *logos*, properly understood, points profoundly toward Jesus. That "proper understanding" came through the Christological controversies of the early church and borrowed heavily from Greek and Hellenistic Jewish thought. The church fathers, conversant with and sympathetic to Platonism and the work of Philo, found in those writings a serviceable explanation for how God could become a man. That understanding of *logos* which helps ground the Trinitarian interpretation of the prologue, arose because those church fathers were profoundly interested in the metaphysical question, "what kind of being is Jesus?" However, I don't think that John was interested in that question. How then was he using the word?

For *logos* serve John's purpose, he had to "unpack" it. This is one purpose of the prologue: to "unpack" the sense in which there is a relationship between Jesus and the *logos*. And *logos* served that purpose precisely because... well, it's not precise. It's flexibility allowed John to work with it and embed it in sentences that were designed to invoke the cultural background he shared with his readers. The "Why logos?" question must be answered by allowing John's arguments to fill out the content.

Accordingly, in my direct, interlined translation, I will leave *logos* untranslated so that we have before our minds the breadth of the word as we consider the context. In my expanded translation I will attempt to identify the English word or words which most closely carry the nuance intended.

Translation and Commentary

John 1:1-18

Part 1:

1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was about God, and God was the *logos*.

In the beginning was the *logos*,

As in Genesis 1:1, the beginning of matter, space, and time is in view. John is establishing that ὁ λόγος, along with its attributes, existed at the moment of creation. In the Genesis account, Yahweh was speaking into existence all that was. By His *logos* Yahweh brought order from chaos and light into darkness. It is this “speaking”, this self-expression that John is echoing in the first clause. Contained within the *logos* are the related ideas of story or account and plan or intention. John does not explicitly distinguish between them since the fact that the narrative unfolds implies God’s intention to unfold it. Here, John seems to shade his meaning toward the sense of his “plan”.

...and the *logos* was about God,

A connection between the *logos* and God is being asserted. The preposition *pros* here serves to establish that this *logos* was God’s story. It was “about” God in that it was “in reference to” or “pertains to” to God.¹

...and God was the *logos*.

In most English translations ὁ λόγος is assumed to be the subject and θεὸς is the predicate. The word order suggests that, in the absence of evidence demanding that *logos* be the subject, God is the subject. This evidence, in the traditional view, arises from the doctrinal commitment that God cannot “equal” the *logos*. In the absence of that commitment, the word order naturally leads to God as the subject of the clause. In what sense then is God related to the *logos* by the equitive verb “was”? There seem to be two possible solutions:

Solution #1:

This assertion restates and strengthens the case made in the second clause. When one sees the unfolding of history, one sees the extension of God’s personality. In that unfolding of history is the account God intends to write which reveals Him. In that sense, God is the story.²

¹ *Pros* may also have the sense of “according to”. Liddell and Scott note Democritus’

usage: ...πρὸς τὴν δυνάμιν, according to one’s power. Applying this usage of *pros* to our passage would convey the idea that the *logos* is the story as authored by God. “About” emphasizes that the *logos* is self-revelatory, and “according to” emphasizes that the *logos* is sourced in God. If what John has in mind is that God has revealed himself in the *logos* then “about” seems to carry that sense most forcefully.

Solution #2:

For both Greek and Hellenized Jew, *logos* can mean the expression of an inward thought (λεγω), and the thought itself (λογιζομαι). If John is exploring the relationship between λεγω and λογιζομαι, then a further understanding of the predication to God of *logos* is that God is the mind or reason behind the story. One can see that the idea of *logos* as plan and *logos* as mind are closely related.

I am inclined to Solution #2: God is the reason behind the account. By this understanding the sense of the second and third clauses is, God is both subject and author of the story.

2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

This *logos* was in the beginning with God.

John has not yet developed the content with which he will fill *logos*, so here the sense is the same as in the first two clauses of verse 1, God's plan for self-expression. While the concept of *logos* includes both the intention or plan of God and the outworking of those intentions, here John focuses on the plan. This statement emphasizes and expands on the theme of the first verse by restatement of the fundamental nature and central importance of the *logos*. John is saying, "The plan was in place and active right from the start".

For John's readers the language of verse one would have echoed the physical creation of the cosmos. As we will see John has much more in mind for the content of the *logos* that he yet to develop. He has in mind the drama of redemption and may, as early as this verse, be preparing his readers for that central purpose of the plan.

In the cosmos we have the theater in which redemptive history is set. It says much about God that, in the beginning there was nothing, and then there was something. But John draws our attention away from the stuff of creation to the purpose of creation, namely the story. John is driving home here in verse two the point that he made in verse 1: the story is everything.

3 πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν.

All things through it happened, and aside from reference to it not one thing happened which happened.

John elaborates on verse 2 and prepares us for verse 4 by making explicit that the entire sweep of history was dependent on, and the furthering of, the story God intended to tell.³

² This solution supports my theory for the prologue: John is working with the idea of creation as God's narrative and his readers would have invested that sense in all three occurrences of *logos* in verse 1. John first draws our attention to the narrative that is history in the first clause. Then, in the second and third clauses, he tells us that there is purpose to that history, namely to reveal God to humanity. Everything which follows in this book is bearing witness to that story. This is great, but, I was not able to establish that a usage like "God was the story" was likely in first century literature.

All things through it happened,

The antecedent of “it” is still *the logos* as story or plan. There are no events which come into existence via any means other than by God speaking them into existence.

...and aside from reference to it, not one thing happened which happened.⁴

All these events that are dependent on the story, the on-going activity of God, have their meaning, even their very existence, in their role of furthering the central purpose of the story. I am taking the antecedent of αὐτοῦ to be “the central purpose of the story”. Hence, story is a metonymy for the central purpose of the story.

4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·
In it was life, and this life was the light of men.

Up to this point, John has left it to his readers to fill *logos* with the received content of their Jewish history and Greek influences. Now he begins to add to that content for the purpose of making his, as yet unrevealed, central point.

³ There are three possible understandings of verse 3 (U1, U2, and U3):

U1 Translation: All things for it happened, and aside from (reference to) it, not one thing happened which happened.

U1 explanation: The events of history all occurred with a view to furthering the story. Not one event of history had any meaning, in fact, any existence at all, without reference to the story. Here, the story, e.g., all created events, stands in for (metonymy) ‘the central elements of the story’. The first and second clause each make the same case.

U2 Translation: All things through it happened, and without it not one thing happened which happened.

U2 explanation: God is the ultimate reality-creating being and the story is the manifestation in the present of that creative work. In the “book” God is writing there is nothing outside the book but God, Himself. I only have access to reality “through the book”. As such, everything happens in the context of the “book”; nothing happens “dia” any other agency. The first and second clause each make the same point.

My preferred option:

U3 Translation: All things through it happened, and aside (from reference to) it not one thing happened which happened.

U3 explanation: First clause is asserting the U2 case and the second clause is asserting the U1 case: The singular source of events is uniquely located in the story (no events without the story); and no events have meaning or even existence without reference to the story.

This verse prepares the reader for the idea that the story has a particular dramatic event at its center. It looks back to the previous verses in the first clause, and forward to the fourth verse in the second clause.

⁴ I take the Textus Receptus punctuation with a full stop after ὃ γέγονεν to make the most sense.

In it was life,...

In the *logos* was contained a certain kind of existence that John identifies as “life”. It is not yet explicit in the prologue, but this life turns out to be the central reason that the plan exists at all. Hence we see John drawing his focus ever more tightly to the point of all God’s creative activity. So what is this “life”? The concept John has in mind here is that of purposeful existence. *Zōe* stands in for that purpose without which physical existence has no meaning.

In the body of the gospel the further concept of eternal (ionic) life is prominent. Eternal life was part of the Jewish understanding of that which the Messiah would bring to pass for Israel. The Abrahamic covenant included the promise that one day those whose faith was reckoned to them as righteousness would inherit eternal life. In our immediate passage, eternal life is in the background, while that of purposeful existence is in the foreground.

...and the life was the light of men.

Men are creatures who desire to know. To take in the world via the senses and come to knowledge is a gift of common grace. Here, τὸ φῶς, ‘the light’, is used in the sense of that which truly illuminates the soul. Conceiving of life is to grasp reality truly; to see men, events, and oneself truly. When man is illuminated he sees the purpose of existence.

5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

And the light shined in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

John may be drawing on Isaiah Chapter 9 here:

1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

2 The people who walk in darkness

Will see a great light;

Those who live in a dark land,

The light will shine on them...

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;

And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

This illumination stood in contrast to the spiritual blindness plaguing the Jews. The metaphor of darkness means a world full of people antagonistic to the truth. That blindness kept them from seeing the fulfillment of all that the prophets spoke concerning the Messiah. Yet, in the end that spiritual blindness was not the final word; knowledge of truth was. (Ultimately this light was embodied in all that was prophesied concerning Jesus, but John doesn't spill those beans yet.)

Καταλαμβάνω has the sense of “to seize” or “apprehend” either physically or mentally. The traditional translation is “to comprehend” (NASB). My choice to translate οὐ κατέλαβεν as ‘did not overtake’ arises from my understanding of the structure of the prologue. The first five verses comprise the “first *logos*”; Yahweh’s story begins and unfolds. The hopeful ending of that story is in view in verses 1-5.

But, there is a “second *logos*” coming; the testimony of John the Baptist, in which he identifies Jesus as the Messiah and we find that there is much darkness in the world in response to his testimony. It is not until verses 6-11 that John tells us about the world’s lack of comprehension; I don’t think he makes that case here; rather, as prophesied by Isaiah, the ultimate triumph is to the light.

Summary of Part 1: The first account: God speaking at the beginning of time and His story unfolds.

Expanded Translation of Verses 1-5

1 When space, matter, and time (the cosmos) came into existence, there was also present the plan for that cosmos: God had a story to tell. The cosmos was the setting for that story. God was both the subject of the story and its author.

2 The plan was in place and the story was active right from the beginning.

3 All created things depended on the plan. Nothing had meaning or even existence unless it furthered the purpose of the story.

4 Contained in this story is the true meaning of life. Illumination, true understanding, comes to men when they grasp this meaning.

5 This kind of understanding came into a world that was characterized by willful resistance to being enlightened. But in the end, the true purpose of the story will be known.

Part 2

2 (a) 1:6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης·

A man came, having been sent from God, whose name was John.

We are introduced to a prophet of God, John the Baptist.

7 οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ.

This man came as a witness, in order that he might bear witness concerning the light, so that all might believe through him.

In the mode of Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist came to convey to men the word of God concerning the illumination promised in Isaiah. The ἵνα clause is intended to convey the purpose of this illumination, namely that belief might come through the testimony of John the Baptist.⁵

8 οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.

That man was not the light, but (was) in order to give testimony concerning the light.

Just as verse 2 emphasizes and clarifies verse 1, so John emphasizes and clarifies the point of verse 7. John the Baptist (JTB) is not the one who illuminates the mind of men concerning life. Rather he is to give an account of that illumination. JTB bore testimony of God's words to him about the identity of the Messiah.

9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

It was the true light coming into the world which illumines every man.

It is possible that the assertion of the first clause is that the true light exists, "The true light is". However, I take the subject of εἶμι to be τὸ φῶς such that the point of the clause is to distinguish this genuine illumination as to purposeful existence from competing claims to truth. The participle, ἐρχόμενον, in the second clause is ambiguous in that it may modify 'the light' or 'every man'. John seems to be gradually drawing us to the fact of the immanence of the light. Consequently, I take that which is 'coming into the world' to be the light.

10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.
That light was in the world, and the world happened because of it, and the world did not know him.

That light was in the world,
The immanence of the light is made explicit.

⁵ αὐτοῦ in verse 7 is ambiguous. It may be either neuter or masculine. Consequently, it's antecedent can be either the light or John the Baptist. Since I take this section, which starts at verse 6 to be introducing the "second account", that of John, I will translate the pronoun "him".

...and the world happened because of it,

The cosmos had, as its purpose to be the theater in which the illumination and the belief that attends it (vs 6), is worked out. That is to say, the plan, in the beginning with God, was for the express purpose of bringing light to men. Διὰ here has the sense of “because of” or “for the purpose of” or “with a view to”.⁶

...and the world did not know him.

Prior to this verse I have translated the pronouns referring to the light with ‘it’. Now John is giving us our first hint that he has in mind a person who will embody the impersonal concept of enlightenment. Accordingly, the masculine αὐτὸν is rendered ‘him’.

Now John makes the point that willful resistance to the one whom JTB is revealing is coming. John’s gospel recounts in many places unbelief, primarily by his Jewish brethren, in response to the testimony that Jesus is the Messiah. Here we have a connection between the prologue and the book. John’s job is to testify to the credentialing miracles done by Jesus. There is a reason why that job must be done: the Jews didn’t believe what JTB said about Jesus.

11 εἰς ἑλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι οὐ παρέλαβον.

The light came to it’s own, and his own did not receive him.

The world, into which the light came, is τὰ ἴδια, the possession of the light.

The illumination was intended to play a specific role, namely to give men life, but those to whom the illumination was to be given were willfully unreceptive. Here again the masculine αὐτὸν serves to personify the light.

John may again have in mind his Jewish brothers. In 1:17 he contrasts the law by way of Moses, with the truth (which is the object of illumination), by way of Jesus.

This is the third couplet employing the structure of an assertion (v10) followed by a clarification in the next verse.

Summary of Part 2(a): Now we have a second “account”, that of John the Baptist. God sent a prophet who would speak concerning the light. John identifies the light, but the world does not recognize him.

Expanded translation 6-11

6 God sent a prophet named John.

7 He came in order to identify the person through whom true knowledge of purposeful existence would come.

⁶ See Crabtree, Defense of Methodology, Appendix D

8 John wasn't that person, but he was to identify him and vouch for him.
9 The message of life this person brought was the profound truth.
10 The one who embodies this truth came into the world which was created just for that event, but the people to whom he came were not interested.
11 He came to accomplish the purposes of God, but the ones who were to be the beneficiaries of those purposes were not interested.

Part 2(b)

12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,
But as many as received him, he gave to them the right to become children of God, to those believing in his name,

Since verse 10, the blindness and stubbornness which characterizes men has been pointed out. (In verse 10, "... the world did not know him"; and verse 11, "... his own did not receive him".) But now the tone changes and the possibility that the illumination will penetrate the hearts of some is acknowledged. The sufficient condition for that illumination is identified: It is to those who believe in his name.

The subject of ἔδωκεν could be the one who personifies the light (as I have taken it), or the light itself. Since John is well on his way to identifying the light, I take the logical subject of ἔδωκεν to be the same person referred to by αὐτόν. However, It seems that the thrust of the sentence is: "By receiving him, the illumination which attends that belief has the effect of making you the kind of person God will adopt as His own." If this is the case, the subject of ἔδωκεν tends toward the illumination itself.⁷

13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.
who, not from blood nor out of the will of flesh, nor out of the will of man, but out of God were born.

This is couplet number four, v.13 clarifies v.12. Those who believe in his name are identified by describing those who do not: Anyone who thinks that by virtue of their descent from the family of Abraham, and by their keeping the law they will be given the right to be children of God are mistaken. It is only by belief in this one who personifies the light.

⁷ This idea that it is the illumination that "gives the right to become a child of God", is in keeping with the "division of labor" Jesus asserts between him and God. Jesus, unabashedly says that he may "give eternal life" (17:2), or He will "raise them up on the last day". At the same time, those for whom he will function as advocate and savior, are only those whom the Father draws to him (6:37ff). Hence, Jesus would not "give the right", God would. If John meant, "God gave them the right..." surely he would have been explicit.

Summary of Part 2(b): Yet in the midst of the world's blindness to the truth, there is a remnant who will desire illumination and recognize the fulfillment of God's plan to redeem the world through the Messiah.

Expanded translation v.12-13

12 But for those who are interested, the very fact of their interest shows them to be the kind of people whom God will save, God's own children.

13 And this status, as a child of God, was not because of who their ancestors were, or what religious observances they kept, but simply because God favored them.

Part 3

1:14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἑθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

And the *logos* became flesh and lived among us, and we beheld the glory of him, glory as of the one uniquely born from the father, full of glory and truth.

And the *logos* became flesh and lived among us,

Logos was used by John in verses 1 and 2 to echo the language of creation in Genesis.

By the plan and story of God all things came into being and were set in motion.

Returning now to that same language, John asserts that the *logos* entered into the world.

What does he mean by the “plan and story became flesh”? It is obvious that the story has been unfolding for centuries and characters in that story have been made flesh. So he must not be saying that the story, in its entirety, is being made manifest. What is the point here? It is this: the character whom the story is all about has come onto the stage. What did our author say in verse one? He said that God intended right from the start to express himself in creation; Here, this self-revelation, this *logos*, comes in a fullness never before seen. *Logos*, stands in for “the central purpose of the story”.

John has prepared us for this revelation: He has singled out from all that the story has told, from all the events and characters of history, the life that brings LIFE and the knowledge of it. And he said that this illumination is had by belief in “his” name.

Whose name? Whoever is the *logos*, the one for whom all of creation exists.

...and we beheld the glory of him, glory as of the one uniquely born from the father, full of glory and truth.

For whom does all of creation exist? It is the μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, the one uniquely born from the father. For John's Jewish readers, this language could have meant none other than the Messiah.

15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον,
Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

John testifies concerning him and cried out saying, this is of whom I said, the one coming after me is established before me, so that he is first with respect to me.

John testifies concerning him...

JTB's job was to convey what God had told him. And what God had told him was that Jesus, the Nazarene, was the Messiah. John's job is to testify as to what JTB had conveyed.⁸

...and cried out saying, this is of whom I said, the one coming after me, is established⁹ before me, so that he is first with respect to me.

JTB asserts the "preexistence" of the Messiah in that the intentions of God to incarnate the Son were in the plan right from the foundations of the earth.

While JTB is placing himself in the proper relationship to Jesus here, I don't think that was John's purpose for including this account.¹⁰ Rather, this further testimony by the prophet as to the preeminence of Jesus is the basis for the "grace upon grace" which John understands he has received.

16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν, καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος·

So that out of his fulfillment we all received, and grace upon grace;

The logos having been made flesh, is the fulfillment of the central purpose of the story. Because the Messiah had come, John and his fellow disciples were the recipients of God's great favor.

τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ is traditionally rendered "of his fullness". This fullness is understood to refer to all that Jesus is in his human nature and divine nature. This understanding could follow if the assumption is that the prologue is making the case for the ontological status of Jesus. If, on the other hand, John's assertion is that the central point of all creation has come on the scene (v14 & 15), and the ὅτι clause is expressing result, then a reference to "all that Jesus is" seems to be incongruous with the argument. Rather, the grace that John and his fellow disciples received is because God's story is fulfilled in Jesus.

⁸ This theme of testimony is important. This passage begins the process, which culminates in verse 18, of tying the prologue to the book. The book is all about the evidences of who the Messiah is and the accounts of these things by those who were there to see them. (These are JTB's first-hand-accounts of the Messiah. The rest of the book are John's.)

⁹ I have translated γέγονεν, a perfect, with present meaning, 'is established'. This usage is similar to that found in Mark 2:27. And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath ἐγένετο for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was established for man... The intention of God with respect to the Sabbath and man is in view. In our passage the intention of God with respect to the Messiah and man is in view.

¹⁰ The confusion about JTB's identity was sufficiently problematic that he took pains to distinguish his prophetic role from Jesus' Messianic one. In verse 20, he denies that he is the Messiah, in v26 he defers his baptism to that of Jesus, and in v30 he subsumes his importance to that of Jesus.

17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

Because the law through Moses was given, (yet) grace and truth through Jesus Christ came.

The pattern of assertion and elaboration continues. The ὅτι is now a causal conjunction introducing the reason for grace upon grace. The law of Moses was the glory of Israel, the favor shown by God to his people. None-the-less, The Law of Moses pales by comparison with the illumination that comes by virtue of belief in Jesus.

The true light that illumines every man (who is willing to be illuminated) is personified in Jesus Christ and this is favor exceeding that found through the Law.

It does not appear that John has set up a comparison with the Law to cast the Law in a bad light. It may be that the “grace upon grace” formula in verse 16 sees the grace through Jesus as “upon” the grace through the Law. So we have, “the favor that comes from belief in Jesus Messiah is over and beyond the favor which comes from the Law of Moses.”

18 θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς υἱὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

No one has seen God at any time; the uniquely born son, who being in the bosom of the Father, that one has been reported.

No one has seen God at any time;

John is not unaware of the manifestations of God to Israel during her history. He has in mind “seeing” God in a more profound sense here. He seems to imply that to the degree his fellow Jews think they have “seen” God in the theophanies of scripture, they have seen him only in part. He might have added, “until now...”.

...the uniquely born son¹¹, who being in the bosom of the Father, that one has been reported.

Now the Messiah, who will be the very embodiment of God on Earth, has been reported by the prophet, John the Baptist. He, as the purpose of all creation, resides in the very seat of the Father’s desires. He has been with the Father in that sense, right from the beginning.

Whereas, human beings up to now have seen God in the scriptures, prophets, messengers, and theophanies, they now see Him in person. We see God fully, save for his transcendental attributes, which are in principle, unknowable to creatures.

¹¹ There is a textual variant here. The manuscripts preferred by the UBS GNT 3rd edition read, μονογενὴς Θεός. The majority texts read, μονογενὴς υἱός. The flow of the argument seems to warrant the later reading.

Summary of Part 4: John's testimony: We are eyewitnesses.

Expanded translation v14-18

14 God brought His narrative¹² to its central purpose with the life of Jesus. We disciples lived with him and came to know all that it meant for him to be the Son of God.

15 John pointed him out to us and we learned that Jesus is preeminent.

16 And since God brought his story to its fulfillment in our time and place, we disciples were favored all the more.

17 We had the law through Moses which was to our benefit, yet this man, Jesus Messiah came and gave us truth in its fullness.

18 We can never know God as he fully is, but in Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan to express Himself in His creation. We disciples saw it first-hand.

EPILOGUE

John has chosen a *logos* motif to introduce his account of the life of Jesus. *Logos* is the repeated element in the prologue which grounds the importance, purpose, and credibility of the rest of the book.

It is important because the subject matter is the center piece of God's narrative of self-disclosure.

Its purpose, "so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God", is necessitated by the world's disinclination to believe John the Baptist's testimony.

And its credibility comes from John having been an eye-witness to the events which he chose to include in his account.

Why *logos*? It served John as a receptacle in which to capture the relationship between the transcendent Father, the unique Son, and John himself: God authors the story, Jesus is the point of the story, and John was to write a story about Jesus.

¹² The role of Yahweh as creator did not cease after the days of creative activity disclosed in Genesis. John would have seen God as the sustainer of all that is. As such, God is speaking into existence, in the present, every aspect of reality. God has the end in mind while he is "speaking" the narrative into existence by His *logos*.

Appendix “A”
DIRECT TRANSLATION

ΚΑΤΑ ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ

Part 1

1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was about God, and God was the *logos*.

2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

This *logos* was in the beginning with God.

3 πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν.

All things through it happened, and aside from reference to it not one thing happened which happened.

4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων·

In it was life, and this life was the light of men.

5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

And the light shined in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Part 2

2 (a) 1:6 Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης·

A man came, having been sent from God, whose name was John.

7 οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι’ αὐτοῦ.

This man came as a witness, in order that he might bear witness concerning the light, so that all might believe through him.

8 οὐκ ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ’ ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός.

That man was not the light, but (was) in order to give testimony concerning the light.

9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

It was the true light coming into the world which illumines every man.

10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω.

That light was in the world, and the world happened because of it, and the world did not know him.

11 εἰς ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι οὐ παρέλαβον.

The light came to it's own, and his own did not receive him.

Part 2(b)

12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,

But as many as received him, he gave to them the right to become children of God, to those believing in his name,

13 οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

Who, not from blood nor out of the will of flesh, nor out of the will of man, but out of God were born.

Part 3

1:14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

And the *logos* became flesh and lived among us, and we beheld the glory of him, glory as of the one uniquely born from the father, full of glory and truth.

15 Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον, Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

John testifies concerning him and cried out saying, this is of whom I said, the one coming after me is established before me, so that he is first with respect to me.

16 ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν, καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος·

So that out of his fulfillment we all received, and grace upon grace;

17 ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο.

Because the law through Moses was given, (yet) grace and truth through Jesus Christ came.

18 θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς υἱὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

No one has seen God at any time; the uniquely born son, who being in the bosom of the Father, that one has been reported.

Appendix B: EXPANDED TRANSLATION

1 When space, matter, and time (the cosmos) came into existence, there was also present the plan for that cosmos: God had a story to tell. The cosmos was the setting for that story. God was both the subject of the story and its author.

2 The plan was in place and the story was active right from the beginning.

3 All created things depended on the plan. Nothing had meaning or even existence unless it furthered the purpose of the story.

4 Contained in this story is the true meaning of life. Illumination, true understanding, comes to men when they grasp this meaning.

5 This kind of understanding came into a world that was characterized by willful resistance to being enlightened. But in the end, the true purpose of the story will be known.

6 God sent a prophet named John.

7 He came in order to identify the person through whom true knowledge of purposeful existence would come.

8 John wasn't that person, but he was to identify him and vouch for him.

9 The message of life this person brought was the profound truth.

10 The one who embodies this truth came into the world which was created just for that event, but the people to whom he came were not interested.

11 He came to accomplish the purposes of God, but the ones who were to be the beneficiaries of those purposes were not interested.

12 But for those who are interested, the very fact of their interest shows them to be the kind of people whom God will save, God's own children.

13 And this status, as a child of God, was not because of who their ancestors were, or what religious observances they kept, but simply because God favored them.

14 God brought His narrative to its central purpose with the life of Jesus. We disciples lived with him and came to know all that it meant for him to be the Son of God.

15 John pointed him out to us and we learned that Jesus is preeminent.

16 And since God brought his story to its fulfillment in our time and place, we disciples were favored all the more.

17 We had the law through Moses which was to our benefit, yet this man, Jesus Messiah came and gave us truth in its fullness.

18 We can never know God as he fully is, but in Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plan to express Himself in His creation. We disciples saw it first-hand.

APPENDIX “C”

ON *LOGOS*

In the first verse of John’s gospel, “word” appears three times and is the English translation of the Greek *logos*. However, the field of meaning for *logos* goes far beyond ‘word’. *Logos* is grammatically related to and derived from the verb *lego*. The archaic sense of *lego* was “to gather”. From that meaning, the term evolved the related ideas of “to enumerate”, “to count”, “to draw up”, “to narrate” and finally “to say” or “to speak”.

Logos came to refer to the thing said, the “account”, “narrative”, or “word”. From those broad senses, a tremendous variety of nuance came into use. Kittel mentions “consideration”, “evaluation”, “reflection”, “ground”, and “reason”.

The relation between the verbal idea and the noun is fundamental insofar as *logos* is both the expression of thought and the thought itself. Aristotle explained that language derives directly from rationality. So *logos* has two sides: that which is spoken and the reason behind it.

In Greek philosophy there was also a wide variety of usages, but some generalization can be made. *Logos* was seen as the rational ordering principle which pervades all reality. According to first century Stoics, the *Logos Spermatikos*, the seminal word, seeded the primal chaos with form. Order in the universe needed explanation, and a principle, like a mind, was that explanation. *Logos* came to describe both the order and the ordering principle. This principle was an impersonal law of the universe.

In the New Testament, *logos* came to signify the gospel itself, functioning as an equivalent of *euangelion*. *Logos*, followed by various prepositional phrases in the genitive, refers to the gospel story while emphasizing an aspect of it: Thus, the word of life, the word of truth, the word of Christ.

In the Old Testament, ‘*dabar*’ is routinely translated ‘word’: “The *dabar* of the Lord came to Abram.” The Septuigent translates *dabar* using both *rhema* and *logos*. (I don’t know how, or if, the LXX makes a distinction between them.) When God speaks, as in Genesis 1, the Hebrew *amar* (to say) is translated in LXX by *eipen*, a past tense form of *lego*. The activity of God in creation is by His *logos*; and His activity in judgement and deliverance is by his *rhema* or *logos*. The *logos* of God, then, describes His self-disclosure and self-expression.

APPENDIX “D”

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROLOGUE

Part 1: Pertaining to God’s Account (verses 1-5)

God speaks at the beginning of time and begins to unfold His story. The *logos* is God’s act of self-expression.

Part 2: Pertaining to John the Baptist’s Account (verses 6-13)

Part 2(a)

John, a prophet of Yahweh, speaks about the identity of the light which will bring knowledge of purposeful existence to men. But the world is not interested in the truth.

Part 2(b)

Yet, in the world, there is a remnant who are interested in the truth.

Part 3: Pertaining to John’s Account (verses 14-18)

The main purpose of God’s story comes to fruition with the life of Jesus. John the Baptist identifies him and we disciples were favored to be witnesses of the miraculous life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. Now I’m going to give my account so that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.