

THE PROLOGUE

1:1-18

John's Prologue serves as an overture to his Gospel, simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing major themes. It is written in stately and solemn prose and summarizes the quintessential message of the Gospel. It testifies to the author's belief in the the divinity of Jesus, His pre-existence, His function in the creation of the world, and His function in the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity.

John schematizes in five steps the movement of Jesus' life and mission: (1) His coming into the world as the life and light of the world (1:1-8); (2) the rejection of Him by His own people (vv. 9-11); (3) His effect on all those who believe in Him (vv. 12-13); (4) the acceptance of Him by those who saw His glory and believed in Him (v. 14); and (5) His gifts to the world of grace and truth and knowledge of the Father (15-18). Thus, the Prologue sounds the central themes that will be developed at length in the Gospel as a whole.

The Background of the Prologue

The backdrop for the Prologue has been discussed for decades. Some scholars have located it in early Jewish Gnosticism, others in Hellenistic philosophy, and still others in the writings of the Qumran community. More recently scholars have turned to the Old Testament as the background for John's Prologue. They have noted the relationship of the Prologue to Genesis, especially Genesis 1, and to the wisdom literature, especially Proverbs 8:22-30.

However, it should be noted that the Prologue uses Logos/Word instead of Sophia/Wisdom, perhaps because both it and the LXX of Genesis 1 begin alike (EN ARCHE/in beginning), perhaps because a masculine term (LOGOS) seemed more appropriate for the man Jesus than the feminine wisdom (SOPHIA). This interchangeably of names corresponds with other early Christian usage: e.g., cf. Odes of Solomon 41:9.

The Structure of the Prologue

John structures each of the twenty-one sequences of his Gospel according to a chiasmic format (see page 25). Not surprisingly, the Prologue (1:1-18) follows the same format. That the Prologue is chiasmic in format has been recognized by many (see the bibliography at the end of this chapter). That the Prologue follows an *abcb'a'* pattern, rather than any other chiasmic pattern, should not be surprising, since the Prologue follows the same format as the rest of John's Gospel.

Text

A 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) All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (4) In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (5) And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome/comprehend it. (6) There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. (8) He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light.

B (9) There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. (11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

C (12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. (13) who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God.

B' (14) And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

A' (15) John bore witness of Him, and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me. (16) For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. (17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (18) No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Parallel Structure of the Prologue

- A **Through the pre-existing Word**, all things **came to be** (1-8).
- B The true light is **rejected** by His own (9-11).
 - C To all who believe, power is given to become children of God (12-13).
- B" The Word becomes flesh and is **accepted** by those who behold His glory (14).
- A' **Through Jesus Christ**, grace and truth **came to be** (15-18).

John 1:1-18 is a thought unit held cohesively together by an inclusion (*THEOS*/God, vv. 1, 18). This assumes that in verse 18 the textual variant, *THEOS*/God, attested by P66, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and others is to be preferred to *HUIOS*/son, attested by Alexandrinus and others. Verse 19, moreover, clearly begins a new section of the Gospel.

John creates parallelism between (A) and (A') by mentioning the witness of the Baptist in v. 7 and returning to it in v. 15; by re-emphasizing, in the Baptist's words "He **existed before me**" in v. 15b, Jesus' pre-existence, first mentioned in v. 1; by paralleling "by Him" (*dia* + genitive), *i.e.*, the Word, in v. 3 with "through Jesus Christ" (*dia* + genitive) in v. 17; and finally, by paralleling "the Word was **with God**" in v. 1 with "the only begotten God, who is **in the bosom of the Father**" in v. 18.

He creates antithetic parallelism in (B) and (B") by contrasting the rejection of Jesus by "His own"--the Jews-- in verses 9-11 with the acceptance of Him by those among whom Jesus dwelt and who "beheld His glory" in verse 14.

The pivotal point deals with the central contention of the Fourth Gospel, namely, that those who believe in Jesus are born anew and become the children of God (vv. 12-13; cf. 3:5, 16-17; 20:30-31).

On the following page, a less compacted chiastic structure of the Prologue is illustrated. One will note that in this diagram that the *abcb*"*a*" pattern discussed above is broken down further.

- A The Word as **THEOS with God** (1:1-2)
- B Creation came through the Word (1:3)
- C We have received life from the Word (1:4-5)
- D John was sent to testify (1:6-8)
- E Incarnation & response of the world (1:9-10)
- F The Word and His own (Israel) (1:11)
- G Those who accepted the Word (12a)
- H He gave authority to become children of God (12b)
- G' Those who believed the Word (12c)
- F' The Word and His own (believers) (1:13)
- E' Incarnation & response of the community (1:14)
- D' John the Baptist's testimony (1:15)
- C' We have received grace from the Word (1:16)
- B' Grace and truth came through the Word (1:17)
- A' The Word as **THEOS with God** (1:18)

With the above structure set forth, the evidence for the chiasmic structure of the Prologue may now be investigated.

Analysis of the Chiasmic Structure

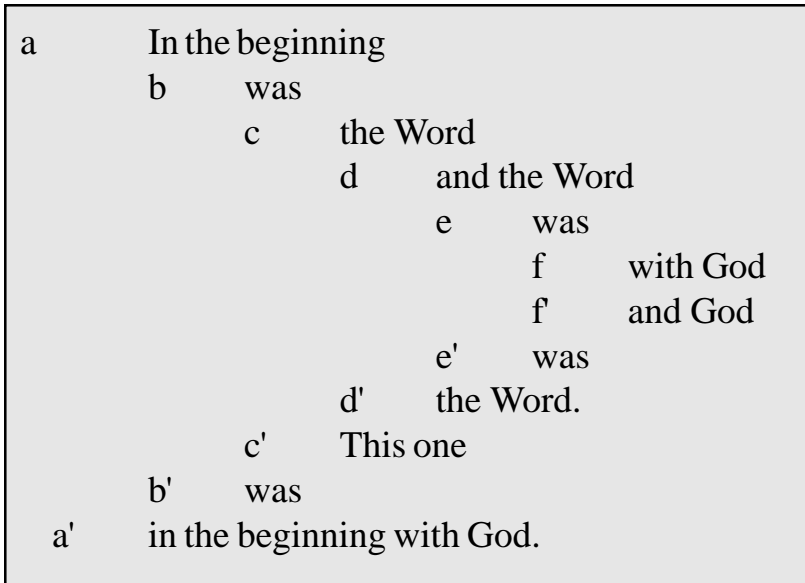
A (vv. 1-2) and A' (v. 18)

The correspondence between the beginning and end of the Prologue (inclusion) is probably the most widely known element concerning the structure of the Prologue. Verse 18 balances verses 1-2 with the repetition of "God"/THEOS. In addition, it is the "Word"/LOGOS which is the instrument whereby God is "made known."

One may further note that there is at least a double structure in verses 1-2. As has long been observed, these verses employ a stair-step parallelism, *i.e.*, the second term in each line becomes the first term in the next:

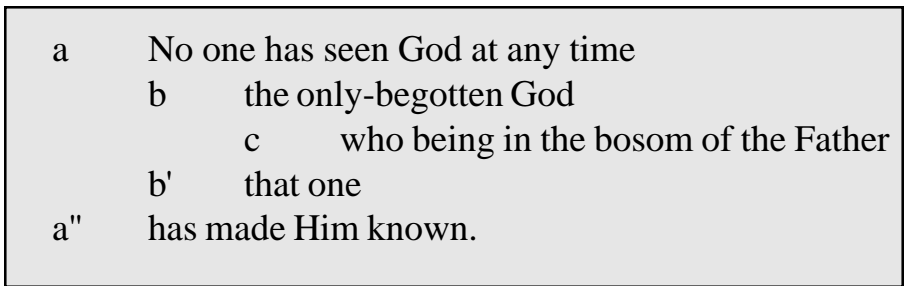
In the beginning (a) was the Word (b)
 and the Word (b) was with God (c)
 and God (predicate; c) was the Word (d).
 This one (d) was in the beginning (e) with God.

One may further observe that verses 1-2 form an independent chiastic unit in which "beginning"/ARCHE is found in both A and E, "Word"/LOGOS is found in both B and D, and "God"/THEOS (c) is the central term. Thus, verses 1 and 2 contain both stair-step parallelism and a chiasm as indicated below:



This structure alerts one from the very beginning to look for repeated instances of chiastic and multiple structures in the Prologue.

As far as observable, verse 18 is also chiastic, with a and a" being related to one another by antithetical parallelism:



With these foregoing observations, the correspondence between verse 18 and verses 1-2 are: (1) these are the only two points in the Prologue at which the Word is "with God," and (2) the term THEOS/"God" occurs three times in verses 1-2, twice in verse 18, and only three times in the remaining fifteen verses (vv. 6, 12, and 13). It is significant that two of these occurrences are at the center of the chiasm. The return of the Word to the presence of God in verse 18 serves to give the Prologue a definite ending which conveys a sense of order, balance and completion; and (3) at both the beginning and the end of the Prologue we find balancing references to eternal time: "in the beginning"/ARCHE (vv. 1-2) and "at any time" (v. 18).

B (v. 3) and B' (v. 17)

The emphasis in verse 3 is on what "came to be" through the Word. In fact, both verse 3 and verse 17 emphasize "what came to be" through the Word by means of antithetical parallelism. Verse 3 affirms the role of the Word in creation; verse 17 affirms the role of Jesus in revelation as the source of grace and truth. Hence, there is a both a verbal correspondence between verses 3 and 17, and a parallelism of theme or emphasis. While one must acknowledge that these parallels would not be convincing in isolation from the other correspondences in the chiasm, they are not absent.

C (vv. 4-5) and C' (v. 16)

The parallels between C and C', while not obvious, are not absent. The problem is that none of the significant words in C appears in C'. The parallel, if there is one, is conceptual or thematic rather than verbal. Inquiry as to whether there is such a parallel is complicated by the uncertainty of the meaning of "fulness" in verse 16.

Although there is no verbal correspondence between verse 16 and verses 4-5, there is a conceptual parallel between "in him was life" in verse 4 and "fulness" in verse 16 from which the "we" in this verse confesses it has received grace. Grace is also closely associated with the gift of eternal life in this Gospel (3:15ff.; 6:33, 40; 10:10, 28; 17:2). Hence both verse 4 and verse 16 speak of the supreme gift of the Word to humankind--grace or eternal life. Thus conceptually, there is a definite correspondence between verses 4-5 and verse 16. What came to be in Him was life, and "we" have received grace (eternal life) from His fulness.

D (vv. 6-8) and D' (v. 15)

It hardly needs to be argued that D and D' are parallel. John the Baptist is mentioned in each of these verses but nowhere else in the prologue. Verses 6-8 affirm that John was sent by God to testify to the light; verse 15 summarizes that testimony. In addition to these parallels in content there are strong verbal parallels between

these verses: (1) "came"/EGENETO (v. 6), "came" (v. 7) and "coming, "cried out," and "was" (v. 15); (2) "John" (vv. 6 and 15), (3) "to bear witness" (v. 7a)--"in order to bear witness" (v. 7b) and "in order to bear witness" (v. 8); "bears witness" (v. 15), and (4) "concerning (peri + genitive) the light" (vv. 7 and 8); "concerning (peri + genitive) Him."

It should be noted that in contrast to most of the rest of the Prologue these verses are written in relatively flat prose style. Consequently, they are commonly identified as interpolations or additions to the Prologue by biblical critics. However, the chiasmic structure of the Prologue indicates that the placement of John's witness is deliberate, *i.e.*, the two references to John the Baptist (vv. 6-8 and 15) are exactly where one would expect in order to produce (or maintain) a chiasmic structure!

E (vv 9-10 and E' (v. 14)

Both verses 9-10 and verse 14 refer to the incarnation. There are two references to the incarnation because the chiasmic structure demands that there be two references, just as there are two references to John the Baptist (vv. 6-8 and 15).

The first reference (vv. 9-10) relates the incarnation to the previous work of the Word (creation) and to the reaction of the world--it did not know Him. The second reference (v. 14) relates the incarnation to the subsequent work of the Word--revealing the glory of the Father and giving grace and truth to the believing community--and to the reaction of the community, "we beheld His glory." Verses 11-13 describe the work of the incarnate Word. The correspondences between E and E', while conceptual rather than verbal, are nevertheless clear.

F (v. 11) and F' (v. 13)

Verse 13 corresponds (antithetically) to verse 11. It has puzzled commentators to observe that whereas verse 13 is in apposition to verse 12c, verse 12c is dative and verse 13 is nominative. The grammatical relationship between verse 12 and verse 13 cannot be denied. But it should be further observed that verse 11b is nominative.

There is a thematic and grammatical correspondence between verse 11 and verse 13. Thematically, both deal with "His own"; grammatically, both are in the nominative case.

Furthermore, verses 12 and 13 are set in contrast to verse 11 by the adversative DE/"but" at the beginning of verse 12. The contrast is twofold: (1) the action of "those who received Him" is opposite that of "His own," and (2) the nature of "those who received Him" is contrasted (in v. 13) with that of "His own." The rejection of Jesus by "the Jews" in John suggests that "His own"/TA IDIA, is "Israel." Nevertheless, verse 13 can be understood as a contrast to verse 11 regardless of one's interpretation of "His own" in verse 11 (see Commentary on these verses). "His own," following the ministry of Jesus, are neither just those whom he has created nor those who can trace their genealogy in a particular nation. Conceptually, verse 13 is related antithetically to verse 11.

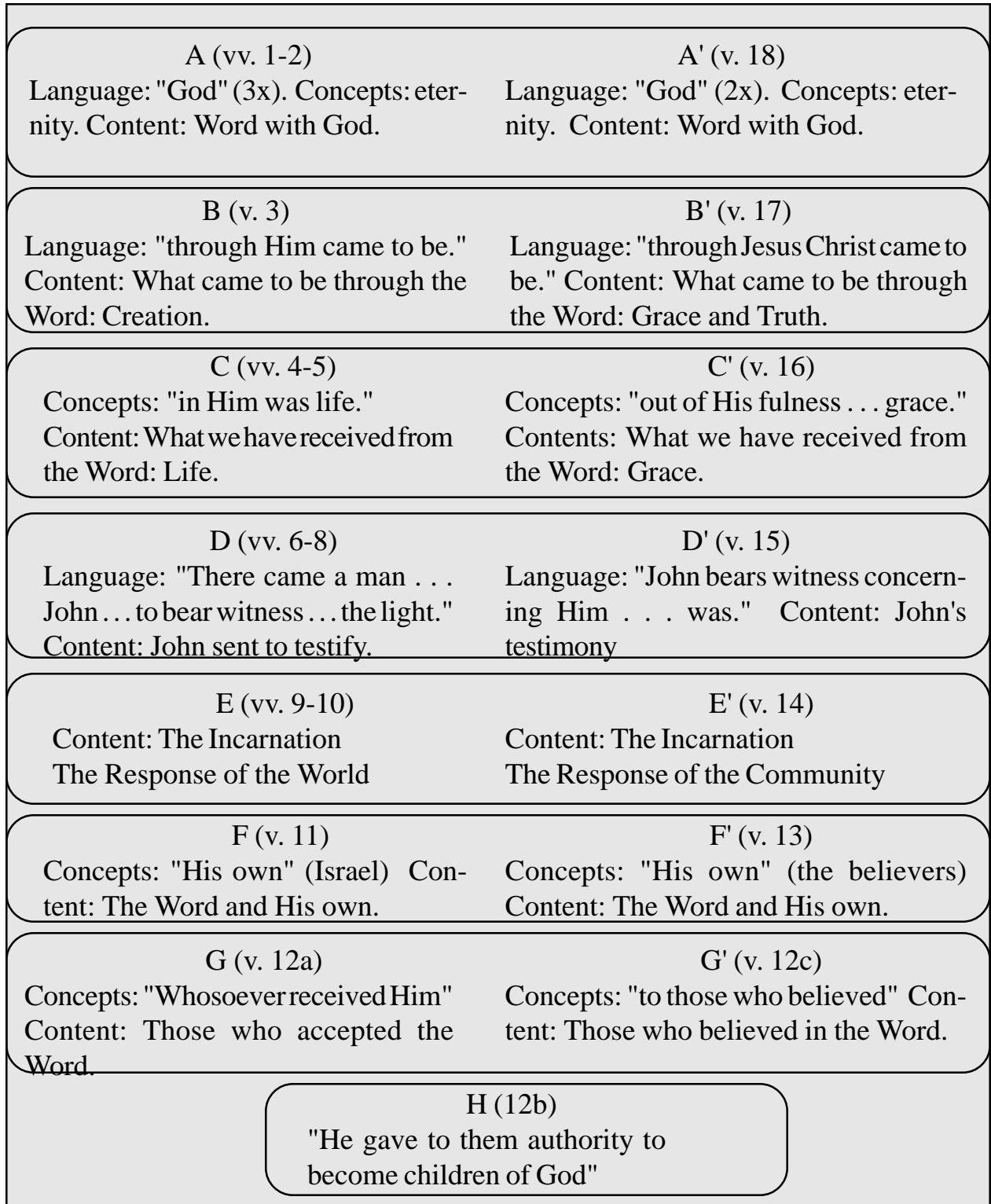
G (v. 12a) and G' (v. 12c)

The parallelism continues. Verse 12c states with greater precision the meaning of verse 12a. "As many as received Him" (12a) are "those who believe in His name." Although R. E. Brown is reluctant to identify the structure of the prologue as chiasmic in his commentary (*The Gospel according to John*), he notes the correspondence between these phrases: "This clause [12c] also explains the indirect object of 'empowered,' just as v. 12a; only while 12a is in the nominative, 12c is in the dative. (We have tried to capture the better agreement of 12c by introducing it with 'that is'.) That 12a and 12c really say the same thing has left its mark on the copying of the text. Some of the Latin, Greek, Syriac Fathers and the *Diatassaron* seem to omit 12c, while a few Latin Fathers, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and an Ethiopic witness omit 12a" (I:10).

H (v. 12b)

This analysis leaves verse 12 b standing alone as the pivot point of the Prologue. It is the "bottom line" structurally. In it the purpose of salvation history and the

incarnation of the Word is summarized. The climax of the Prologue is, therefore, neither a theological paradox ("the word became flesh"), nor the testimony of a privileged few ("and we beheld His glory"), but a proclamation immediately relevant to every reader of the Gospel ("He gave authority to become children of God). The following diagram summarizes the evidence for this understanding of the Prologue.



The evidence for this understanding of the Prologue's chiastic structure is cumulative. If the evidence for correspondence between some of the verses is considered in isolation from the other correspondences, it may not be persuasive. In this case, the chain is stronger than its weakest links. Moreover, the interpreter must also bear in mind that all literary structures are in varying degrees artificial. The Prologue of John is a work of art; the artist used structures, but he was not their slave. To have made the chiastic structure more explicit would necessarily have made it more artificial.

Commentary

We will now look at the significance of the chiastic structure in light of John's theology. The commentary will be based upon the chiastic structure found on page 33 (at the top). In addition as a learning tool, there will be "instruction boxes" which will contain principles for learning chiastic structure as the commentary precedes.

(A) Through the pre-existing Word, all things came to be (1:1-8).

1:1 In the beginning was the Word. With its manifest allusion to Genesis 1 concerning the creation of all things and especially life and light (vv. 3 & 4), these words situate the existence of the Word as prior to creation (cf. the parallel in v. 15b: "He existed before me"; see also 8:56-58: "before Abraham was, I AM"). The emphasis of the verb "was" (imperfect of EIMI) implies continuing existence, *i.e.*, "was and still is."



Principle of Inversion and Balance

When you see repetition of identical terms or subject matter, a chiastic structure may not be far off! In this case, the term "God" in v. 1 is balanced nicely in v. 18. In addition, it is the "Word"/LOGOS which is the instrument whereby "God" is "made known."

And the Word was God. These words imply close union of the Word with God. The Greek for "with God" (*pros theon*) expresses the movement of the Word "toward" God. The parallel expression in verse 18, "in the bosom of the Father," implies the same. **And the Word was God.** These words testify to the divine nature of the Word. In the Greek no article is used before the word "God," not only because it is the predicate nominative ("Colwell's Rule"), but the absence of the

article prevents exact identification with the "Father." The Word "becomes flesh" in verse 14, something that the Father is not. In John 5:19-30 and 10:29-39, he will make a similar subtle distinction between the Son and the Father.

1:2 He was in the beginning with God. These words reiterate and emphasize the truth enunciated in verse 1. The Word existed before creation (cf. 17:4, where Jesus speaks about returning to the position of glory he had with the Father "before creation").

Concerning the use of the term "the Word" to describe the pre-existent Son of God, it should be noted that while "the Word" is used only here in the Prologue, it is nevertheless only one of the expressions used by John to describe Jesus. In the course of the Gospel, John will speak of Jesus as "the bread of life" (6:32-58); "the light of the world" (8:12); "the door" of the sheepfold (10:7); the "resurrection and the life" (11:25-26); and "the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6).

In the context of Genesis 1, the term "the Word" is a particularly apt title for Jesus, since God is there described as bringing about all creation through His word alone, *e.g.*, "He said, 'Let there be light, and there was light'" (Gen. 1:3). There are allusions here as well to wisdom as spoken about in Proverbs 8:22. There may even be an echo here of Isaiah 55:11, where God says of His word that "it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Finally, it was through His word that God revealed Himself to His prophets, and through them to Israel. If a synonym were to be used here for "the Word," the best term would probably be "the revealer." Jesus through His words and His deeds reveals the nature of the Father as one who loves the world (cf. 3:16). In verse 18, the chiastic parallel to verses 1-2, it is significant that the Prologue concludes with the statement that it is Jesus, "the only begotten God," who "has explained Him."

1:3 All things came into being by Him. Since all things have been given physical existence and life through Jesus, the Word, it will follow in the Gospel that all are called to believe in Jesus in order to receive spiritual, *i.e.*, eternal, life (cf. 3:16-17; 4:10-14; 5:19-30; 6:47-58; 8:12; 10:10, 27; 11:25-26). The emphasis in verse 3 is on the agency of Jesus in the creation of the physical universe. In the chiastic parallel of verse 17, the emphasis will be on the agency of Jesus in bringing to all humanity God's spiritual gifts of "grace and truth." Here, as in verses 1-2, the reader will find echoes of what was said in Proverbs 8:30 concerning the role of wisdom in the creation of the world.

And apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Hebrew poetry, antithetic parallelism frequently consists in saying the same thing positively and then again negatively. Here John says negatively what he had said positively in verse 3a: "all things came into being by Him."

1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. As the Word, *i.e.*, as the revealer, Jesus communicated the knowledge-love about God necessary for eternal life (cf. 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent"). It can be said, therefore, that in Jesus one finds life inasmuch as he is the source of life. As revealer of God, Jesus' life in the world made Him "the light," *i.e.*, the source of knowledge about God and about eternal life for all humanity (cf. 8:12; 12:34-36). John prefaces this statement to verse 5 because in verse 5 he is preparing to introduce for the first time a reference to the historical existence of Jesus.

"Life" and "light" are almost universal religious symbols. In John's Gospel they are not sentimental props but ways of focusing on the excellencies of the "Word." The relationship between God and the Word in the Prologue is identical with the relationship between the Father and the Son in the rest of the Gospel. Both 1:4 and 5:26 insist the Word/Son shares in the self-existing life of God. Later on Jesus claims that He is both the light of the world (8:12; 9:5) and the life (11:25; 14:6).

Nevertheless there is a difference between this passage and most of the rest of the Gospel where light and life come to the fore. In the rest of the Gospel, John is largely interested in "light" and "life" as they relate to salvation: the "light" is revelation which people may receive in active faith and be saved, the "life" is either resurrection life or spiritual life that is its foretaste. If 1:4, by contrast, is read in the context of the first three verses, it is more likely that the life inhering in the Word is related not to salvation but to creation. The self-existing life of the Word was so dispensed at creation that it became the light of the human race.

However, what is not clear is whether John is thinking of our essential constitution, the fact that we have been made "in the image of God" (cf. Gen. 1:27, continuing the creation theme), or of the reflections of Himself in the universe He has created (what theologians sometimes call "natural" or "general" revelation; cf. Rom. 1:20), or even of more specific revelation bound up with the coming of the Son. At least in this verse, John is more interested in the source of the light (the life of the Word) and its purpose (for the human race) than in the mode or purpose of its dispersal.

1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend/overcome it. This verse is a masterpiece of planned ambiguity. If a hellenistic Jew or for that matter even a pagan Greek, read through the opening verses to this point, and had no personal experience of Christianity, he or she might well take verse 5 to refer exclusively to creation, without moral overtones. Light and darkness are not simply opposites; darkness is nothing other than the absence of light. At the first creation, "darkness was over the surface of the deep" (Gen. 1:2) until God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). At no time other than creation could it more appropriately be said, *The light shines in the darkness*. Precisely because John is speaking about creation, and is not describing a dualistic universe in which light and darkness, goodness and evil, are matched opposites, he can describe the victory of the light: *the darkness did not overcome it* (as the verb KATELABEN can be translated).

But any reader who had entered into sustained dialogue with Christians, and, more importantly, any reader who had read through this Gospel once and was now re-reading it, could not fail to see in verse 5 an anticipation of the light/darkness duality that dominates much of the rest of the Gospel. The "darkness" in John is not only absence of light, but positive evil (cf. 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; 1 Jn. 1:5, 6; 2:8, 9, 11); the light is not only revelation bound up with creation, but with salvation. Apart from the light brought by the Messiah, the incarnate Word, people love darkness because their deeds are evil (Jn. 3:19), and when the light does shine, they hate it, because they do not want their deeds to be exposed (Jn. 3:20). In fact, wherever it is true that *the light shines in the darkness*, it is also true that *the darkness has not understood it* (taking KATELABEN as in the NIV). Reading verse 5 this way anticipates the rejection theme that becomes explicit in verses 10-11. Alternatively, even if KATELABEN means something like "did not overcome it," it is quite possible that John, subtle writer that he is, wants his readers to see in the Word both the light of creation and the light of the redemption the Word brings in His incarnation. Thus, since John likes to use double-meaning words (see page 9) and since the theme of the Jews' refusal to understand Jesus runs throughout the Gospel (cf. 12:37-44), it is quite probable that John is using the verb in both of its meanings. The Jews neither understood Jesus nor succeeded in overcoming Him.

1:6-8 There came a man, sent from God. A reference to John the Baptist ends section (a), and another reference to him will begin section (a'). What John emphasizes here is the vast difference between Jesus and the Baptist. The Baptist came *only as a witness* (cf. Jn. 3:27-36, where the Baptist himself emphasizes this difference); Jesus alone is the light. The Baptist came so that through his witness to Jesus, all might believe in Jesus. In 1:35-42, John will describe how Jesus' first

disciples came to believe in Him as a result of the Baptist's witness to him.

The ultimate origins of Jesus, the Messiah, John will insist, are in the pre-incarnate Word who was with God and who was God. But when he comes to the account of Jesus' public ministry on the stage of human history, the Evangelist, in common with the Synoptic and with early Christian preaching, begins with the witness of John the Baptist (1:19ff.; cf. Acts 1:21-22; 10:37; 13:24-25). That is why it is entirely appropriate for him to introduce the Baptist here.



General Information

The mention of John the Baptist in verses 6-8 and again in verse 15 is one of the strongest parallels in the Prologue, and therefore the easiest to recognize as part of a chiasmic structure. When you recognize balanced parts of a structure, begin to work outward or inward, until the final parallel is recognized--even if this means transgressing verse or chapter boundaries (these were not part of the original autograph!).

Interestingly, it is only in this Gospel that there is no additional description such as "the Baptist," even though the Evangelist is very careful to distinguish other characters who bear the same name (*e.g.* "Then Judas [not Judas Iscariot]," 14:22; "He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon," 13:26). The Evangelist does not need to identify John as "the Baptist," because he never mentions by name the only other John in Jesus' circle, John the son of Zebedee, for the brother of James and intimate of Peter. The traditional explanation for this silence is still the best one: John the son of Zebedee was responsible for this Gospel, and preferred to refer to himself only obliquely.

The forerunner's significance to the story is grounded in the fact that he was *sent from God*, assigned to this specific task. That he was commissioned by the Almighty places him in the same category as Moses (Ex. 3:10-15) and the prophets (*e.g.* Is. 6:8; Jer. 1:4ff.)--indeed, in this respect, he is like Jesus Himself, who was also sent from God (Jn. 3:17; a frequent theme in the Fourth Gospel). A fuller description of the Baptist's witness appears in verses 1:19-34; 3:27-30; 5:35, with a marvellous summary in 10:40-42.

(B) The true light is rejected by His own (1:9-11)

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. Jesus is the source of light, and therefore of revelation and life for all. John prefaces this statement about the universality of Jesus' impact on humanity because He is about to contrast here in (b), by antithetic parallelism, the rejection of Jesus by His own people, the Jews, with the acceptance of Jesus by believers in section (b").

On a more technical note, if the phrase "coming into the world" is understood to be masculine and attached to "every man," then we must translate this verse as in NIV fn.: "This was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world." If this is the correct rendering, then there is nothing here or in verse 10 that requires us to go beyond the illumination granted to the entire race in the Word's creative activity (cf. vv. 4-5). This view is reinforced by a common rabbinic expression, "all who come into the world," used to describe "every man." But that expression is always plural; the construction here is singular. It is best to take "coming into the world" as a neuter form attached to "light," adopting the translation of NIV: *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.* The most convincing support for this rendering is the fact that "coming into the world" or being sent into the world is in this Gospel repeatedly predicated of Him who is the Word. Moreover the peculiar Greek syntax this translation presupposes is a common feature of John's style (cf. 1:28; 2:6; 3:23; 10:40; 11:1; 13:23; 18:18, 25). What this means is that in this verse it is the Word, the light, that is coming into the world, in some act distinct from creation. If incarnation is not spelled out as forcefully as in verse 14, it is the same special visitation that is in view. Few could read the Fourth Gospel for the second time without recognizing that the coming of the Word into the world, described in the Prologue, is nothing other than the sending of the Son into the world, described in the rest of the Gospel.

Because John insisted that the Word was the agent of creation, it might be thought that when he now describes that Word as coming *into the world* he means nothing more than that the Word has invaded the created order He Himself had made. But **world** for John has more specific overtones. Although some have argued that for John the word KOSMOS ("world") sometimes has positive overtones ("For God so loved the world," 3:16), sometimes neutral overtones (as here; cf. also 21:24-25), where the "world" is simply a big place that can hold a lot of books), and frequently negative overtones ("the world did not recognize Him," 1:10), closer inspection shows that although a handful of passages preserve a neutral emphasis the vast majority are decidedly negative. There are no unambiguously positive occurrences. The "world," or frequently "this world" (e.g. 8:23; 9:39; 11:9; 18:36), is not the

universe, but the created order (especially of human beings and human affairs) in rebellion against its Maker (*e.g.* 1:10; 7:7; 14:17, 22, 27, 30; 15:18-19; 16:8, 20, 33; 17:6, 9, 14). Therefore, when John tells us that God loves the world (3:16), far from being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God. God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big but because the world is so bad!

1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. The Word, then, *was in the world* as a result of His special coming into it, *i.e.*, the incarnation. Our decision regarding the meaning of "world" in verse 9 has its bearing on the interpretation of verse 10. This was the world that *was made through Him*--not a mere repetition of verses 3-4, since "world," as we have seen, has a narrower focus than "everything that has been made." The point is that John will not allow ontological dualism, the view that there exists a principle of evil entirely independent of the universe God created. Far from it: apart from the Word, "nothing was made that has been made" (1:3). That includes the KOSMOS, the world of human beings and their affairs in rebellion against the Word. Instead of allowing dualism, John grounds the moral responsibility of the race in the doctrine of creation. This world created through the "Word" *did not recognize Him*, they did not "know" Him.

1:11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. This verse is not merely a poignant repetition of verse 10. Indeed, these, John's saddest words, encapsulate a theme that runs from beginning to end of his Gospel (1:19-28; 2:13-25; 3:11; 5:18; 7:1, 20; 8:40; 9:40-41; 10:31; 11:45-54; 15:18-25; 19:4-16). See also Isaiah 65:2-3 and Jeremiah 7:25-26.

(C) To all who believe, power is given to become children of God (1:12-13)

Many who argue for a chiasmic structure in the Prologue rightly identify verses 12-13 or some section of these verses as the center of the chiasm. They do so for several reasons: (1) verses 12-13 deal with **all** people and specify the crucial difference between believers and nonbelievers; (2) this crucial difference is spelled out in the verses on either side of verses 12-13, *i.e.*, in verses 9-11 (b), where John deals with the nonbelievers, the Jews, and in verse 14 (b"), where he deals with the believers; (3) verses 12-13 concentrate on an important theme of the Gospel, namely, the identity of the true versus the false children of God (*cf.* 3:3-21; 5:31-47; 6:59-

69; 8:31-47; 10:25-29); (4) verses 12-13 do not properly parallel any other verses in the Prologue.

1:12ac But as many as received Him. To "receive," i.e., to believe in Jesus, is for John the key to eternal life (cf. 3:3-29). It is the key to eternal life for all. This general statement fits with the universal scope of Jesus' mission: He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29); the "light of the world" (8:12); and when "lifted up from the earth," He will "draw all men to Himself" (12:32).



The Chiastic Center

There will always be anomalous feature(s) which will distinguish the center of the chiastic structure (*i.e.*, the pivot point). The anomalous feature(s) may be unusual vocabulary, style, content, or as here, a summary which deals with all people and specify the crucial difference between believers and nonbelievers.

1:12b To them He gave the right to become children of God. The Old Testament often refers to the Israelites as the children of God (cf. Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Hos. 11:1; Jer. 3:19). The New Testament frequently uses the phrase or its equivalent in the context of a debate dealing with the question, Who are the true sons of God (Matt. 3:9; 11:9; 21:28; Gal. 3:25; 4:6-7; Rom. 8:14-27, 21, 29; Eph. 5:1, 8; 1 Jn. 3:1-2, 10; 5:2). The theme of the true versus the false children of God is central to John's Gospel and is therefore fittingly given the central position in his Prologue, in which he summarizes the major themes of his Gospel (for the theme "the children of God," cf. 3:3-21; 8:31-47; 11:52; 20:17; see also 14:18, 23).

Since John has already identified those who did not receive Him as the Jewish nation in verses 9-11 (b) and will immediately designate the true children of God as the "us" and the "we" of verse 14 (b"), it is readily understandable that a statement containing the criterion for determining the true "children of God" should find its logical position in verses 12-13 (c), between verses 9-11 (b) and verse 14 (b"). From the beginning to the end of his Gospel, John insists on faith as the ultimate criterion for eternal life, *i.e.*, union with Jesus the Messiah. It is no accident that when he expresses the purpose for which he wrote his Gospel, he says, "These have been written that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **believing** you may have life in His name" (20:31).

1:13 Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The children of God are born by the will of God and not through any agency of man, *i.e.*, by grace and not by nature. Jesus' discourse to Nicodemus

deals precisely with the origin of the children of God and states unequivocally that they are born from above. Supernatural life, in short, is a gift from God (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). **Not of bloods** is the literal translation. These words rule out procreation through the blood of the father and mother, a popular ancient belief concerning the origin of life. **Nor of the will of the flesh.** These words probably refer to sexual desire, just as the following words, **nor of the will of man** probably refer to the initiation of human birth by the father. All these are ruled out because the initiative in the birth of the children of God comes from God alone.

By themselves, verses 10-11 would be grim indeed; but verses 12-13 immediately soften the sweeping rejection of the Word by indicating that, as in Old Testament times, there remains a believing remnant. "But to all who received Him . . .", another way of describing these people is to say that they "believed in His name." The "name" is more than a label; it is the character of the person, or even the person himself. Such faith in the Word yields allegiance to Him, trusts Him, and acknowledges His claims.

B" The Word becomes flesh and accepted by those who behold His glory (1:14)


1:14a And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Without ceasing to be the divine Word, pre-existent with the Father (vv. 1-2), the Word takes on human flesh and is henceforth both divine and human. To become flesh, therefore, is the equivalent of "to be born as a human being," although the verb used (EGENETO) does not have the same strict meaning of "to be born" that it has in verse 13.

For the first time since verse 1, the term LOGOS, "the Word," reappears. At this point the incarnation, the "in-fleshing" of the Word, is articulated in the boldest way. If the Evangelist had said only that the eternal Word assumed manhood or adopted the form of a body, the reader steeped in the popular dualism of the hellenistic world might have missed the point. But John is unambiguous, almost shocking in the expressions he uses: **the Word became flesh.**

The Word not only became flesh, He "dwelt among us." More literally translated, the Greek verb for "dwelt" means that the Word pitched His tabernacle, or lived in His tent, among us. It echoes loudly God's coming to dwell with His people in the tabernacle, *i.e.*, tent, as described in Exodus 40:34-38. In verse 11 (b),

the Word "came to His own," and His own people did not receive Him. Here in antithetical parallelism (b"), John contrasts sharply those who did accept the Word.

Hellenistic Jews with at least a smattering of Hebrew would be quick to see another connection between John's words and the Old Testament. The corresponding Hebrew verb for "to dwell," sometimes used of God "dwelling" with Israel (Ex. 25:8; 29:46; Zech. 2:13), and the noun for "tabernacle," are cognate with the post-biblical term "to dwell."



Chiasmus and Outlining

Because chiasmus essentially returns to its original idea, a better approach to outlining chiastic structure is to employ repeating alphabetical characters (i.e., A, B, C, B', A'), rather than with ever increasing alphanumeric points (i.e., I, II, III, IV, A, B, C, D, etc.). Admittedly, such a structure is alien to our Western thinking and progressive linear thought patterns. But for the reader who is willing to study the principles of chiastic structure and apply them to Scripture, the aesthetic, literary, and theological rewards will be considerable. In addition, any point which finds itself contrasting or the direct opposite of its counterpoint, is said to be antithetical and can be designated by a double hash mark. For instance in the Prologue, A, B, C, B", A', the B" (v. 14) indicates that the idea in those verses are contrasting somehow with those found in B (vv. 9-11).

This term, strictly speaking, means "residence," but most commonly refers to the glory of God who made Himself present in the tabernacle and the temple. The bright cloud of the presence of God settled on the tabernacle, and the glory of the LORD filled it (Ex. 24:16; 40:34-35; similarly the temple, 1 Kgs. 8:10-11). In post-biblical Hebrew, this glory was nothing less than the visible manifestation of God. By alluding to such themes, John may be telling his readers that God manifested Himself most clearly when the Word became flesh. The incarnate Word is the true Glory, the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God among human beings, for this Word became a man.

1:14b And we behold His glory. John now draws an explicit line to "glory." "We," and not the Jewish nation, have beheld the glory of the incarnate God. The word "glory" (DOXA), signifies the outward manifestation of inward divinity (cf. Isa. 6:3 and Jn. 12:41; Mk. 9:2-8; Phil. 2:6-7). The statement testifies, therefore, to the divinity of the incarnate Word--that belief which the Jewish nation refused to accept. **Glory as of the only begotten from the Father.** The Word's glory comes from His relationship with the Father. He is one with the Father as God, but distinct

from Him as a person. John will explain the relationship of the Son with the Father at length in 5:19-47; 7:1--8:59; 10:31-38. Throughout the Gospel, he will insist that the Jews have refused to see and accept the glory, *i.e.*, the divinity, of Jesus as the only-begotten Son sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. **Full of grace and truth.** These words are best understood from their Old Testament Sinai covenant ambient, where they testify to God's grace and truth, *i.e.*, His love and fidelity.

(A') Through Jesus Christ, grace and truth came to be (1:15-18)

1:15 John bore witness of Him. By returning to the person (the Baptist) and the content (the Baptist's witness to Jesus) of verses 7-8 with which he concluded section (a), John signals the beginning of section (a') of his chiasmic structure for the Prologue. In verses 15-18 (a'), he repeats and at the same time goes beyond what he said about the Word in verses 1-8 (a). The Baptist's witness that "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me" testifies directly to Jesus' pre-eminence and indirectly to His pre-existence, first mentioned in verse 1.

The earlier mention of the witness of John the Baptist (vv. 6-8) dealt with the coming of the pre-existent light into the world; verse 15 abandons that theme and grounds the glory of the incarnate Word in a concrete individual, a concrete "He" attested by another individual. Thus it prepares the way for the detailed account of the Baptist's witness, which immediately succeeds the Prologue (1:19-34 and 3:27-36).

1:16 For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace. It is important to note that John reintroduces the Baptist in verse 15 not only because he wants to create a parallel with verses 7-8 (a), but also because the Baptist represents the Old Testament (he is the last of the Old Testament prophets); and John, in this verse and the verses that follow (vv. 17-18), intends to contrast the great gift of the law given by God through Moses with the much greater gifts of grace and truth given by God through Jesus. Thus, while "grace upon grace" could mean grace after grace in a cumulative sense, it is far more likely that it means grace in place of grace, in the sense that the greater grace brought through Jesus and the New Covenant surpasses abundantly the grace of the Old Covenant.


1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. The contrast between Moses and Jesus is not meant to denigrate Moses but rather to extol Jesus. John is not against the Law of Moses but against its interpretation by the Pharisees (cf. 5:1-18; 9:1-38). He sees the law as God's gift to Israel and recognizes Moses as a witness to Jesus (cf. 1:45; 5:45-47). The point he is trying to make here is that the "grace and truth" that come through Jesus far surpass the gift of the law given through Moses in the Old Covenant. Jesus, as the Prologue stated in verse 14, is "full of grace and truth." It should be noted that the words "grace and truth" here in the (a') section of the Prologue parallel broadly the words "light and life" in verses 4-5 of the (a) section.

1:18a No man has seen God at any time. It was popularly believed in the Old Testament that no one could see God and live (cf. Ex. 33:18-20; Deut. 4:12; Ps. 97:2; Isa. 6:5). The contrast between Jesus and Moses is continued here. Moses never saw God. Jesus, on the contrary, as the only begotten Son of God, is always in the presence of God and has not only seen Him but "has explained Him," *i.e.*, He has revealed Him to the world. In and through Jesus, the world hears, sees, and knows the Father (cf. 8:38; 12:45; 14:9). God is revealed to the world through Jesus.

1:18b Who is in the bosom of the Father. The metaphor attests to the intimacy of the Father and the Son and is best illustrated by John's remark about the Beloved Disciple in 13:23: "One of His disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus."

The Prologue concludes as it began. It began with Jesus called the Word.

It now concludes with Jesus declared to be the revealer of the invisible Father. It began with the statement that "the Word was God"; it ends with the only God called God. It began with the observation that "the Word was with God"; it concludes with the only God "in the bosom of the Father."



Chiasmus and Textual Criticism

Notably, realizing that verse 18 balances verses 1-2, helps to establish the internal integrity of the Greek text. The textual variant in verse 18, THEOS/God, attested by P66, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and others is confirmed by John's chiastic structure. Essentially, the chiastic structure indicates that the text should read "the only begotten **God**" (NASB), instead of "the only begotten **Son**" (fn. NIV; KJV, NRSV), that the term **God** is essential for balance and the reading **Son** is spurious. This is a clear example where textual questions may be evaluated by internal chiastic structure.

The inclusions that link verses 1 and 18 have been noticed by many scholars. What has not been noticed is that verses 15-18 (a') parallel verses 1-8 (a), just as verse 14 (b'') parallels verses 9-11 (b). With verses 12-13 (c) in the center, the Prologue has a clearly defined *abcb'a'* structure. As we shall see, this structure recurs in each of the twenty-one sequences of the Gospel and even in sections and subsections of sequences. It is so pervasive, so regular, so almost automatic that we might well speak of it not only as the most common of the Johannine rhetorical techniques, but as the habitual and almost subconscious rhythmic movement of the Johannine thought-process.

Chiastic Parallels in the Prologue

(a) vv. 1-8

v. 1: In the beginning
 v. 1: was the Word
 v. 1: The Word was with God
 v. 1: The Word was God
 v. 3: All things made through Him

 v. 4: life and light
 vv. 6-8: John . . . came . . . to bear witness.

(a') vv. 15-18

v. 15: He was before me
 v. 18: He has made Him known
 v. 18: in the bosom of the Father
 v. 18: the "unique" God
 v. 17: grace and truth through Jesus Christ
 v. 17: grace and truth
 v. 15: John bore witness

(b) vv. 9-11

v. 10: He was in the world
 v. 11: His own people received Him not.

(b'') v. 14

v. 14a: The Word became flesh
 v. 14bc: He dwelt among us . . . we have beheld His glory.

(c) vv. 12-13)

v. 12c: Power to become children of God.

When these parallels are placed side by side and their thought-content is compared and summarized, as they should be in a presentation according to the principles of parallelism, the reader is enabled to grasp the full meaning and thrust of John's theological message.