

# THE OPENING PASSAGE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

## John 1:1 – 18

What could one possibly say about this passage that hasn't already been said? This is, of course, not only a very familiar passage, but also a favourite passage for many. It is the 'standard' exposition of the deity of Jesus. The writer spells it out clearly and unequivocally.

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

In the original manuscript, the word used for Word here in this first verse is the Greek word *logos*. It's where we get our word logo from. The Greek of the New Testament is not classical Greek, but a commonly spoken form of the language, sometimes referred to as the language of the market place. *Logos* means more than just the mere name of an object. It is, or denotes 'the expression of thought.' In fact rather like the use today of logos. With that in mind the Gospel writer applies it to a person — he gives it a personal dimension. It is only at the very end of the passage that he identifies by name the One to whom he refers.

However, to any Jew reading this in the day in which it was written, that opening statement would be a bombshell. As far as any Jew was concerned, there was only one God, but here we have a clear statement that there was another person with God, who is also identified as God. How could this be? Two Gods, a God in two parts? Yet they could reflect on Genesis 1:26 where God says, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness." Similarly in Isaiah 6:8, 'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for **us**?"' In both those passages God is not speaking to some third parties, but to Himself. So there was somewhere in the Jewish mind the thought that God was more than a single person.

The Jehovah's Witnesses make a nonsense of this opening verse of John's Gospel by inserting 'a' before the final God, so that it reads, 'the Word was a god.' No Jew, or even a Greek convert to Judaism, for that matter, would ever have given voice to the thought of more than one God. Other gods did not exist, so far as the Jews were concerned. Early day Christians gave their lives defying those Roman emperors who proclaimed themselves a god. (Or even allowed themselves to be hailed as a god.) The writer also clearly personalises the Word, referring to he or him.

***<sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.***

Along with that opening verse here we have a clear unambiguous statement that the Word was not only present in creation, but it was through Him that it all happened. He was responsible for creation. Yet the Jew knew that God was the creator, so there was developing here an altogether explosive idea.

***<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

Even this statement implies supremacy. The darkness referred to is the darkness of evil, the light, the light of God. And the light is superior to the darkness. Darkness can not overwhelm the light.

***<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.***

This is by way of an interjection to clarify the picture for his reader. He wants to make sure his readers are in no doubt about who it is he writes.

***<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.***

'He came to that which was His own ...' It is easy to read this and miss the enormous significance of this statement. The Word came to the Jewish people, the people God had chosen for His own. God had established a covenant relationship with the Hebrews. In Exodus 3:7 God says to Moses, "I have seen the misery of **my people** in Egypt. ... So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring **my people** the Israelites out of Egypt." Later in the wilderness the God confirms his covenant with them. So the people, the Israelites, the Hebrews, who are clearly identified as the people of God, are the Word's own people. And it is more than just that He is of the same race as they, it is that they belonged to Him. The implication is obvious and inescapable. The Word and God are clearly one person, yet more than one person.

***<sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — <sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.***

For those who did receive Him there is the prospect of an entirely new relationship with their God. Those who receive him by faith become children of God. Prior to this they are the children of men (and women of course), the creation of God. But by receiving the Word, by acknowledging him as Lord and Saviour, they are born of God. This, of course, looks forward to something the writer says in the third chapter, where he records the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus, that learned Jewish Pharisee.

***<sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."***

Quite understandably Nicodemus was puzzled by this statement.

***4“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”***

***5Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”***

Jesus was speaking of a spiritual re-birth. Nicodemus was still confused and Jesus went on to explain things further to him during which He makes probably the most famous statement in all Scripture.

***16“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”***

I wonder what Nicodemus made of that. Back to John 1 where the writer comes to his punch line.

***14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

Now, not only do we have the concept of the Word who is one with God and in fact is God, but also the extraordinary, incredible statement that He took on human form. The great Creator God choosing to confine Himself to human form. Finally this oneness with God is underlined explicitly in the final verse of our passage.

***17For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.***

Finally the writer identifies the One of whom he has been speaking; Jesus the Messiah (the Anointed One).

## **God the Son of God in the flesh.**

*N.B. All the Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.*

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