

In the Beginning was the Word

This is a Sermon using B.W. Johnson's Commentary as an Outline

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

The reader who opens the Gospel of John at once notices a difference between it and the three preceding gospels. They begin with the times of Jesus Christ upon the earth, while the fourth carries the reader back to the unknown period that lies before the dawn of Creation. The question will at once arise why John introduces his history of Christ with the explanation of the WORD which occupies the first eighteen verses of this chapter. It must always be kept in mind that he wrote many years later than the authors of the other Gospels. He wrote far away from Judea among a people deeply imbued with the philosophical spirit of Grecian civilization. At Ephesus he was in a center of Grecian culture, and the church was affected by the prevalent speculations of the Greek philosophers.

Alexandria in Egypt was a great center of Grecian learning where the greatest library of the ancient world was gathered. A Jewish philosopher named Philo was born there about 20BC. Philo wrote in the Greek language, and gathered from various sources, a system of profound speculation upon the nature and essence of God. He held that the absolute Deity was incapable of coming in contact with, or influencing matter, or manifesting himself to other intelligences, but that he gave forth certain divine powers or influences, which surround God as the members of a court surround an earthly king. The highest of these he called the *Logos*, or Word, a term that not only indicates Reason, but is the expression of thought in language.

He also held that God was pure and absolute Light. His philosophy would possess little interest for us were it not for the fact that it was developed into a system called Gnosticism which reached its climax in the second century, and was already, before the close of the first century, a troublesome heresy to the Church of Christ. It took the idea of Philo of an absolute Deity, and taught that beside God there were various sub gods, among which were Reason, the Word, Power, Light and Life, which were all a kind of lesser deities. Even YHWH or Jehovah, the revealed God of the Jews, was one of these inferior deities, and Jesus Christ was another, but Jesus was a higher manifestation. These theories had begun to plague the church before the death of Paul who refers to them a number of times (Col. 2:18; 2 Tim. 2:16-18), and John at Ephesus would at once come in contact with their influence.

John therefore, in the very outset of his Gospel, shows that these speculations do not harmonize with the revelation of Jesus Christ. The first eighteen verses of John are the profoundest exposition of the unity of the God-head, and the absolute divinity of the Word manifested in the flesh, that was ever penned. The first section (verses 1-4) contains a description of the essence of the Divine Word. He was before time began, was in association with God and was God. He was also the uncreated source of all created things, was the Power of God; and was also the Light, and the fountain of existence. He is the Life of men but He is not only these things, but He is shining in upon the darkness. This Word became flesh and dwelt among men in the person of Jesus Christ, Who is, therefore, God, divine, the Power, the light and life of men. To Him the prophets have borne witness, and most of all, John the Baptist, who was not himself the Light, but came as a witness of the Light. These grand declarations in the prolog, cover the ground of the Gnostic heresy, and they show its errors, are kept in view in the whole Gospel of John.

The Son of man is revealed as the Son of God, as Divine, the Light of the world, the Resurrection and the Life, the Bread of Life and Water of Life, and as the manifestation of the Father, the whole story reaching its climax in the declaration cf:

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

This *Word (logos)*, which John introduces without explanation, is not used in the sense of Philo and the Gnostics, used it as representing Reason, nor is it ever used in that sense by the writers of the Bible. Nor is it an attribute of God, but an *acting reality, personal*, instead of an abstraction or personification. The Logos or Word was a Person who appeared upon the earth in human form. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Word of God, not because He speaks the word, nor because He is spoken of, nor because He is the author and source of the word as spoken in the Scriptures, but because the Word dwells in Him, acts through Him, and speaks from Him. He is not only the Word, but He is the Light and Life of the World. For similar reasons; the Light dwells in Him and shines from Him, and the Life lives in and works from Him. It is because He is the Light that He has filled the world with light; because He is the Life in that the spiritual dead of the earth hear his voice, become new creatures, live a new life, and the world itself is regenerated. It is because He is the Word that He spake as never man spake. He spoke in the morning of time, and at His voice order came out of the primeval chaos, He spoke to the dead when He was upon the earth, and they rose from the tomb, and He shall speak to those that are in their graves and they shall hear His voice and come forth in the resurrection. It was this Word which was pre-existent, before time, that was manifested in the fulness of time in the flesh to carry out the gracious ends of divine love.

John 1:1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

This sublime preface of John carries us back to the account given in Genesis of the beginning of all things, when, "In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth." The passage declares that at that time, before creation, the Word existed, was with God and separate from him, but was God, or divine. What this Word is we learn from verse 14, where it is stated that it became flesh and dwelt among men in the person of Christ. This deep description of the divine Word, almost too deep for human understanding, was penned by John on account of certain false philosophies which began to creep in and trouble the church. Much has been written, by learned men, upon those heresies and upon the Word and its relation to the Father. We are going to confine ourselves to what is the obvious meaning of the Scripture. This passage then states: 1. That the person afterwards manifest as the Christ existed before creation began; 2. That he was present with God; 3. That he was divine; 4. That he was the Word; 5. That by or through him were all things made that were made (verse 3). The first chapter of Genesis helps us to understand its meaning.

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

This does not mean there was nothing before in the beginning cf:

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

John 17:24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

II Timothy 1:9 Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

Titus 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Gen 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Gen 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

God said, "Let there be light," "Let there be a firmament," "Let the earth bring forth," etc., and it was done. God exhibits his creative power through the Word, and also manifests his will through the Word. Every careful reader of the Old Testament will see the prominence given to the Word of the Lord, and also with the frequent reference in the Pentateuch to the Angel of Jehovah through whom the Lord manifests himself. When Jesus came he was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," the manifestation of the Father, the "Word made flesh and dwelling among men." There are mysteries belonging to the divine nature and to the relation between the Son and the Father that we have to wait for eternity to solve. They are too deep for human solution, but this is clear: that God creates and speaks to man through the Word. As we clothe *our* thoughts in words, God reveals his will by the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2. The same was in the beginning with God.

John reiterates a part of his first statement, partly for emphasis, and partly to bring out the thought that there is a real distinction between the Word and the Father. He labors to make clear two thoughts, that the Word was divine, God, and yet had an individuality of its own. From the beginning, that unknown epoch, before creation began, he was with God.

John 1:3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Having affirmed the divine and uncreated nature of the Word, John next proceeds to tell of his relation to creation. All things, the world and all it contains, and the whole universe, were made by or through him. The account of creation in Genesis helps us to understand. It was God who said, "Let there be light," and there was light. It was when the Word was employed that the sun, moon, and stars took their place in the sky. All things that were made were *spoken* into being, or made through the Word. The Word was not yet named Jesus Christ, for he had not yet been manifested as our Savior, nor is it certain that he was called the Son of God until he appeared upon earth as the Son of Man.

Hebrews 1:1-14 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 1:3 Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; 1:4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 1:5 For unto which of the

angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?
1:6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

1:7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. 1:8 But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness *is* the sceptre of thy kingdom. 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even* thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. 1:10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: 1:11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; 1:12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

What is God like, He is just like Jesus Paul declares cf:

Colossians 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.