

**Association of Hebrew Catholics**

New Zealand Branch

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# **The Torah Became Flesh**

## **The Prologue of St. John's Gospel**

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

**St. John 1: 1 — 18**

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### St. John 1: 1 — 18

Our Reflection on this great passage from the Gospel according to St John is presented in three parts, with an introduction, overview, conclusion and supplementary reading.

### General Introduction

#### Overview

- Part I**    **Verses 1 — 5:**    In the Beginning —  
the Word in God and His Revealing role.
- Part II**    **Verses 6 — 14:**    The Word entering Salvation History.
- Part III**    **Verses 15 — 18:**    Believers and the revealing role of the Word  
in the New Creation.

### General Conclusion

#### Hymn To The Blessed Trinity

- Appendix 1.**                    "Mystery of Godliness"  
by John Henry Newman.
- Appendix 2.**                    On Leadership: "To Lead Is To Listen"  
by Lord Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi  
of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

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St. John 1: 1 — 18

### Introduction

#### A little daunting

To write anything about the first eighteen verses of the Gospel according to St. John is like "walking where angels fear to tread!" All of our sources of information are commentaries on this magnificent Gospel by scholars of distinction and reputation: and rightly so, as this precious document requires advanced learning together with wide experience in Biblical studies if the commentaries are to be of genuine quality.

Our experience as a Fellowship, is that — despite the beautiful teaching and profound spirituality this Gospel contains, very few people we meet bother even to read it, let alone study it. Further enquiry into this strange situation soon reveal why it is generally neglected, and left to Sunday readings at Church: it is too complicated. But the real answer is far more complex. Our Christian culture has let disciplined Bible study and meditation fall by the wayside. This is regrettable since instruction in our Faith and the Sacred Scriptures can be, and should be made available in an organised way for all levels of ability.

#### Our Aim

This presentation is not a commentary: it is a set of reflections, with the aid of commentaries, to help non-specialist readers walk through the text and have sufficient guidelines and support to enable them the "savour the most delicious food of the Divine Scripture with greater profit." (St. Paul of the Cross)

#### Our sources

In the process of preparing this set of reflections we have consulted, as mentioned, a considerable number of theologians and specialists in Biblical studies; Some of these we quote by name, especially when we have used an idea or concept found in their work. Having said that, while we will record quite a number of such names, our Reflection is not simply like a telephone directory trying to cram in lots of material from noted specialists.

Full details of sources will appear in our bibliography.

## Our Perspective

As with all the Gospels (as well as the Epistles) the Prologue has its own particular contribution to make for Christians seeking the Hebrew perspective present in the teaching and worship of the Church. This we will try to bring to the forefront, as we believe it will help readers advance in the growing awareness, among Church members, of our true heritage as members of the Household of God. (Ephesians 2: 19)

## Our text

Our text of eighteen verses is usually referred to as the **Prologue** to this Gospel account. Some refer to it as an **overture**. It appears to be based partly on one or more ancient Christian hymns. Those portions are interspersed with prose: altogether forming a sort of irregular **Canticle of the New Creation**, which we are encouraged to learn by heart. It is certainly framed in a definite shape characteristic of ancient Jewish literature. We should remember that it was written about 60 years after our Lord's death, and thus incorporates many already well-established teachings, understandings and principles passed down as part of the oral tradition of the Church.

## Our Approach

We will follow a common procedure of reflecting on three sections of the Prologue, three steps in St. John's presentation which unveil Christ the Word:

- |            |                        |                                                                   |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I</b>   | <b>Verses 1 — 5:</b>   | In the Beginning — the Word in God and His Revealing role.        |
| <b>II</b>  | <b>Verses 6 — 14:</b>  | The Word entering Salvation History.                              |
| <b>III</b> | <b>Verses 15 — 18:</b> | Believers and the revealing role of the Word in the New Creation. |

These are perhaps best read and reflected on, not as necessarily sequential, but in some cases, as parallel developments. (McPolin S. J.)

The sections can therefore be read in any sequence or individually according to need.

For those who would like a one page overview-summary, we offer an excerpt from "[The Gospel Story](#)" by R. Cox, C.M.

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St. John 1: 1 — 18

### Part I Verses 1 — 5:

#### In the Beginning: the Word in God and His Revealing role.

##### Introduction

This short selection of five verses wastes no time getting to the point! The point is: the Word was with and in God before creation. The rabbis had taught that the Torah existed before creation. Now St. John is going to reveal the pre-existence of the Anointed One, the Christ and later make links with the Torah. Ultimately this is about the Love of God and how this love "spilled over" into creation which followed. Let's take a deep breath and move on into the grand disclosure, the like of which there simply is no equal!

##### Verses 1 — 5

**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 to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be**

**through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;**

**the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

##### Sub-section: Before Creation — The Word in God

##### Verse 1

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

##### "In the beginning"

St John opens his Gospel with the same opening words of Genesis: "In the beginning ..... ." The first question might be, "In the beginning of what?" What are we talking about?

Let's note first that, whatever the translation, Genesis 1 opens with the **creation** of the **universe**, and of **time**. Knox makes this very clear in his translation:

"God, at the beginning of time, created heaven and earth."

St. John, wanting to allude to a new creation, goes **back further before creation**.

### **"In the beginning was the Word"**

**First** we note that the verb "**was**" means was **already** in existence. That is, the Word existed before creation, and continues to do so.

Jesus was eternally present with His Father as "the Word."  
Divine in being (vv 1 — 2): "In the beginning . . . ." (Genesis 1:1):  
the gospel opens with the first words of the Old Testament in order to express that when time and finite being began their course, the Son was already with His Father. But it is also a reminder that because of Jesus there will be a new beginning for mankind for he will recreate man and communicate his own life to those who accept him. (McPollin, S. J.)

**Secondly**, we are introduced to "the Word" (In Greek — *Logos*). We all need, from time to time, to reflect on the importance of this term, which is a title respectfully assigned to Jesus Messiah. Some scholars, in times past, have made much of this Greek term, "logos," and all that Greek philosophy added to this term. But **the real meaning of the term / title is to be found within the Biblical tradition.** (Lindars and others).

St. John, by linking his Prologue with Genesis 1: 1, emphasises the foundation of our Lord's unusual title: The Word — **God speaks, and whatever He speaks comes into existence.** God's speech is therefore His channel of creation. We are reminded of this in Psalm 33.

**By the LORD's word the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth all their host.** (NAB Psalm 33: 6)

But the "Word of the Lord" was also, via the Prophets, the channel of sharing information, communication, and the wisdom of God.

For the Hebrews, the spoken word was something very precious and personal, inseparable from and revealing the person who spoke it. Thus God revealed himself through the words of his prophets (Jeremiah 1: 9). In eternity, then, the Son is the perfect expression of God the Father and all that God is. Furthermore, he is near his Father, constantly oriented "towards God" (RSV: "with God") and yet distinct from him. (McPollin, S. J.)

We need to note especially this idea of the Son being **the perfect expression of God** the Father. St John chose the term "**Word**" for very important reasons. The term, rather than just meaning a word of speech, — ". . . ." is more accurately understood as an **expression with meaning**; that is, it is a **message**, a "**communication**," and, as indicated, a type of "**revelation**." (Newman and Nida)

In Hebrew thought, the Son is therefore — "as the Word of God — God's manifestation, the revelation of Himself, whether in creation, deeds of power and of grace, or in prophecy."  
(Raymond Brown)

The full power of this understanding of "**the Word**" as a message, communication, revelation, will reach its climax in the final verse (18) of this magnificent hymn.

The missionaries among us will be roused by the evangelistic vibes arising out of this amazing Biblical text.

### **"and the Word was with God"**

The word "**with**", here, denotes a living union with (literally, the) God;

The word "**God**," here, refers therefore to the divine Person of the Father. (See 1 John 1: 2) (MacRory.)

We should add that the word "**with**" means not just that the Word was in the company of the Father, but that there existed a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the Word and God.  
(Neman and Nida)

Now St. John completes the first verse in five stunning words:

This means clearly, '**partaking fully of the nature of God.**'

"The truth revealed in these four words, 'The Word of God,' is the highest thing which can be revealed to us respecting God."  
(Sadler.)

It ranks, therefore, with the most important dogma in the sense of authoritative utterances conceivable, **equaled only** by the final words of this unique Hymn of the New Creation.

Let's remember that the greatest commandment, **according to Jesus** was also the core of Jewish Biblical teaching:

**"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!**

**Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

**Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.**

As spoken by Jesus:

**"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart,  
with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

**This is the greatest and the first commandment.**

**The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as  
yourself.**

(Matthew 22: 37 — 39)

This central teaching reveals a **God-focussed** declaration **together with a human directed** focus. St. John, in his opening verse proclaims the **God-focussed** element which will find its corresponding human focus in verse 14 of our text.

The **final** clause of verse 1 coupled with **verse 14** and the **final sentence** of the Prologue form the axis of this great hymn of the New Creation.

We have given a lot of space to verse 1, and this is because the whole of St. John's Gospel is to be read with this in mind. It is the key to understanding this great canticle-like Prologue, and the whole Gospel account it introduces.

## **Verse 2**

**He was in the beginning with God.**

This verse has also been translated as:

"This word, when time began, was face to face with God."

Thus the Greek translation implies that the Word and God are distinct, and live in intimate communion. (Kleist, S. J.)

Readers will have, by now, begun to see how important this passage is for us to appreciate the harmony and continuity displayed between the ancient Scriptures and the New Testament. This perception will become ever more enlightening as we proceed. **It will help us to appreciate our Hebrew-Christian heritage as well as sharpen the focus of our evangelistic outreach, for it conveys the true image of just who the "real Jesus" is.**

## **Sub-section: At Creation — The Word and His revealing role in creation.**

### **Verse 3a**

**All things came to be through him,**

Our translation is very close to the literal rendering: "all things **through him** came into being."

The Greek phrase through him indicates that the Word was the agent in creation, but at the same time the context clearly implies that God is the ultimate source of creation.

Similar expressions are found in Paul's writings in the Letter to the Hebrews. In 1 Corinthians 8: 6 Paul distinguishes between "God, the Father, who is the **creator** of all things" and "Jesus Christ, **through whom** all things were created". Again in Colossians 1: 15 — 16 Paul refers to "the first born Son," by whom "God created everything in heaven and on earth". In Hebrews 1: 2 the writer speaks of the Son, as "the one through whom God created the universe".

**The Greek text indicates clearly that the Word was the instrument or agency employed by God in the creation.**

(Newman and Nida. Some emphasis ours.)

### Verse 3b

**and without him nothing came to be.**

This is "an emphatic negative statement essentially equivalent in meaning to the first part of the verse".

It is St. John's way of emphasising the importance he wishes to give this notion.

### Verse 4

**What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;**

This simply means, **the Word was the source of life**. We should pause to reflect on St. John's use of the word "**life**". It is generally agreed that he is talking of "**eternal life**". In our notes we will denote this by a capital, e.g. Life, or even upper case LIFE.

For John **life (eternal life)** describes a quality existence, that is, the kind of life that man has when God rules in his life. The word **life** (Greek *zoe*) is used 36 times in John's Gospel, never in the sense of "natural life" or "biological life," but always with the meaning of "real life" or "true life". (Newman and Nida)

The verse continues, asserting that the LIFE which came through the Word was the light of the human race. St John is saying — "The Word is the one who caused people to **really LIVE**. This way of LIFE caused people to **see**, that is, to **perceive**,: indeed to **perceive the truth**." Thus the Word gives **understanding**. (Based on Newman and Nida)

Therefore LIFE associated with the Word is not mere existence — even inanimate things exist; LIFE signifies some kind of **sharing in the being of God**.

(Based on Vawter, C. M. — Emphasis ours)

### Verse 5

**"..... the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."**

St. John labels all that is unbelief and opposed to God, as **darkness**. We are in darkness, but we do not have to be part of it. We note he says, "the light **shines**" — by a present tense he draws our attention to its eternal quality and performance.

Despite **all** the darkness which has surrounded the light, it has never overcome it. Thus this Light of the Word is always available to those who seek it.

Some writers at this point make a distinction between the **Light of the Torah** (Old Testament) which they wrongly claim was for **Jews only**, and the **Light of the Word** which is for **all humanity**. This type of error is uninformed and demeaning for the light of the Temple was beamed out to the whole world, signifying Israel's vocation to all humanity.

Here St. John picks up this theme and emphatically states that the light of Christ's teaching enlightens not only Jews, but the whole world. St. John indirectly links the Light of the Torah (the Law, the Words of God) with Christ the Light, basing this on the teaching of the Jewish sages:

**"The Light of the Law which was given in our nation to  
enlighten everyone."** (Test. Levi, 14.)

### **Conclusion to Part 1**

Even just the first five verses of St. John's Prologue present us with immensely profound thoughts. These are given to us to ponder. We do not need to shrink and feel inadequate because we may not understand them. If we engage with our Lord and seek to hear whatever He wishes to share with us, we will grow spiritually, and be empowered to persevere until He returns.

**Shalom!**

(End of Part 1.)

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St. John 1: 1 — 18

### Part II Verses 6 — 14:

#### The Word entering Salvation History

##### Introduction

The Prologue takes a distinct turn at this point. Up till now, St. John has talked of the Word in eternity. Those of us not used to that kind of literature have done well to reach this stage.

St. John now presents the Word in day to day life. Thus we  
step out of eternity into time. (S. Ray)

To start, the narrative begins with John the Baptist, a great Prophet, and a strong and holy servant of God. In Biblical style, the focus soon changes from one of prophesying on to the One prophesied.

The text moves quickly. Let's join the writer, St. John, as he unfolds his vision.

##### Verses 6 — 14

**A man named John was sent from God.**

**He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.**

**He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.**

**The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.**

**He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.**

**He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.**

**But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,**

**who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.**

**And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.**

## Verse 6

### **A man named John was sent from God.**

The Evangelist now introduces John the Baptist and his mission, for two reasons: (a) as a witness to prove that our Lord was the Messiah; (b) to show that the Baptist himself was not the Christ, as some erroneously thought. John's mission was a divine one, it was from God, but it was only to prepare the way of the Messiah and to give testimony to him.

(Callan, O. P.)

Like the great Prophets and our Lord Himself, John the Baptist was "**sent**" by God. Although our text does not call him a "**messenger**," the verb "**sent**" means "sent as a messenger," or "sent with a message".

## Verse 7

### **He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.**

This is a plain talking, "sharp shooting" sentence. Literally it reads "This one came for witnessing, in order that he might give witness concerning the Light, in order that all might believe through him".

Our translation uses, 'testimony' and 'testify' and these signal powerfully that John came to give irrefutable **evidence!**

To testify (or to be a witness) is to "speak for the benefit of, or, in a person's favour". It also means to "reveal who a person is".

John the Baptist has not come to talk about a lovely man who lived long, long ago in a far, far away land. He is not telling a fairy tale! He has been sent to give bold, uncompromising and unmistakable evidence in testimony. He is therefore a principal witness in the "case" before us. Let's take a closer look at this idea of **testimony**, **witness** and **evidence** ("**important truths**".)

John the Baptist is a witness, 1: 7; the Samaritan woman is a witness, 4: 39; Jesus' works are a witness, 5: 36; 10: 25; the Old Testament is a witness, 5: 39; the crowds are a witness, 12: 17; God himself is a witness, 5: 37; and the Holy Spirit, as well as those **whom our Lord chooses**, are **witnesses to him**, 15: 26 — 27.

Though the Greek usually rendered "witness" or "testify" may frequently be rendered simply "speak" or "tell," there are two important components in the Greek term which may be made explicit in some languages. In the **first** place, there is an element of personal relation to the events mentioned, that is, one normally testifies or witnesses to something which one has **personally experienced or seen**.

The **second** component involves an element of importance or significance in the content of what is said. Since the Greek term was frequently used in connection with witnessing in court, the associations of "**important truths**" are often significant in particular contexts. In this context it seems that the writer is emphasising the importance of John's message concerning Jesus, and therefore chooses a term which carries **more significance than merely some expression for "talking" or "speaking about"**. (Newman & Nida — Emphasis ours)

We wouldn't expect anyone to remember all of the Biblical references above. But what they demonstrate is extremely important in discerning who the **real** Jesus is and how we convey the truth about Him to other people. The explanation above is very clear:

**First** Those of us who wish to give witness to Jesus Christ must give testimony of **our personal relationship** with Him.

**Second** We must have clear ideas in our mind about the evidence in favour of Jesus — i.e. we must be familiar with **the great truths of His teaching**. Regular reflection on the Gospels is a major qualification we need to have.

### Verse 8

**He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.**

This verse restates Verse 7 in the negative form as a Hebrew way of emphasising the critical importance of what was stated there. In other words these ideas must be clearly stated and understood.

Let us keep noting the implications for the followers of Jesus who wish to "give witness" to Jesus in the world about us.

### Verse 9

**The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.**

The "true light" is the divine fulfilment of what had earlier been given to Israel as a preparatory light — evidenced in Torah, i.e. the Sacred Words and the Wisdom Literature. St John calls it "true", i.e. "real" — not the opposite of false but like the coming of the True (Good) Shepherd: the full revelation of God's truth.

This Light "enlightens everyone" — not without **exception**, but without **distinction**.  
(D Carson)

Thus the "true light" is the One who enlightens, literally, every person born in this world. The implications of this truth in the mission field of our contemporary society are enormous and should help restore our courage to "take the Gospel to every creature".  
(Mark 16: 15.)

The coming of this Light into the world was keenly awaited by many of the learned teachers of Judaism. The first rabbis who followed Jesus in the infant Church grasped immediately the power and vitality of this great truth.

As Christ is the Spring and Fountain of all wisdom, so all wisdom that is in man comes from *him*; the human *intellect* is a ray from his brightness; and the *reason* itself springs from this Logos, the eternal reason. Some of the most eminent rabbis understand Isaiah 60: 1, *Rise and shine for thy LIGHT is come*, of the Messiah; who was to illuminate Israel, and who, they believe, was referred to in that word, Genesis 1: 3, *And God said, Let there be LIGHT; and there was light*. Let a Messiah be provided; and a Messiah was accordingly provided.

(See Schoettgen, referred to by Clarke)

We have to be careful not to slip into the common mindset that no one recognised the coming of the Promised One, as we shall observe in the next verse and reflections.

### Verse 10

**He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.**

**"He was in the world, and the world came to be through Him".**

St. John is saying, "He," that is the Word, not the light, is present in creation. Almost all of the Fathers in the early Church understood the reference to be to the presence of the Word in the world before the Incarnation. According to this understanding, the Word was in the world, in the universe, conserving what He had created, "sustaining all things by the word of His Power" (Hebrews 1: 3). (Callan, O. P. and MacRory).

God is everywhere present by His **essence**, by His **knowledge**, and particularly according to our current text, by His **power**.

**"but the world did not know him."**

Let's first consider two technical points which would benefit readers.

**"Know"** in John does not mean simply to **perceive**, to **be aware of**, but has the full Semitic sense attached to knowledge in which personal involvement is always supposed.  
(Vawter, C. M. — Emphasis ours.)

In the Old Testament, "to know God," implies **more than mere recognition**. In the Old Testament, "to know God," is not only to recognise who he is, but more important, **to respond to him in obedience and faith**. In John's Gospel both ideas are important, but **to respond in faith is primary**".

So to know him is to recognise him for who he is, to acknowledge him. (Based on Newman and Nida — Emphasis ours)

St. John states boldly, "the world did not know him". He is not referring to "knowing **about** him, or knowing **of** him". Thus he is not referring to all those who **did not** know of his existence, but rather to those who, because of personal agendas:

- declined to engage in close personal involvement with Him;
- refused to respond to Him, first, by having faith in Him, and secondly, by refusing therefore to do as He directed — i.e. to obey Him.

St. John is referring to the power-block of a number of senior Jewish authorities who felt threatened by our Lord's teaching and saw their power-base at risk.

Not all the senior teachers of Judaism fell into this category, and many of them later became active Christian leaders.

St. John is declaring forthrightly that the senior performers in Jewish worship and administration were unworthy of the office they performed. They had condemned themselves by their worldly and arrogant rejection of the One God sent to bring His promises to Israel and to the world through Israel, to fulfilment.

### Verse 11

**He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.**

We have to ask, what is meant by: "what was his own"? Recall, in verse 10, "**the world** did not know Him". It did not recognise "the **true** light;" it did not accept the illumination which the light gave, and thus it rejected to source of the light, the Light Himself. With noble exceptions, the world rejected the Light, as did even many of His own people. **As a nation** His people rejected Him. But as St. John indicates in the next verse, **as individuals**, many accepted Him.

### Verses 12 and 13

**But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,**

**who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.**

St John quickly acknowledges those of his own people who did accept Jesus for who and what He was. These, (and there were **many** of them) and all other people of like mind, if they **believed** in His **Name**, were given "power to become children of God".

In reference to **belief**, St. John is not talking about just "mental assent". St. James taught (2: 18 — 26) that this is **not enough**. Belief includes **faith, obedience, following Christ, taking up our cross, confessing His Name, repentance, baptism**, and so on. (S. Ray).

That is the Biblical meaning of belief.

Now, a note with regard to "believing **in his name**"

In Semitic usage, "**name**" is equivalent to the person. Faith is not simply the **acceptance of a proposition**, but a **commitment to a person**. (Vawter, C. M.)

What was St. John alluding to in the words, "to become children of God"?

This shows that while men, and the will of men, are the cause of **carneal** generation, it is only God who can be the cause of **spiritual** generation through faith and Baptism. This was an argument against the Jews who considered themselves **just** because they had Abraham as their father. (Callan, O. P.)

This is not said to demean Judaism but to counter the ever-present temptation of religious people to find some way to establish their superiority.

### **What does being born "of God" imply?**

This "new birth" of believers is declared "not of blood," i.e., by heredity or inheritance, "nor of the will of man," i.e., by human volition, "but of God," i.e., by the direct, supernatural exercise of divine power. Therefore, the life of a true Christian cannot be explained on the grounds of heredity, or of environment, or of personal resolution; **it is imparted by the Spirit of God**. (Erdman. Emphasis ours)

The phrase, "but of God" teaches something which, when we ponder it, can "take our breath away":

To be "born of God," implies that we are transferred into a new life wherein we become in some sense **partakers of the Divine nature** (2 Peter 1: 4). (MacRory)

### **"And the Word became flesh"**

#### **Verse 14**

**And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.**

St. John returns to using his term in verse 1 for, "the Word".

He draws on **Exodus 33: 7 — 34: 35**. for the whole of verse 14. This is provided as a convenient appendix. [See Appendix 1 for text](#).

We offer an excerpt from a sermon by J. H. Newman based on this verse, for those who enjoy his approach to Biblical studies. [See Appendix 2 "Mystery of Godliness"](#).

After reflection in verses 12 and 13 on **the way** our Lord was received by people, the Evangelist now states the **manner** in which He came, namely by taking on the whole of human nature.

The Word, God's very Self-expression who was both with God and who was God, became flesh: he donned our humanity, save only for our sin. God chose to make himself known, finally and ultimately in a real, historical man: 'when "the Word became flesh" God became man'. (Carson, also quoting Bruce)

**"and made his dwelling among us".**

The Word took up a transitory abode on earth among us — **literally** "pitched His tent, or tabernacle." The Incarnation of the Word was permanent, but His visible dwelling among the people was not so. (Callan, O. P.)

Many think, with St. John Crysostom (C.O. 349 —407) and St. Cyril (C.E. 376 — 444), that the Greek word for "dwelt" or "made his dwelling place" is employed specially to indicate that the Word did not cease to be God when He became man, but 'dwelt' in His humanity as in a tent among other people. That understanding is entirely consistent with the way God chose to demonstrate His Presence with His People in the Book of Exodus.

Many readers will be familiar with the Hebrew word "Shekinah" which literally means 'residence' but is generally known as the symbol of God's presence in the Tabernacle and the Temple. (Exodus 24: 16 and 40: 34 — 35. See also 1 Kings 8: 10 — 11).

In this verse of the Prologue, St. John declares Jesus to be the fulfilment of what that prefiguring (the Shekinah) pointed towards. It is a very rich truth for those who wish to meditate further on it.

The unusual Greek word for "made his dwelling" is believed to allude to Sirach 24: 8 where Wisdom says,

**Then the Creator of all gave me his command, and he who formed me chose the spot for my tent, Saying, 'In Jacob make your dwelling, in Israel your inheritance.'** (Sirach 24: 8.)

Thus Wisdom finds a home with the chosen people, **making God known through the worship of the Temple and the Jewish Scriptures.**

(Note: The Book of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus is not considered by all divisions of Christianity as included in the Canon of The Old Testament.)

This "**making God known**" is at the heart of the vocation of God's people to be a light to the nations. There can be no doubt that St. John had this critically important role of God's People in mind. The Messiah has come to bring this role into focus and to promote it.

(The final clause of this verse really belongs here, endorsing the truth that the Word is full of grace and truth. The two clauses about His glory are to underpin this understanding.)

### "and we saw his glory."

St. John is here proclaiming himself to have been an eye-witness to the glory of the Word. He didn't just "see" by casually taking a look: he beheld with attention and great faith, when he was given a kind of a vision of it at the Transfiguration. [Read the Transfiguration of the Lord](#). That was an **outward** brightness, a physical, visible glory, such as that of the Sun in the heavens.

But St. John will demonstrate a further inward understanding of the glory he has personally discerned **in the life of Jesus**, and wants to share.

His **real glory**, rather than just a spectacular vision — however stunning — was His **holiness**, His **meekness**, and **gentleness**, His **knowledge**, and in the **wisdom** of His divine utterances as well as in the **power** manifested in His mighty deeds of **compassion**.  
(Based on Sadler)

What is particularly significant here is that these qualities of His glory are those displayed, however less perfectly by God's people who hearken to His Words — His Torah, (which is only partially explained by the term His "Law". Here is the perfect completion, the perfect fulfilment of what God calls for in His Commandments, His Words of LIFE. Jesus is thus the Word made flesh — the perfect revelation of the Father in thought, word, and deed.

This understanding of Jesus being the perfect fulfilment of the Torah: God's command to "LIVE!" — LIFE in Jesus Messiah. It is critically essential if Christians are to respond to the call for a new evangelization in our times.

### "the glory of the Father's only Son".

The Greek word here for "only" has a corresponding meaning in Hebrew of a "beloved son" which in turn, corresponds to God's declaration of Jesus as a beloved Son at His Baptism and Transfiguration. This Son's **perfect fulfilment** of all God the Father has promised through His Patriarchs, Prophets and faithful servants down through the ages.

### "full of grace and truth".

The image translated here is of a vessel overflowing in ever-increasing abundance: and this applied to Jesus the Word as containing all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2: 3). Thus Jesus is the infallible Word: Teacher of the Torah — He is the Word who is Teacher of the **Truth**, and the **Way** to the **Life** of Heaven.

St. John, talking of grace and truth, uses a Greek translation of the Hebrew word '*hesed*' — lovingkindness and faithfulness, or mercy and fidelity. This beautiful word was used by God to reveal **partially** His Name to Moses. (Exodus 34: 5 — 7). We can see therefore the full graciousness of God in revealing His Son in this way.

Some commentators, with whom — despite our profound respect — we cannot agree, claim 'grace' means something more interior and unlimited than 'hesed'. Similarly they claim that 'truth' is not merely the faithful fulfilment of all God's promises but the new revelation of God's majesty and mysterious purpose formerly hidden in the inaccessible light of His divinity. We are at a loss to respond adequately in this presentation, to an apparent misunderstanding of the Biblical / cultural setting St. John is referring to.

We hope we can help readers avoid confusion in this matter.

### **Conclusion to Part II**

No reader will need convincing that St. John has taken us to the very heart of our Christian calling. He has brought us to the epicentre of the new creation. His thoughts and words are lofty and we could become discouraged trying to keep up with him. But we must not allow that mindset to develop within us.

Let's allow our souls to be challenged by the depths of his testimony and thus allow ourselves to be drawn into the mystery he describes. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to unpack this for us at the speed He approves for each one of us: and meanwhile, awestruck and determined to serve Him, let's get on with what He moves us to do,

**Shalom!**

(End of Part II)

# The Torah Became Flesh

## The Prologue of St. John's Gospel

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective  
[www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz](http://www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz)

St. John 1: 1 — 18

### Part III Verses 15 — 18:

#### Believers and the revealing role of the Word in the New Creation.

##### Introduction

The final four verses of St. John's Prologue bring the text of eighteen verses to a magnificent climax. It is true verse 14 presents us with a high-point in Salvation History: "And the Word became flesh."

In the final verse, the final three words declare that the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been faithful to His commission and "revealed" God to us perfectly.

Even further, if we would but ..... **listen**,  
He would empower us to ..... **hear**,  
that we might hearken to Him and **LIVE!**

Let's now follow our text step by step.

##### Verses 15 — 18

**John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'."**

**From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace,**

**because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

**No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, 12 who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.**

We will base Part III of our reflections on three units:

verse 15	John testified
verses 16 — 17	Law and grace
verse 18	No one has ever seen God.

## Verse 15

**John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'."**

Out of the blue, so to speak, we "cross-over" to St. John the Baptist for a comment. This turns out to be like "a little quote in brackets" — it is of tremendous import.

We note John the Baptist "cried out" meaning, he made a **solemn proclamation**. He then gave his evidence — that is, his testimony — and it caps all the magnificent prophecies of the past pointing to the Messiah.

We note that the phrase "cried out" reflects **loudness of voice** and the **urgency of the message**. John the Baptist, this Old Testament Jew, claims only to be the **herald**, and the way he refers to One he heralds is a graphic proclamation of the pre-existence of the Word (See verse 1). We are witnessing the breath-taking moment of the **prophetic word** acknowledging the long-awaited arrival of the **Word of Prophecy**. This is the moment so faithfully foretold.  
(Based on Newman and Nida, and Lindayrs)

## Verses 16 — 17

**From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace,**

**because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

Readers may find some commentaries take this and subsequent verses to have been spoken by the Baptist. Our understanding is that we are now passed back to the writer of this Gospel, who at this point, adds his own perspective: and we had better brace ourselves for a little bit of mind-stretching, for he is **very, very** divergently interpreted.

### First: Verse 16

**From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace,**

St. John is saying, from the overflowing super-abundance of gifts / graces to be found in Jesus Christ, we have all received from Him, in fact, "grace in place of grace". What does this mean?

Some scholars will tell us that the grace of God revealed in the new covenant in Christ Jesus has now replaced God's grace as expressed in the old covenant at Mt. Sinai. We can find no justification for such an explanation: that **the Gospel succeeds the Law**. That would be demeaning of both!

But some will take the position even further, adding fuel to the fire using verse 17 below.

### Verse 17

**because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.**

We list five interesting interpretations of this verse.

- a) So, Law was **opposed** to grace and truth?
- b) One writer has it: "But the Law cannot give life."
- c) Another says, "Obedience to the Law is clearly inferior to the simple acceptance of grace and truth".
- d) Still another will state a common misunderstanding:  
"Moses, who gave the Law but **no power to obey** .....".
- e) Finally another takes the final leap: "The thought is that of Hebrews 11: 1 — 4, and constitutes **a final break of John's thought with that of Judaism**". In other words, Christianity here cuts loose from its Judaic culture and birthright.

Our experience in discussing these issues with Christians trying to keep the spark of faith alive in their families is that they are confused and do not know how to change this. Many report they have been in this situation for decades and see little hope of a re-vitalised Christian practice. A correct understanding of Biblical teaching would be an essential ingredient in rectifying this state of affairs.

We see the above arguments as unbiblical and arising from incorrectly interpreted Scriptures.

- The Law is **not opposed to grace and truth** — though some will insist (demonstrably incorrect) that "St. Paul said so". — Romans 7: 7 — 8.
- No one ever said the Law itself gives Life, other than in the ancient Hebrew tradition, when they referred to Torah as a living being. God prescribed a Way for His People to follow that **He** might bring them to fullness of Life. (Which He later in the fullness of time, chose to do through His Son.)
- The unfavourable comparison of "the simple acceptance of grace and truth" being so superior to "obedience of the Law" is misleading. The closest word we can find for Hebrew respect for the Law is "to hearken" — now passing out of English use. It means far more than to obey. It is derived from the great truth: "Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is the Lord alone!" That requires us to **be listening** and to **be seeking** God's Divine Will, for that brings us into His Presence

Readers will undoubtedly find helpful our excerpts from an address on the subject of "obedience" to the Law. This address was delivered by Emeritus Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathon Sacks in Great Britain. [See Appendix 3](#)

- As for the very commonly held view that "**Moses gave the Law but no power to obey**" — it is disastrously off-track. God's Commandments are literally, "His Words, His Instruction, i.e. His Torah" — the Way and the Truth He gives to bring His people into their restored home with Him. **God blesses His people with the power to obey i.e. to hearken** — to take His Word to heart and live it the best one can.

- We do not believe St John, in this Prologue, or anywhere else in this Gospel or his Epistles "broke away" from Judaism. The infant Church took root wherever it spread. It spread beyond Judaism as we think of it, but had no need to "cut itself off" from its origins. The distinguished scholar T. F. Glasson put it in this way: "Running right through the Prologue is the transference to the Logos of what had been claimed for the Torah".

We would modify this just a little and think in terms of a "transference" of spiritual truth and energy really as an on-going extended link from the Torah to the Word. This is like **new growth on a vine which retains its connection with its roots** yet has all the freedom it needs to blossom in new spaces.

This is a helpful concept and respects the integrity of the former as it shares its treasures and vitality with the infant Church, whilst acknowledging the new path the New Israel must walk in obedience to its Head who commanded "Take the Gospel to every creature!"

And just to conclude this section we find the charge that the Law and all its benefits were for the Jews alone and not the rest of the World, to lack fundamental evidence. It is easy to find specific examples which superficially appear to support the charge. However, devout Jews were very conscious of their duty to be "a light to the nations", as Isaiah put it. It is true a notion of exclusivity became highly developed in some quarters, e.g. **some** of the Pharisees. But even this grew out of a major dilemma they had of keeping their youth from being assimilated into pagan Roman society around them. We can be quick to shoot them down in flames but seem to overlook our **own huge difficulty of preventing our young being filled with anti-theistic philosophy and false religion** throughout the education system. If we look closely at the Pharisees of our Lord's day (and our own, if we know any) we may find much we admire. It is not a matter of just "keeping your religion to yourself" but somehow trying to find a balance "in the world but not of it". It is a constant battle for us all.

None of what we have written in response to untenable, popular doctrine among some Christians diminishes our sense of awe and gratitude we experience in beholding the glorious **fulfilment of the Old Testament** in our Lord Jesus Christ. He said himself He did not come to destroy. Nor did He come to replace. He came to bring all things to their fullness. That was a **new starting point – not a finishing point: not a termination!**

This particular understanding would rank as one of the most important in the field of Biblical studies. We offer a short additional comment in "**Fulfilment For All in Jesus Messiah**".

We move now to the final verse of St John's Prologue.

## Verse 18

**No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, 12 who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.**

No mortal man can bear to see the full splendour of God; it is only in Christ that we see Him mirrored (Hebrews 1: 3)  
(Alan R Cole, Tynedale, O. T. Commentaries, Inter Varsity Press 1973)

The closing verse of the Prologue is a magnificent construction and finished with, "**has revealed him**". Most scholars will draw our attention to the fact that the Greek term used by St. John (*exegesato*) is related to the English word "exegesis". The Greek word originally referred to the **declaration of divine secrets** by an oracle or priest (Lindar). The English word is commonly used to mean revealing the inner message of the text being studied. The particular emphasis is on making clear the spoken words of Jesus who, as Word of God, gives us a true spiritual image of God.

In our text Jesus, only Son and Word of God, has in every respect, revealed God to us. Later in his Gospel account, St. John will present Jesus telling His chosen 12 that He has declared everything He has heard from His Father to them; that there is nothing He would hold back from them. This gifting of the Word by the Word is the closest act of companionship and communion He can share with us, other than by permitting us to receive Him in sacramental Communion.

The gift of the Word to us is the One who will convey to us the Love and Life of God. In Biblical tradition, we must **be listening** if we are to hear the Word and His messages.

At Sinai, God provided a visible image of His presence, the Shekinah cloud, from which He spoke; and the people were required to **be listening** — to be a listening people.

In our Lord Jesus Christ, God has come as His visible image, who speaks; and we are to be His listening people. In this spiritual communion St. John can write:

"The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, **has revealed Him**". (Verse 18 final)

Here, at the end of the Prologue Jesus is proclaimed to be, alone, the whole of God's words to humanity. This helps us appreciate the sheer power and dynamism at this high point of St. John's masterpiece.

St John, in these closing words, completes his Hymn of the New Creation by linking to the core truth of the Hebrew Scriptures:

Shema Yishrael:  
Listen O Israel —  
The Lord our God is Lord alone!

The command "listen" means "Be listening". In Biblical spirituality —

We: **listen**, so we hear this great **TRUTH** above all others;

**hear**, so we understand (— we are not animals, we are  
God's partners in creation.)

**understand**, so we can follow safely  
the **WAY** to eternal **LIFE** which God provides.

### **Conclusion to Part 111**

Jesus Christ is our Torah the WORD made flesh, who has revealed God to us and calls upon us to rejoice as family, and take His WORD out to the whole world. This is our Hebrew-Christian vocation.

Let us pray for one another that we cherish this calling and great privilege.

Our Internet website visitors are invited to visit our [Scripture Meditation](#) section. There we offer a Hebrew approach to Communion in the Word through meditation. Our approach is developed on the principles of **listening to the Word** and responding as the Holy Spirit leads us.

This approach is in full harmony with the great traditions of spirituality in the Church, and particularly of the Benedictine culture of "[Lectio Divina](#)" — listening to the Divine words of Sacred Scripture.

**Shalom!**

(End of Part III)

## General Conclusion of the Prologue

And so the great Prologue to St. John Gospel comes to an end. The writer declares ever so briefly that the Word — the living fulfilment of all that God has to say to humanity — and who is His only Son, has reflected the Father to us.

Does that mean we have to have **seen** God? Because the Word became flesh, a human being, even 2000 years after the birth of Jesus can say we have seen our Lord in His teaching and ministry. St. John taught that we have therefore seen God's image, so to speak: we have seen God mirrored (Hebrews 1: 3)

It is the words and actions of Jesus Messiah that we should behold and dwell upon. It is these we are called to pass on to the people around us. No one person is more or less important than any other in creation. All are of equal importance in God's eyes.

Let's remember, there are people in the world who will only know about Jesus what **we** tell them. So, that outreach has to begin with **each of us**, because our Lord depends on us passing on the fruits of our personal involvement with Him. We should not be misled regarding how we think the world looks upon Christianity. There are people watching every move we make, and listening to every word we utter. We are the **Ambassadors of the Torah Made Flesh**: we must **BE** the message the Divine Word seeks to spread throughout the whole world. Let us pray for one another that we might fulfill this vocation with passion and perseverance.

**Shalom!**

### Additional Reading

We offer two excerpts from a brilliant address on the Torah, Law and Listening, entitled,

**"On Leadership: To Lead is to Listen"**.

It was presented by Lord Jonathan Sacks,  
former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

# Hymn To The Blessed Trinity

From The Prologue of St. John's Gospel

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective  
[www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz](http://www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz)

**Blessed are you O Lord God our Father:  
One with your Son and the Holy Spirit.**

Before time began you nurtured in your heart your Divine Torah: your Sacred Way of Truth and Life designed to share your own Being with those whom you planned to bring forth in your creation of the universe.

Before time began you shared your LIFE with your only Son — Your Divine Word, in the love and unity of the Holy Spirit.

Before time began not only was the Word with you but the Word was God.

Throughout eternity your Son, your Divine Word has always been the perfect expression of your own self.

In the beginning of time as the Spirit moved over the waters you created all things through your Divine Son.

Through Your Son, you breathed life to be the light of the human race.

In your love, this light continues to shine without dimming despite the onset of darkness which is always at work, seeking opportunities to overcome it.

**Halleluia**

**Blessed are you O Lord Jesus:  
only Son of the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.**

You are the True Light about which John the Baptist was sent to give powerful evidence in testimony, so that all might believe through you.

You are the True Light to which John the Baptist testified that you had come into the world.

You were in the world before time began, for it came into being through you.

You went to your own people, but as a nation they did not accept you.

You empowered those individuals who accepted you to be born from above and thus to become children of God.

You empowered those who became the children of God to share in a mysterious way in the Divine nature of God.

You are the Word of God who became flesh and thus made your dwelling place — your Tabernacle, your Temple — among us, that we might see your glory — the glory as of the Father's only Son.

**Halleluia**

**Blessed are you, Holy Spirit:  
in union with the Father and the Son.**

You filled Saint John the Baptist with your Presence while in his mother's womb, and led him to preach in the wilderness and proclaim loudly and with urgency that Jesus — the Word of God — who has existed eternally, has come among us.

You bring to each person who believes in Jesus, (who is God's perfect Torah: God's Word, His Message, His Call to LIFE) — the fullness of grace and truth which enable us to respond to Him: by an ever increasing flow of grace upon grace, upon grace, upon grace ..... ..

You enabled Moses to convey faithfully the Treasures of the Torah to God's People and now, through the **Torah (the Divine Word) made Flesh**; you enable us to receive the fullness of grace and truth.

You are the candelabra bringing the Living Flame of God's Word to His People.

You continue to enable God's People to perceive the revelation of the Father in Jesus, His only Son.

You continue to help God's people to draw from the unbroken stream of revelation in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and in the teaching and worship of the Church.

You continue to uphold in the minds and hearts of God's faithful, the great Truth affirmed by Jesus: "Listen, O Israel, the Lord Our God is Lord alone!"

You inspire witnesses and disciples of Jesus Christ to turn to Him to **hear**, to **hearken** and to **LIVE**, awaiting the fullness of His revelation when He returns at the end of time.

**Halleluia**

**Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit  
Let us praise and magnify Him forever.**

**Shalom!**

# The Gospel Story by Ronald Cox

## Overview of Prologue of St. John's Gospel

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

[www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz](http://www.hebrewcatholic.org.nz)

This is the beginning of St. John's gospel ..... ..

There is a simplicity and sublimity about St. John, so different from the other evangelists; his writing is more like a meditation, or reminiscences of an old man (he wrote about sixty years after the events narrated) on the greatest thing that ever happened, the Incarnation **1**. The synoptists **2** write of Jesus as a man on earth, John soars like an eagle to where the Son dwells with the Father from all eternity. He uses a special title for the Son: it is 'the Word': 'the radiance of his Father's splendour, and the full expression of his being' (Hebrews 1:3).

The mention of 'John' (the Baptist; he never speaks of himself by name), shows that the evangelist is thinking of the time when he first met Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry, not his infancy. He visualises the Incarnation right from the words, 'and the light shines in darkness'; it is only in the first few lines that he is considering the Second Person of the Trinity before the Incarnation. Consequently he is not introducing a new fact when he writes, 'and the Word was made flesh'. St. John here deals in dramatic contrasts, not in logical sequence.

**His main contrast is the eternal godhead **3** of the Word (his opening sentence), and his becoming man in time ('the Word was made flesh').** The mighty effect of the Incarnation (a divine Person, having a human as well as a divine nature) is expressed by these two ideas: light (or truth), and life (or grace). The first affects man's mind: man can know God as never before; he now possesses our human nature, and speaks our language. The second affects man's will: he is given a new vitality, the power to live in friendship and union with God through Jesus Christ. This is the supernatural life; a free gift of God only to those who believe in him, faith, not Jewish descent is the necessary qualification **4**.

### Footnotes:

- 1. Incarnation, —** The assumption of human nature by the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14). The Incarnate God had a true human body, a true human soul and a true human will; his two natures, divine and human, are united in one person as God he was invisible, incomprehensible, timeless; as man he became visible, comprehensible, living in time; he was in all things like us save in sin: but did not in any way cease to be God.

2. **Synoptists"** — The term applied to Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke who wrote what are referred to as the "Synoptic Gospels". Why are these Gospels called "synoptic"?

The word 'synoptic' (derived from the Greek) means "seeing together". The three writers, each in their Gospel account, look at the Life of our Lord and their task in writing it down in much the same way. They therefore give a general view of His life and teaching, which sometimes appear to be written from the same 'synopsis' — i.e. outline.

3. **Eternal Godhead** — For practical purposes we can say that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, living in perfect unity comprise the Eternal Godhead.
4. **Faith, not Jewish decent** — Ronald Cox is here simply drawing on the understanding which arose very early in the history of the Church, that the senior Pharisees (we are talking only of those in senior positions of power) who claimed "We have Abraham as our Father" were wrong to use that to denigrate Jesus. Faith and Jewish descent are not to be seen in conflict — the issue is that all are called into a new relationship with God, through Jesus Messiah.

# John 1: 1 — 18

Prologue to the Gospel of John

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

- 1**     **1 2** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2**     He was in the beginning with God.
- 3**     **3** All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be
- 4**     through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;
- 5**     **4** the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- 6**     **5** A man named John was sent from God.
- 7**     He came for testimony, **6** to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
- 8**     He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.
- 9**     The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
- 10**    He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.

**1** [1-18] The prologue states the main themes of the gospel: life, light, truth, the world, testimony, and the preexistence of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, who reveals God the Father. In origin, it was probably an early Christian hymn. Its closest parallel is in other christological hymns, [⇒ Col 1:15-20](#) and [⇒ Philippians 2:6-11](#). Its core ([⇒ John 1:1-5](#), [⇒ 10-11](#), [⇒ 14](#)) is poetic in structure, with short phrases linked by "staircase parallelism," in which the last word of one phrase becomes the first word of the next. Prose inserts (at least [⇒ John 1:6-8](#), [⇒ 15](#)) deal with John the Baptist.

**2** [1] In the beginning: also the first words of the Old Testament ([⇒ Genesis 1:1](#)). Was: this verb is used three times with different meanings in this verse: existence, relationship, and predication. The Word (Greek logos): this term combines God's dynamic, creative word (Genesis), personified preexistent Wisdom as the instrument of God's creative activity (Proverbs), and the ultimate intelligibility of reality (Hellenistic philosophy). With God: the Greek preposition here connotes communication with another. Was God: lack of a definite article with "God" in Greek signifies predication rather than identification.

**3** [1] What came to be: while the oldest manuscripts have no punctuation here, the corrector of Bodmer Papyrus P75, some manuscripts, and the Ante-Nicene Fathers take this phrase with what follows, as staircase parallelism. Connection with [⇒ John 1:3](#) reflects fourth-century anti-Arianism.

**4** [5] The ethical dualism of light and darkness is paralleled in intertestamental literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Overcome: "comprehend" is another possible translation, but cf [⇒ John 12:35](#); [⇒ Wisdom 7:29-30](#).

**5** [6] John was sent just as Jesus was "sent" ([⇒ John 4:34](#)) in divine mission. Other references to John the Baptist in this gospel emphasize the differences between them and John's subordinate role.

**6** [7] Testimony: the testimony theme of John is introduced, which portrays Jesus as if on trial throughout his ministry. All testify to Jesus: John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, scripture, his works, the crowds, the Spirit, and his disciples.

Continued on the next page .....

..... continued from the previous page .....

- 11** He came to what was his own, but his own people **7** did not accept him.
- 12** But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,
- 13** **8** who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.
- 14** And the Word became flesh **9** and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.
- 15** **10** John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'"
- 16** From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, **11**
- 17** because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- 18** No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, **12** who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

**7** [11] What was his own . . . his own people: first a neuter, literally, "his own property/possession" (probably = Israel), then a masculine, "his own people" (the Israelites).

**8** [13] Believers in Jesus become children of God not through any of the three natural causes mentioned but through God who is the immediate cause of the new spiritual life. Were born: the Greek verb can mean "begotten" (by a male) or "born" (from a female or of parents). The variant "he who was begotten," asserting Jesus' virginal conception, is weakly attested in Old Latin and Syriac versions.

**9** [14] Flesh: the whole person, used probably against docetic tendencies (cf [⇒](#) 1 John 4:2; [⇒](#) 1:7). Made his dwelling: literally, "pitched his tent/tabernacle." Cf the tabernacle or tent of meeting that was the place of God's presence among his people ([⇒](#) Exodus 25:8-9). The incarnate Word is the new mode of God's presence among his people. The Greek verb has the same consonants as the Aramaic word for God's presence (Shekinah). Glory: God's visible manifestation of majesty in power, which once filled the tabernacle ([⇒](#) Exodus 40:34) and the temple ([⇒](#) 1 Kings 8:10-11, [⇒](#) 27), is now centered in Jesus. Only Son: Greek, monogenes, but see the note on [⇒](#) John 1:18. Grace and truth: these words may represent two Old Testament terms describing Yahweh in covenant relationship with Israel (cf [⇒](#) Exodus 34:6), thus God's "love" and "fidelity." The Word shares Yahweh's covenant qualities.

**10** [15] This verse, interrupting [⇒](#) John 1:14, [⇒](#) 16 seems drawn from [⇒](#) John 1:30.

**11** [16] Grace in place of grace: replacement of the Old Covenant with the New (cf [⇒](#) John 1:17). Other possible translations are "grace upon grace" (accumulation) and "grace for grace" (correspondence).

**12** [18] The only Son, God: while the vast majority of later textual witnesses have another reading, "the Son, the only one" or "the only Son," the translation above follows the best and earliest manuscripts, monogenes theos, but takes the first term to mean not just "Only One" but to include a filial relationship with the Father, as at [⇒](#) Luke 9:38 ("only child") or [⇒](#) Hebrews 11:17 ("only son") and as translated at [⇒](#) John 1:14. The Logos is thus "only Son" and God but not Father/God.

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## Exodus 33: 7 — 23

### NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

- 7**     **1** The tent, which was called the meeting tent, Moses used to pitch at some distance away, outside the camp. Anyone who wished to consult the LORD would go to this meeting tent outside the camp.
- 8**     Whenever Moses went out to the tent, the people would all rise and stand at the entrance of their own tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.
- 9**     As Moses entered the tent, the column of cloud would come down and stand at its entrance while the LORD spoke with Moses.
- 10**    On seeing the column of cloud stand at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and worship at the entrance of their own tents.
- 11**    The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. Moses would then return to the camp, but his young assistant, Joshua, son of Nun, would not move out of the tent.
- 12**    Moses said to the LORD, "You, indeed, are telling me to lead this people on; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'You are my intimate friend,' and also, 'You have found favor with me.'
- 13**    Now, if I have found favor with you, do let me know your ways so that, in knowing you, I may continue to find favor with you. Then, too, this nation is, after all, your own people."
- 14**    **2** "I myself," the LORD answered, "will go along, to give you rest."
- 15**    Moses replied, "If you are not going yourself, do not make us go up from here.

**1** [7-11] The meeting tent is mentioned here by anticipation; its actual construction is described in the following chapters.

**2** [14] I myself: literally, "my face," that is, "my presence." To give you rest: in the Promised Land; some understand, "to put your mind at rest"; others, by a slight emendation in the text, render, "to lead you."

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- 16** For how can it be known that we, your people and I, have found favor with you, except by your going with us? Then we, your people and I, will be singled out from every other people on the earth."
- 17** The LORD said to Moses, "This request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend."
- 18** Then Moses said, "Do let me see your glory!"
- 19** He answered, "I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, 'LORD'; I who show favors to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will.
- 20** But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives.
- 21** Here," continued the LORD, "is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock.
- 22** When my glory passes I will set you in the hollow of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.
- 23** **3** Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen."

**3** [23] You may see my back: man can see God's glory as reflected in creation, but his "face," that is, God as he is in himself, mortal man cannot behold. Cf ⇒ 1 Cor 13:12.

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## Exodus 34: 1 — 35

### NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

- 1 The LORD said to Moses, "Cut two stone tablets like the former, that I may write on them the commandments which were on the former tablets that you broke.
- 2 Get ready for tomorrow morning, when you are to go up Mount Sinai and there present yourself to me on the top of the mountain.
- 3 No one shall come up with you, and no one is even to be seen on any part of the mountain; even the flocks and the herds are not to go grazing toward this mountain."
- 4 Moses then cut two stone tablets like the former, and early the next morning he went up Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, taking along the two stone tablets.
- 5 Having come down in a cloud, the LORD stood with him there and proclaimed his name, "LORD."
- 6 Thus the LORD passed before him and cried out, "The LORD, the LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity,
- 7 continuing his kindness for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness and crime and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but punishing children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for their fathers' wickedness!"
- 8 Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship.
- 9 Then he said, "If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own."
- 10 "Here, then," said the LORD, "is the covenant I will make. Before the eyes of all your people I will work such marvels as have never been wrought in any nation anywhere on earth, so that this people among whom you live may see how awe-inspiring are the deeds which I, the LORD, will do at your side.
- 11 But you, on your part, must keep the commandments I am giving you today. "I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.
- 12 Take care, therefore, not to make a covenant with these inhabitants of the land that you are to enter; else they will become a snare among you.

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- 13**     **1** Tear down their altars; smash their sacred pillars, and cut down their sacred poles.
- 14**     **2** You shall not worship any other god, for the LORD is 'the Jealous One'; a jealous God is he.
- 15**     Do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of that land; else, when they render their wanton worship to their gods and sacrifice to them, one of them may invite you and you may partake of his sacrifice.
- 16**     Neither shall you take their daughters as wives for your sons; otherwise, when their daughters render their wanton worship to their gods, they will make your sons do the same.
- 17**     "You shall not make for yourselves molten gods.
- 18**     You shall keep the feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days at the prescribed time in the month of Abib you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you; for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.
- 19**     "To me belongs every first-born male that opens the womb among all your livestock, whether in the herd or in the flock.
- 20**     The firstling of an ass you shall redeem with one of the flock; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. The first-born among your sons you shall redeem. "No one shall appear before me empty-handed.
- 21**     "For six days you may work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; on that day you must rest even during the seasons of plowing and harvesting.
- 22**     **3** "You shall keep the feast of Weeks with the first of the wheat harvest; likewise, the feast at the fruit harvest at the close of the year.
- 23**     Three times a year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel.
- 24**     Since I will drive out the nations before you to give you a large territory, there will be no one to covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD, your God.

**1** [13] Sacred poles: "Ashera" was the name of a Canaanite goddess. In her honor wooden poles (asherot) were erected, just as stone pillars (massebot) were erected in honor of the god Baal. Both were placed near the altar in a Canaanite shrine.

**2** [14] The LORD is "the Jealous One": see note on [⇒ Exodus 20:5](#). Some, by a slight emendation, render, "The LORD is jealous for his name." Cf [⇒ Ezekiel 39:25](#).

**3** [22] Feast of Weeks: the festival of thanksgiving for the harvest, celebrated seven weeks or fifty days after the beginning of the harvest. It was also called Pentecost (fiftieth) and coincided with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, fifty days after the offering of the first fruits ([⇒ Lev 23:10-11](#); [⇒ Deut 16:9](#)).

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- 25** "You shall not offer me the blood of sacrifice with leavened bread, nor shall the sacrifice of the Passover feast be kept overnight for the next day.
- 26** "The choicest first fruits of your soil you shall bring to the house of the LORD, your God. "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."
- 27** Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with them I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."
- 28** So Moses stayed there with the LORD for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water, and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.
- 29** As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the LORD.
- 30** When Aaron, then, and the other Israelites saw Moses and noticed how radiant the skin of his face had become, they were afraid to come near him.
- 31** Only after Moses called to them did Aaron and all the rulers of the community come back to him. Moses then spoke to them.
- 32** Later on, all the Israelites came up to him, and he enjoined on them all that the LORD had told him on Mount Sinai.
- 33** **4** When he finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.
- 34** Whenever Moses entered the presence of the LORD to converse with him, he removed the veil until he came out again. On coming out, he would tell the Israelites all that had been commanded.
- 35** Then the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; so he would again put the veil over his face until he went in to converse with the LORD.

**4** [33] He put a veil over his face: St. Paul sees in this a symbol of the failure of the Jews to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah: the true spiritual meaning of the writings of Moses and the prophets is still veiled from the unbelieving Jews. Cf ⇒ 2 Cor 3:7-18.

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## Appendix 2

### Mystery of Godliness.

The mystery is overwhelmingly great but it is a mystery of Love and Condescension. It is the link between, the Creator and the creature — not with the perfect, but with the imperfect and fallen creature, for the Son of Man, though sinless Himself, became the Brother of sinful creatures. There is One in the Universe, once in the womb, once on the Cross, once in the grave, 'Who is now at the right Hand of God, Who has within Him the mind, the love, the will of God, and yet also the mind, the love, and the will of man.

The best setting forth of the Incarnation which I have seen is in these words : "That Eternal Mind which, till then, had thought and acted as God, began to think and act as a man, with all man's faculties, affections, and imperfections, sin excepted. Before He came on earth He had but the perfections of God; but, afterwards, He had also the virtues of a creature, such as faith, meekness, self-denial. Before He came on earth He could not be tempted of evil but, afterwards, He had a man's heart, a man's tears, and a man's wants and infirmities. His Divine Nature, indeed, pervaded His Manhood, so that every deed and word of His in the flesh savoured of eternity and infinity; but, on the other hand, from the time He was born of the Virgin Mary, He had a natural fear of danger, a natural shrinking from pain, though ever subject to the ruling influence of that Holy and Eternal Essence which was within Him. For instance, we read on one occasion of His praying that the cup might pass from Him . . . . Thus He possessed at once a double, assemblage of attributes, divine and human. Still He was all powerful, though in the form of a servant still He was all-knowing, though partially ignorant ; still incapable of temptation [so that He should fall], though exposed to it." (J. H. Newman.)

## Appendix 3

### On Leadership: To Lead is to Listen.

Excerpts from an address by Lord Jonathan Sacks former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

- I It is reasonable to assume that in the life of faith, obedience is the highest virtue. In Judaism it is not. One of the strangest features of biblical Hebrew is that – despite the fact that the Torah contains 613 commands – there is no word for 'obey.' Instead the verb the Torah uses is *shema/lishmoa*, 'to listen, hear, attend, understand, internalise, respond.' So distinctive is this word that, in effect, the King James Bible had to invent an English equivalent, the word 'hearken.' Nowadays the word has gone out of circulation, and there is no precise translation. Equally, modern Hebrew had to invent a word to mean pure, unquestioning obedience. It chose *letzayet* – not *lishmoa* which means something else, reflective response. In Judaism, G-d does not command blind obedience. *Ein haKadosh Barukh Hub ba be-tirunyah im. beriyotav*; 'G-d does not deal despotically with His creatures' (*Avodah Zarah 3a*). If He sought no more than mindless submission to the Divine will, He would have created robots, machines, or genetically programmed people who responded automatically to commands as dogs to Pavlov's bell. G-d wants us to be mature, deliberative, to do His will because we understand or because we trust Him when we do not understand. He seeks from us something other and greater than obedience, namely responsibility.'
- II If we want God to listen to us we have to be prepared to listen to Him. And if we learn to listen to Him, then we eventually learn to listen to our fellow humans: the silent cry of the lonely, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the people in existential pain.

When God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and asked him what he would like to be given, **Solomon** replied: *lev shomea*, literally "**a listening heart**" to judge the people (1 Kings 3: 9). The choice of words is significant. Solomon's wisdom lay, at least in part, in his ability to listen, to hear the emotion behind the words, to sense what was being left unsaid as well as what was said. It is common to find leaders who speak, very rare to find leaders who listen. But listening often makes the difference.

Listening matters in a moral environment as insistent on human dignity as is Judaism. The very act of listening is a form of respect. The royal family in Britain is known always to arrive on time and depart on time. I will never forget the occasion — her aides told me that they had never witnessed it before — when the Queen stayed for two hours longer than her scheduled departure time. The day was 27 January 2005, the occasion, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The Queen had invited survivors to a reception at St James' Palace. Each had a story to tell, and the Queen took the time to listen to every one of them. One after another came up to me and said, "Sixty years ago I did not know whether tomorrow I would be alive, and here I am talking to the Queen." That act of listening was one of the most royal acts of graciousness I have ever witnessed. Listening is a profound affirmation of the humanity of the other.

In the encounter at the burning bush, when God summoned Moses to be a leader, Moses replied, "I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before, not from the first time You spoke to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Ex. 4: 10). Why would God choose to lead the Jewish people a man who found it hard to speak? Perhaps because one who cannot speak learns how to listen. A leader is one who knows how to listen: to the unspoken cry of others and to the still, small voice of God.

(End of excerpts)

# John 1: 1 — 18

Prologue to the Gospel of John

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

- 1**     **1 2** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2**     He was in the beginning with God.
- 3**     **3** All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be
- 4**     through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race;
- 5**     **4** the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- 6**     **5** A man named John was sent from God.
- 7**     He came for testimony, **6** to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.
- 8**     He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.
- 9**     The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
- 10**    He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him.

**1** [1-18] The prologue states the main themes of the gospel: life, light, truth, the world, testimony, and the preexistence of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, who reveals God the Father. In origin, it was probably an early Christian hymn. Its closest parallel is in other christological hymns, [⇒ Col 1:15-20](#) and [⇒ Philippians 2:6-11](#). Its core ([⇒ John 1:1-5](#), [⇒ 10-11](#), [⇒ 14](#)) is poetic in structure, with short phrases linked by "staircase parallelism," in which the last word of one phrase becomes the first word of the next. Prose inserts (at least [⇒ John 1:6-8](#), [⇒ 15](#)) deal with John the Baptist.

**2** [1] In the beginning: also the first words of the Old Testament ([⇒ Genesis 1:1](#)). Was: this verb is used three times with different meanings in this verse: existence, relationship, and predication. The Word (Greek logos): this term combines God's dynamic, creative word (Genesis), personified preexistent Wisdom as the instrument of God's creative activity (Proverbs), and the ultimate intelligibility of reality (Hellenistic philosophy). With God: the Greek preposition here connotes communication with another. Was God: lack of a definite article with "God" in Greek signifies predication rather than identification.

**3** [1] What came to be: while the oldest manuscripts have no punctuation here, the corrector of Bodmer Papyrus P75, some manuscripts, and the Ante-Nicene Fathers take this phrase with what follows, as staircase parallelism. Connection with [⇒ John 1:3](#) reflects fourth-century anti-Arianism.

**4** [5] The ethical dualism of light and darkness is paralleled in intertestamental literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Overcome: "comprehend" is another possible translation, but cf [⇒ John 12:35](#); [⇒ Wisdom 7:29-30](#).

**5** [6] John was sent just as Jesus was "sent" ([⇒ John 4:34](#)) in divine mission. Other references to John the Baptist in this gospel emphasize the differences between them and John's subordinate role.

**6** [7] Testimony: the testimony theme of John is introduced, which portrays Jesus as if on trial throughout his ministry. All testify to Jesus: John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, scripture, his works, the crowds, the Spirit, and his disciples.

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- 11** He came to what was his own, but his own people **7** did not accept him.
- 12** But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name,
- 13** **8** who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.
- 14** And the Word became flesh **9** and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.
- 15** **10** John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'"
- 16** From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, **11**
- 17** because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- 18** No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, **12** who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

**7** [11] What was his own . . . his own people: first a neuter, literally, "his own property/possession" (probably = Israel), then a masculine, "his own people" (the Israelites).

**8** [13] Believers in Jesus become children of God not through any of the three natural causes mentioned but through God who is the immediate cause of the new spiritual life. Were born: the Greek verb can mean "begotten" (by a male) or "born" (from a female or of parents). The variant "he who was begotten," asserting Jesus' virginal conception, is weakly attested in Old Latin and Syriac versions.

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