

John 1:1 – 18

^{1:1} In the beginning was the Word¹, 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 through 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 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ⁶ There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. 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. 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 of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh², and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testified about him and cried out, saying, ‘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 fullness 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 one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him.

¹ The ‘Word of God’ (Jn.1:1) was understood by Jews to be the perfect communication of God. By His word, God *spoke* everything into existence (Gen.1:1 – 2:3). By His word, God *spoke* promises to His people and then brought them to pass. God revealed what He would do through *His word* and then He acted. The Old Testament writers noticed this pattern: ‘The LORD God will do nothing except that which He reveals to His servants the prophets’ (Amos 3:7), since those people God informed beforehand were then called prophets. God’s *word* was God’s act. God acted through His word. He revealed Himself through His word. Thus for John to say this may not have been totally surprising to Jews. What would have been utterly surprising is that the Word became flesh; see below.

² ‘Flesh’ (Greek *sarx*, Jn.1:14) was a very negative term to describe humanity in Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts. For example, Paul wrote, ‘I know that no good dwells in me, that is in my **flesh**’ (Romans 7:18). The Hellenistic Jewish commentator Philo Judaeus wrote:

‘It is impossible for the Spirit of God to remain and to pass all its time, as the law-giver himself shows. “For,” says Moses, “the Lord said, My Spirit shall not remain among men forever, because they are **flesh**.” For, at times, it does remain; but it does not remain forever and ever among the greater part of us; for who is so destitute of reason or so lifeless as never, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to conceive a notion of the all good God. For, very often, even over the most polluted and accursed beings, there hovers a sudden appearance of the good, but they are unable to take firm hold of it and to keep it among them; for almost immediately, it quits its former place and departs, rejecting those inhabitants who come over to it, and who live in defiance of law and justice, to whom it never would have come if it had not been for the sake of convicting those who choose what is disgraceful instead of what is good.’ (Philo, ‘On the Giants,’ *Commentary on Genesis*, V.19 – 21)

John chose the most negative way to say this. He could have said, ‘The Word became a body (Greek *soma*)’ or, ‘The Word became a man (Greek *anthropos*)’ but he does not use those other words. He chose the word that connotes the tainted ontological nature of humanity.

Session 1: Identity of Jesus; what he reveals about God

Which image do you think best describes God?

God is absent. Or He IS the universe, the stuff we swim in.



God is passive: He pushed the first domino and then stands back and does nothing.



God is partly evil: He plays both sides of the chess game. He controls both good and evil.



God is revealing Himself in one man: Jesus. He is healing and transforming human evil through Jesus.



Questions

1. What have you heard about Jesus? Who do people say he is? Who do you say he is?
2. What is John's view of Jesus?
3. What does it mean for the 'Word of God' to become 'flesh'?
4. What does it mean about how we go about making conclusions about the character of God?
5. How does your view of humanity need to change to match up with this? And your view of God?