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John 1: Divine Initiative in Salvation

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Introduction

Introductions are like appetizers: the good ones give a taste of what's to come and create a hunger for more. "In giving an exordium at all," says Roman rhetorician Quintilian, "there is no other object but to prepare the hearer to listen to us more readily in the subsequent parts of our pleading."¹ Like John the Baptizer did for

¹ Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 4.1.5. The first century AD scholar goes on to say, "This object, as is agreed among most authors, is principally effected by three means: by securing his good will and his attention, and by rendering him desirous of further information. These ends are not to be kept in view throughout the whole pleading, but they are pre-eminently necessary at the commencement, [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Jesus, a good introduction paves the way and makes smooth the path so that the listener is ready to hear what must be heard.

Crafting a good prologue is not easy. Despite this fact, the Apostle John has not just produced a good one but a brilliant one.² Thus, R. Brown says, “If John has been described as the pearl of great price among the NT writers, then one may say that the Prologue is the pearl within this Gospel.”³ Its value may be unsurpassed but what of its function? How does it serve to introduce the rest of the Gospel? D. A. Carson describes the Prologue as “a foyer to the rest of the Fourth Gospel . . . , simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes.”⁴ Connecting the introduction to the artistic forms of

when we gain admission, as it were, to the mind of the judge in order to penetrate still farther into it.”

² Craig S. Keener (*The Gospel of John*, vol. 1 [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003], 331) says, “If any given passage in the Gospel is of special import, it is the prologue. As the introduction to the whole work, it shapes the expectations with which a reader will approach the Gospel as a whole.” M. M. Thompson (“John, Gospel of,” in *DJG*, ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall [Downers Grove: IVP, 1992], 373) affirms that the suggestion by some that the prologue was a later tack on does not undercut the fact that it successfully “introduces the main themes, movement and chief protagonist of the Gospel.” A. C. Gaebelien (*The Gospel of John* [New York: “Our Hope”, 1936], 11) says, “These opening verses contain the entire Gospel of John in embryo.” H. Ridderbos (*The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 17) says, “One can speak of the prologue as a splendidly constructed a prior introduction to the story, which is the gospel concerning Jesus of Nazareth.” See also F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 28; C. Erdman, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1917), 18.

³ R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: (i-xii)*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 18. He rightfully reminds us that with all of the connections with the rest of the Gospel “there are also concepts and terms in the Prologue that have no echo in the Gospel” (19). This is simply to affirm that the Prologue cannot contain *everything* that the remaining chapters, as long as they are, have to say. No introduction can do that when so much diverse material follows it. One understands, though, E. C. Hoskyns (*The Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. N. Davey [London: Faber and Faber, 1947], 137) when he says that “the prologue, like other literary introductions, is not so much a preface to the gospel as a summary of it.”

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 111. He lists a dozen themes in the prologue found later in the Gospel. B. Witherington, III (*John’s Wisdom* [Louisville: John Knox, 1995], 48) names five. C. Kruse (*The Gospel According to John*, TNTC, [Grand Rapids: *Footnote continued on next page ...*]

the Apostle's day, R. Bultmann describes the Prologue an "overture."⁵ Indeed, the beginning of John's Gospel is the dramatic opening act, the welcome mat, the great treasure, and the tasty morsel—all these things and more.

But why write a gospel at all? Three synoptic gospels have been in circulation by the time John writes his own. Justification for inking a fourth is the elephant in the room, and the question of its necessity has no doubt crossed the Apostle's mind when he put pen to paper. Why then did he write this Gospel? What was his purpose? What contribution could be made that the others did not do so previously? Difficulty arises realizing that there may not be only one such purpose. While a focused evangelistic purpose is stated in 20:30-31, how he planned to accomplish this inspiration of belief in his

Eerdmans, 2003], 58) has a longer, more detailed list. Issues of whether the Prologue is a hymn or hymn-like addition to the Gospel will not be pursued at length but for now see D. Moody Smith, "The Sources of the Gospel of John," *NTS* 10 (1963-4): 336-51. R. Bultmann (*The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 17) argues that "the Evangelist has made a cultic community hymn the basis for the Prologue, and has developed it with his own comments." He does not see John's changes as sloppy patchwork. "The *form* of the Prologue is not loose or haphazard, but rigid and even minor details are governed by strict rules." Similarly, J. Neyrey (*The Gospel of John*, NCBC [Cambridge: CUP, 2007], 43) says "When scholars argued that the prologue was a wisdom hymn stitched by the author to the front of the Gospel to make it more acceptable to Hellenistic readers, it was judged to have little relationship to the rest of the Gospel. Now scholars stress the extensive relationship between prologue and Gospel, such that one might say that the prologue is a topic, sentence. . . ." Similar to Carson's "foyer", J. A. T. Robinson ("The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John, *NTS* 9 [1962-3]) likens the Prologue to "a porch to the house" (121). He sees numerous themes in the Prologue that are common to the rest of the Gospel and calls this list "impressive" (122).

⁵ Bultmann, *John*, 13, italics his. Kruse (*John*, 58-9) similarly says that the Prologue "functions as an introduction to the Fourth Gospel, much as an overture functions as an introduction to an opera." Pushing the drama concept even more, Witherington (*Wisdom*, 47) suspects the Prologue follows the Roman custom of singing a hymn to the Emperor before the presentation of a drama to him. He even divides the Prologue (only 1-14 minus 6-9) into four "strophes". Mildly, L. Morris (*The Gospel According to John*, revised, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 64) says, "The Prologue sounds the keynote." More forcefully, A. Plummer (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Cambridge: CUP, 1902], 59) says, "The Gospel of the Son of Thunder opens with a peal."

readership was specific.⁶ And some of these specifics are revealed in the Prologue.

So then, picking from among the morsels John parades before us represents a challenge, for they all carry the aroma of divine sweetness to our theological senses. The incarnation appears to the primary narrative goal of the text, but that fact is not enough to settle on. What does the Apostle mean to convey by the incarnation? Many truths, of course. But it may be argued that if there is one that arrests our attention the most perhaps it is *God's divine initiative* in Jesus' condescension and redemptive work on the cross for human sins. For God had to take the initiative to step down into the world for the world to have the barest hope of rescue from its terrible plight.

None of this denies the necessity of the human responsibility to trust and obey. For John and his audience seem to regard the requirements of choosing and believing as givens. We are the creatures, those morally bound to our Creator. That we would be held to a standard of faith and obedience is natural. That the Almighty Creator, bound and held by no one not especially any creature, would go out of his way to pluck us from our misery, however, is quite beyond expectation. It may be consistent with his love but that does not bind him to any specific action. God is the ultimate free agent in the universe who transcends all restrictions and constraints external to himself.

The divine initiative, then, is an act of pure grace. It is nothing human beings can rightfully require from God. John is right to put this idea front and center in his Gospel, for it cannot be taken for granted. He does not seem the least bit concerned about ensuring we do not lose our sense of human responsibility. Statements of responsible action and choice are made rather casually, as if they were obvious and understood. For they are. What cannot be presumed are the gracious actions of God either then or now, hence John's sheer delight

⁶ E. Jay Epp ("Wisdom, Torah, Word: The Johannine Prologue and the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G F. Hawthorne [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 128) says, "It is no simple matter to state the purpose which the author of the Fourth Gospel had in mind. It is widely recognized . . . that a *single* aim or purpose is not necessarily to be sought nor likely to be found." He further observes that 20:31 "is not as helpful as it first might appear."

and praise for the genesis of God’s salvation plan existing at all much less having come to fruition in Jesus Christ in his lifetime. How does John unfold this concept of the divine initiative?

1. The Revelation of God to Humanity in Christ (overall structure)

The overall framework of the passage is a good place to begin.⁷ Structurally, one could reasonably divide the prologue into four major sections (1-5, 6-8, 9-13, 14-18) with the possibility of collapsing vv. 6-13 into one coherent part, creating a three section division.⁸ One argument for a four-section division is that each concludes with a statement about the revelation of God to humanity. Verse 4 of the first section describes Christ as the “light of men”. Light reveals what is hidden by the darkness. Paragraph two is all about the forerunner to Christ who “came to bear witness about the light” (v. 8). The third section describes the reception of this revelatory light “which enlightens everyone” (v. 9); though his own people “did not receive him” (v. 11), others did (v. 12). Lastly, John concludes with the summary statement that Christ’s enfleshment and ententment (v. 14) was for the purpose to have “made him known” (v. 18)—the revelation of the Father by the Son. How one divides this section is not itself the most important decision. What matters is observing how and why the division was made. It seems that one if not the main purpose for each section is the emphasis on the manifestation of this Word to all—his own people, his rejecters, and gladly those who would embrace him.

⁷ The question of the origin of the Prologue’s content, whether John adapted a known hymn or teaching or whether it arose completely from his own creative mind, will not be settled here. Even if John used an existing hymn or hymn-like piece, he adapted and structured it for his own purposes, making it uniquely his own.

⁸ Ridderbos (*John*, 23) goes with a basically three-fold structure (1-5; 6-13; 14-18). See also Plummer, *Gospel*, 59. Representing a four-fold division is C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed., [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1978], 149-50) who divides it as: 1-5; 6-8; 9-13; 14-18. B. F. Westcott (*The Gospel According to St. John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 1-2) divides it into two major sections: (1; 2-18) with three subcategories under 2-18: (2-5, 6-13, 14-18).

Revelation is, by nature, only the result of divine initiation. Humanity does not conjure up God's revelation by rubbing a genie's bottle or earn them by piling up meritorious good works to the heights of heaven. God must want to and so initiate the act. If God chose not to reveal himself but remain in silence, that silence alone would condemn humanity to an existence devoid of any opportunity for salvation. If God did not initiate communication, there would be no hope. Carson says, "The emphasis of the Prologue, then, is on the revelation of the Word as the ultimate disclosure of God himself."⁹ Bultmann says, "God is only encountered in the revelation." And again, "To speak of God, means: to speak of his revelation; and to speak of his revelation, means; to speak of God."¹⁰ The theme of revelation suffuses the entire introduction and with it the truth that heavenly disclosure comes only and entirely by God's choice and grace alone, that is, by his initiation.

2. The Word As Genesis and Creator (vv. 1-5)

John knows how to grab our attention. His first five words immediately evoke a well-known, impossible-to-miss reference: Genesis creation.¹¹ This is no casual reference. H. Ridderbos asserts, "All that now follows in the Gospel has to be understood from the perspective of that 'beginning': It arises from that beginning, and that beginning is its deepest and most essential *Sitz im Leben*."¹² Creation puts us in our proper place before God. Just as revelation is something willed into reality completely by the desire of God giving us no control as to its existence, so likewise neither did we call or will

⁹ Carson, *John*, 135.

¹⁰ Bultmann, *John*, 35.

¹¹ Keener (*John*, 366) says, "That John intends an allusion to Genesis 1 may be regarded as certain." J. McHugh (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*. ICC, ed. G. Stanton [New York: T & T Clark, 2009], 6) says that "the opening words of the Gospel are clearly intended to recall the first words of Genesis (1.1)." See also Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT, ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 25; Carson, *John*, 113; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, NTC, 2 vols in 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 69; Thompson, "John," 373; Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1988), 21; Plummer, *Gospel*, 60.

¹² Ridderbos, *John*, 23.

ourselves into existence. God had to create us. We depend entirely upon the divine initiative of God in creation. Even subsequent to that first act of creation, every person born has been so at the initiative of someone other than self. Passivity in our own creation is a universal truth God has wrought in us from the Beginning. Not even the most self-sufficient, independent human being can claim to have created himself. John further says that not merely some things but “all things” (pavnta, v. 3) owe their existence to this *lovgoV*.¹³ Jesus is the source of and therefore the Lord over all things.¹⁴

Jesus as the uncreated creator of v. 1 is no mere passing thought.¹⁵ The idea returns in verse 10 where the Apostle makes the stunning observation that the Creator stepped into the very world he made and was rejected by it. Imagine a painter putting brush to canvas and creating a beautiful and marvelous scene. Now see the painter stepping into his canvas-world, one that owes its very existence to that painter, and watch as those pigmented persons in the scene wish nothing more than to kill the painter and remove him from “their” landscape. *Ungrateful* barely begins to describe such a scene. Divine initiation, starting with Adam and culminating in Christ, has been consistently met with human repudiation.

The *lovgoV* controversy has enough significance here to warrant a brief word. Sufficient sources exist in Judaism apart from Gnostic or

¹³ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 11-13), while observing that some have taken v. 3 to refer to the work of salvation, sees a both-and situation here, believing it can describe both the work of creation and recreation (salvation). See also R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 238.

¹⁴ Carson (*John*, 118) says, “That the pre-existent Christ created everything is a common theme in the New Testament...” E. Haenchen (*John 1*, Hermeneia, transl. Robert W. Funk, ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 109) notes that the Apostle presents a Jesus who is “elevated to such heights that it almost becomes offensive.”

¹⁵ Witherington (*Wisdom*, 54) asserts strongly that “the whole of this Gospel must be read in light of this very first verse, for it means that the deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of a divine being, and not a created supernatural being either, for he existed prior to all of creation.” Westcott (*St. John*, 2) speculates that Jesus’ “pre-existence” may not suffice, that there is a “loftier concept than that of pre-existence” in mind, which, Westcott wonderfully states “is embarrassed by the idea of time.”

Hellenistic origins to justify embedding John's concept of *lovgoV* entirely in the context of Judeo-Christian theology and tradition.¹⁶ C. Keener argues that *lovgoV* is Torah,¹⁷ but this is too limiting, for

¹⁶ For one of the strongest cases developed see D. Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *HTR* 94 (2001): 243-84. See also D. Reed, "How Semitic Was John? Rethinking the Hellenistic Background to John 1:1," *ATR* 85 (2003): 709-26 and Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 154-63. Hoskyns agrees that the use of Logos is "Jewish throughout" (159) and not Greek. But he also emphasizes the Christian side of "Judeo-Christian". He says, "What was manifested at the Beginning was not Law, as the Pharisees held, not reason or thought, as the Greek philosophers and later the Gnostics tended to suppose; but the creative power of the Word of God" (141).

One thinks of references that link God to his word. Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made". Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2, "O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures you have made" (NRSV). *Frg. Targ.* Gen 1:3, "The Word of the Lord said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light in his Word." See Keener's discussion (339-63); Gaebelien, *Gospel*, 12-13. Carson (*John*, 115) asserts that a Jewish, OT source as "the ultimate fountain for this choice of language cannot be in serious doubt." See also Köstenberger, *John*, 27; D. H. Johnson, "Logos," in *DJG*, ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 481-4; Charles Talbert, *Reading John* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 71; Westcott, *St. John*, xv, 2-3. McHugh (*John 1-4*, 8) rejects Greco-Roman nuances to the term, preferring instead to see the *lovgoV* as standing in place of the Name of God. M. M. Thompson (*The God of the Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001] 131-2) finds Wisdom parallels to Logos numerous and striking. For those who are tempted to see parallels to Gnostic thinking and sources such as the *Trimorphic Prottennoia* P. Borgen ("The Gospel of John and Hellenism," in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black [Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 109) argues that the many differences between Gnostic writings and John's Gospel "speak . . . against any theory of direct influence" and it is more likely that both drawn from a common source (Jewish Wisdom) than one from the other. See also Brown, *John*, 519-24.

¹⁷ Keener, *John*, 360-3; idem, "John," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 421-2. Keener admits that John's use of *lovgoV* rather than *novmoV* may have been due to the broader purpose for *lovgoV* (361-2). But if this is the point, why limit *lovgoV* to Torah only? Why not allow it to encompass the fullness of Torah/ Law, Creator, and Wisdom and in addition allow it a familiar "ring" that it might resonate with Gentile/ Hellenistic audiences in the term as a segue into their thinking (but correcting their views along the way)? Reed ("Semitic," 721) is even stronger stating that "John's prologue should be translated, [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Jesus brings new revelation as well as embodying the fullness of the old, and many have argued for a strong connection between Logos and Sophia.¹⁸ Bultmann offers the classic Hellenistic-heavy view that *lovgoV* was rooted in Gnosticism, specifically “a relatively early oriental Gnosticism.”¹⁹ This view is not commonly held in recent scholarship, most favoring entirely Judaistic sources for John’s meaning.

Jewish embedding does not, however, eliminate the possibility that *lovgoV* may have been an intentional, international *bridge*²⁰ between Jew and Gentile given the church’s ethnically mixed congregations by the time he pens his Gospel.²¹ Scholars are right to believe that a Gentile reader would come with preconceived notions when hearing about a divine, preexistent *lovgoV*.²² Whatever these

‘In the beginning was the Torah, and the Torah was toward God and Godlike was the Torah. . . .’

¹⁸ Many could be listed but see Epp, “Wisdom, Torah, Word”.

¹⁹ Bultmann, *John*, 30. He sees that John employs OT creation theology and puts it in the foreground, pushing the Gnostic mythological view (the source) ultimately into the background. Haenchen (*John 1*, 113) disagrees with Bultmann on much and sees that the Logos “stands in opposition to Gnosticism”.

²⁰ Bruce (*John*, 29) says, “It is not in Greek philosophical usage, however, that the background of John’s thought and language should be sought. Yet, because of that usage, *logos* constituted a bridge-word by which people brought up in Greek, philosophy, like Justin Martyr in the second century, found their way into Johannine Christianity.”

²¹ Many believe that Hellenistic Judaism sets the context for John’s Gospel in general. Barrett (*St. John*, 154) asserts, “That John was familiar with the Old Testament and Judaism seems clear; it is also highly probable that in developing Sophia and Torah speculation he intentionally chose for employment those aspects of Jewish thought which had Hellenistic parallels.” See also D. Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 12. Witherington (*Wisdom*, 53) speculates that either John chose Logos over Sophia because of the better Torah-Logos connection or “it was thought that the *logos* concept better united creation and salvation history.”

²² Kruse (*John*, 61) lists five distinct sense of *lovgoV* as employed by different groups and rightly concludes, “All these parallels reveal that when the evangelist chose to identify Jesus as the Logos, he was using a term in wide circulation, but which meant different things to different people.” D. H. Johnson (“Logos,” 483-4) similarly affirms that this background was in play but, “If John was thinking of any of the particular background . . . , it is not clear which one he [Footnote continued on next page ...]

ideas may have been before, whether Gentile or Jewish, they undergo correction and nuancing as John’s prologue unfolds and his Gospel proceeds.²³ This *lovgoV* is unique, the product of new covenant christology as presented by the beloved Apostle.²⁴ How is this pertinent to God’s initiative in salvation? Efforts to couch *lovgoV* too deeply in Gentile contexts risk losing a solid Old Testament creation theology where God stands as the sole source and initiator of all that is must be preserved. When this is lost, the strength of God as the sole source and initiator of all things, salvation not the least of them, might be also lost.

had in mind.” Johnson leans toward a Jewish context. Ridderbos (*John*) also runs through a historical overview of interpretive options for *lovgoV* (27-36) but comes to the conclusion that *lovgoV* “has a unique, specific, and limited character that is conditioned by the rest of the Gospel, such that it can only be described as typically Johannine” (36). Of *lovgoV* Plummer (*Gospel*, 60) is convinced that John “assumes that his readers will at once understand it. This shews that his Gospel was written in the first instance for his own disciples, who would be familiar with his teaching and phraseology.” Robinson (“Prologue,” 127-8) distinguishes the Prologue’s “background” (Palestinian Judaism) and “environment” (Hellenistic, Diaspora Judaism) and sees that either could account for the Prologue’s Logos theology (though he seems to shade toward the Palestinian source as being able to account for its use and meaning).

²³ Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 233) observes, “The personal character of the Logos forms a definite contrast to the Wisdom speculation of Hellenistic Judaism, to the doctrine of the Logos in Philo and above all to the Gnostic notions of creative powers proceeding from God and emanating from one another.” Kruse (*John*, 61) says, “More important than these parallels [in what non-Christian sources say about *lovgoV*] for our understanding of the Word/ Logos is what the evangelist himself says about him in the Prologue.” H. Kleinknecht (“The Logos in the Greek and Hellenistic World,” in *TDNT*, vol. 4, ed. G Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], 91) sums it well saying, “From the very first the NT *lovgoV* concept is alien to Gk. thought. But it later became the point of contact between Christian doctrine and Gk. philosophy.” N. T. Wright (*The New Testament and the People of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 411-17) sees the Logos in John embodying both the Torah and Wisdom, collecting thoughts and theology from these traditions yet also subverting some of their assumptions.

²⁴ Plummer (*Gospel*, 61) puts it well: “[John] therefore took the phrase which human reason had lighted on in its gropings, stripped it of its misleading associations, fixed it by identifying it with the Christ, and filled it with that fulness of meaning which he himself had derived from Christ’s own teaching.”

Moreover, John’s use of “light” (fwÆV) and “life” (zwhv) further reminds us of the Genesis creation,²⁵ particularly its goodness. The six days emphasize the luminaries and the living creatures coming into existence, and John’s repetition here further solidifies that Judeo-Christian theology and sources are primary. Perhaps most important, God is not the initiator of “all things” unqualified if “all things” include evil and sin. Light and life limit “all things” to “all good things.”²⁶ Subsequently, the corruption of humanity in sin plunged us into a darkness that required a new infusion of light and life to achieve a recreation. Thus, life and light may begin as concepts mainly referring physical creation, but they shift to and overlap with the new covenant focus of spiritual recreation as the Logos proceeds to enter the world and bring light to it.²⁷ The same God who initiated

²⁵ Köstenberger, *John*, 30; Brown, *Gospel*, 22. Along with Köstenberger and Barrett (*St. John*, 157), Carson (*John*, 118) reminds us that “life” and “light” are “almost universal religious symbols” though John’s use of them is specific to the Word’s purpose, mission, and character. J. Ashton (*Understanding the Fourth Gospel* [Oxford: OUP, 1991], 208) says, “There can be few societies if any in the course of history that have *not* seized upon the contrast between light and dark, night and day, to signify the contrast between good and evil or misery and content.” Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 242) reminds us that life and light are “still more closely allied in Hellenistic mysticism and Gnosis.” Contra Hendriksen (*John*, 71-2) who argues that these two terms “belong to the spiritual sphere” and are not a reference to physical creation. G. F. Shirbroun (“Light,” in *DJG*, ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall [Downers Grove: IVP, 1992], 472) interestingly links John’s use of light with the OT concepts of “God’s presence, God’s salvation, the Law, Wisdom and Logos. . . .” E. Freed (“Some Old Testament Influences on the Prologue of John,” in *A Light unto My Path*, ed. H. Bream, R. Heim, C. Moore [Philadelphia: TUP, 1974], 145-61) argues that “light” is mainly drawn from Isaiah and the Psalms.

²⁶ Westcott (*St. John*, 4) implies that “the term ‘the world’ (oJ kovsmoV, vv. 9, 10) is purposefully avoided” in v. 3 to avoid any hint that the Word created evil.

²⁷ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 15ff) following his interpretation of v. 3 naturally sees this as a both-and situation; “life” and “light” apply to both salvation and genesis creation. Barrett (*St. John*, 157) perhaps has it right when he sees that John, with life and light, “sets first in a cosmological aspect what later will appear in a soteriological.” Borgen (“Hellenism,” 114-15) sees John 1’s light as starting with creation but extending farther into a more universal, spiritual domain. See also Bultmann, *John*, 40; Bruce, *John*, 33; Gaebelien, *Gospel*, 15. Witherington (*Wisdom*, 55) says of the darkness, “The darkness the author talks about is not just [Footnote continued on next page ...]

all things good for first creation also initiates all things for second creation: salvation.

Twice John mentions the rejection of the *lovgoV* who is this *fwÆV* and *zwhv*. The first appears in this paragraph, concluding it with the darkness failing to receive (*katalambavnw*) it (v. 5). Whether this verb denotes overpowering, winning, comprehending by a mind, or acceptance/ reception,²⁸ what is clear is the darkness's rejection of the light.²⁹ John may have meant to include more than one of the listed senses.³⁰ For this rejection is described a second time in

physical darkness like that referred to in Gen. 1 but a spiritual darkness that involves not only ignorance of the truth but also a moral darkness and fallenness, which leads one to reject the light and life even when they are offered." Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 136) says, "The business of the world depends upon the Word of God both for its creation and for its salvation." Thompson (*God*, 55) says, "For John the supreme manifestation of God's sovereignty comes through God's power to create and to give life."

²⁸ See H. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. by H. S. Jones, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 897, "katalambavnw"; W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed., F. W. Danker (Chicago: UCP, 2001), 591-20, "katalambavnw"; J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 328, #2638; M. Burer and J. Miller, *A New Reader's Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 174, "katalambavnw".

²⁹ McHugh (*John 1-4*, 20) cleverly follows others who have rendered it "and the darkness has not *mastered* it" (italics mine) to encompass both overpowering and comprehending ideas. Plummer (*Gospel*) mostly favors "apprehended", the sense that "requires mental and moral effort" (63) but later adds, "The word rendered 'comprehended' may also mean 'overcame;' and this makes good sense" (64). Contra Ridderbos (*John*, 39-40, fn 69) who favors "understood" over and against concepts of "overtake" or "vanquish". See also Haenchen, *John I*, 114-15. And contra Brown (*Gospel*, 22) who emphasizes "conquer" seeing it as a reference to Gen 3:15, the victory of the woman's seed over the serpent's. Talbert (*Reading*, 71) also says, "In this context *katelaben* means 'overcome,' not 'comprehend.'" See also Bruce, *John*, 34. Westcott (*St. John*, 5) is convinced by "overcame" based on uses in John 12:35 and 6:17. He rejects "seize" based on the logic that if darkness grasped light, "it would cease to exist".

³⁰ Carson (*John*, 119) calls this verse "a masterpiece of planned ambiguity". Keener (*John*, 387) says, "More than likely John, whose skill in wordplays appears throughout his Gospel, has introduced a wordplay here: darkness could not 'apprehend' or 'overtake' the light, whether by comprehending it (grasping with the mind) or by overcoming it (grasping with the hand)." See also [Footnote continued on next page ...]

vv. 10-11 where the people did not “know” (ginwvskw, v. 10) him and in parallel description did not “receive” (v. 11) him using another lambavnw verb form (paralambavnw).³¹ Not knowing and not receiving are linked in vv. 10-11 and are perhaps captured in the single word katalambavnw in v. 5.³² Bultmann agrees that “the ouj katevlaben . . . cannot have any other meaning than that of the oujk e[gnw and the ouj parevlabon of vv. 10f., i.e, of the rejection of the incarnate Revealer.”³³ This is important because rejection is a response.³⁴ Humanity did not seek God only to walk away dejectedly

Barrett, *St. John*, 158. One has to wonder if Delling (“katalambavnw,” 10) is right that its “positive sense” is “to attain definitively” and that there may be a “grasping at” sense to it, that John is saying that the darkness did not pursue the light, did not grasp after it. Or perhaps adding a more emotive sense: the darkness did not *embrace* the light. Far from it, the darkness rejected it. If so, there may be a kind of ultimate-understatement sense to the expression: “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not to chase after it.” Darkness did not regard a serious pursuit of the light as a high priority, to say the least. (Delling himself goes with “overpower” (10)).

³¹ Barrett (*Essays on John* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982], 79) notes that paralambavnw commonly refers to “receiving a tradition” though here it is a person received.

³² Most NT lexical sources do not cite “receive/ accept” as a possible definition though LSJ lists it as a classical usage and TDNT (G. Delling, vol. 4, 5-7) notes that all uses of lambavnw have the dual directions of “take/ grasp” and “receive” as the core of its variant uses. Boyarin (*Memra*, 272) argues that katalambavnw has ties to other lambavnw-forms in the Prologue. He sees a strong sense of “reception” in the term. “The near-rhyme between katevlaben in v. 5 and parevlabon in v. 11,” he says, “lends aid to this reading as well, as does also the further repeat of this root in v. 12 and its final appearance in v. 16.” Hendriksen (*John*, 73-4) renders katalambavnw as “appropriates”, rejecting the “overpower” sense. He also sees the parallels between the other lambavnw verb forms in vv. 10 and 11. While Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 246) states his preference for “grasp” over “master”, he correctly sees the link to vv. 10-11. He says, “As katalambavnw means to welcome something that arrives, so too paralambavnw means to lay hold of something that is present.” Contra Köstenberger, *John*, 31; Kruse, *John*, 63.

³³ Bultmann, *John*, 46. He says that katevlaben “can only mean ‘grasp’= to make one’s own, as in Rom. 9:30, I Cor. 9.24, Phil. 3.12.”

³⁴ Whether it is the darkness failing to overpower, understand, grab, or receive it, all have a sense of rejection in common. Hoskyns (*The Fourth Gospel*, 138) says, “In the context of this general opposition, Jesus was rejected. The darkness neither accepted nor comprehended the manifestation of life.” Carson [*Footnote continued on next page ...*]

as God rejected us. Darkness does not seek light; it flees from it.³⁵ As in the Garden of Eden, God sought after man but man hid from his Creator. Human rejection resonates off divine initiation. Seeing our response, we assume God's initiation. He is the one who makes the first move to reach out his anthropomorphic hand in unconditional love.

3. The Human and Divine Passive (vv. 6-13)

3a. God's Initiative with John the Baptizer

The introduction of John the Baptizer into this discussion of the Word may seem abrupt or even misplaced, especially as discussion of the Word picks up only after v. 14.³⁶ But this is no mistake as the

(*John*, 120) sees v. 5 as a more implicit rejection and thus it “anticipates the rejection theme that becomes explicit in vv. 10-11.”

³⁵ Hoskyns (*The Fourth Gospel*, 137) appropriately notes that on the other hand, “Light does not avoid the darkness: it shines in it.” Ridderbos (*John*, 39) narrows down the description to a specific rejection of Jesus that will be more explicated in vv. 6-13 as opposed to a “timeless”, general description of the rejection of light by darkness. Contra Erdman (*John*, 14) who says of vv. 1-5, “The statements are timeless and universal, and are not to be limited to the activity of the preincarnate Christ.”

³⁶ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 21) says, “Without warning, both the scene and the subject-matter change, and the reader is thrust into the world of time.” He does not see this as a misplacement, though, just an abrupt shift. See also Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 144. Ridderbos (*John*, 41) similarly rejects the view that this section disturbs the flow of thought from vv. 1-5. He admits that this section is more “prosaic” than vv. 1-5 but “vss. 6-8 are by no means incongruous.” Again he says, “The references to John thus do not break the thought pattern of the prologue but precisely reinforce what one may call its central content” (42). Westcott (*St. John*, 5) says, “The abrupt introduction of John is explained by the fact that the review of the revelation, preparatory to the Incarnation, starts from the last, that is the most intelligible stage in it. The Baptist—a priest and a Nazarite—was the completed type of the Prophet. . . . ; and it was by the Baptist, an interpreter of the Old Dispensation and herald of the New, that St John himself was guided to Christ. . . .”

Brown (*Gospel*, 22), however, says of vv. 6-8, “These prosaic verses interrupt both the poetry and the consecutive thought of verses 5 and 9, and may originally have been elsewhere in the Gospel, perhaps before verse 19.” Robinson (“Prologue,” 122) says that “John the Baptist breaks without warning into a series of timeless statements about the Logos.” He also calls v. 15 “the most rude [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Apostle does it again in v. 15. Some argue the Apostle was countering an over-exaltation of John the Baptizer³⁷ or using him as a contrastive foil over against all others who have walked the earth before Jesus. Others observe that the Gospels traditionally put John on the scene prior to Jesus, and so this is normal if not expected.³⁸

These are secondary considerations. What is primary is the Apostle's narrative purpose, which lies in direct contrast to vv. 1-5. John the Baptizer's entrance onto the scene in v. 6 has the immediate effect of snapping our gaze from eternity to earth, from heaven to humanity. It has the rhetorical effect of zeroing in on the human condition and further explicating the human response to the Word's entrance into the world.³⁹ Jesus dubbed John the Baptizer as the greatest of all people prior to his own coming saying, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (John 11:11). John's commission from God as described in v. 6 matches him up with other great OT figures also sent

interruption in the Prologue." Witherington (*Wisdom*, 48) removes vv. 6-9 from his commentary on the Prologue section, leaving it (and vv. 15-18) for a separate section on John the Baptizer. C. H. Giblin's ("Two Complementary Literary Structures in John 1:1-18," *JBL* 104 [1985]: 87-103) insistence that a two-fold structure exists apart from the "additions" of vv. 6-8 and v. 15 implies strongly that there was once a time when they did not exist in its original form and were likely later insertions. Yet he also admits that without the John narratives the shift to v. 19 abrupt and that the writer has woven in the Baptizer's narratives well into the chiasmic structure, even enhancing it. Brown (*John*, 21-23) offers a helpful "cross section" (21) of key scholars of his day (including Bultmann, Käsemann, and Schnackenburg) and which portions of the prologue they accepted as "original".

³⁷ Bultmann (*John*, 51) says, "This is a clear rebuttal of those who regarded the Baptist as the Revealer." Bruce (*John*, 35) cautiously suggests that John "may have had in mind" such a group. Contra Kruse (*John*, 65) who thinks this "is going too far. This Gospel repeatedly portrays John positively as a faithful witness to Christ...."

³⁸ Haenchen (*John* 1, 116) observes that "an account of John the Baptist had to be given prior to the appearance of Jesus. Verses 6-8 are now to rectify this apparent deficiency."

³⁹ Köstenberger, *John*, 34. Bruce (*John*, 34) says of the narratives of vv. 6 and 15, "Their insertion may remind the reader that the author is not concerned simply to state timeless truths, but rather to show how these truths are anchored in human history."

from God: Moses, Isaiah, and the other prophets.⁴⁰ This makes him the ideal measuring rod against which to compare any others in regard to status and greatness.

John is the greatest. So then how did this great man come to God? On his own? Did he decide to be a herald of Jesus by his own initiative? Verse 6 says John was “a man sent from God”. God took the initiative to call, appoint, and commission John. There is nothing of self-choosing here. His function was solely as a “witness”, one who spoke of and pointed to another.⁴¹ God revealed to John what he needed to see and know as part of his testimonial ministry. The Apostle makes it evident that John the Baptizer “was not the light”, but his sole purpose was to “bear witness about the light” (v. 8).⁴² Everything about this text accomplishes what John himself said was the goal of his ministry: “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30). The Apostle subordinates John under the primacy of the One who sent him. God is the Sender, the Object of testimony, and the Chief Initiator.⁴³

3b. God’s Initiative with the World

Not only does the true light outshine John the Baptizer, but Jesus comes to enlighten the whole world (v. 9). Once again the Apostle

⁴⁰ See Barrett, *St. John*, 159; Carson, *John*, 120. E. Käsemann (*The Testament of Jesus*, trans. G. Krodel [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968], 11) says, “To be sent by God means, to begin with, nothing else than ‘to be authorized’.”

⁴¹ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 24) notes, “The Fourth Gospel frequently uses the vocabulary of litigation, reminding its reader especially of bearing witness . . . and of judgment. . . .” Westcott (*St. John*, 6) says, “The office of the prophet in the fullest sense is to make known Another.”

⁴² There has been some speculation as to why the Apostle chose to depict the Baptizer as bearing witness to the “light” as opposed to “the Word” or “life”. McHugh (*John 1–4*, 25) has some discussion on this. It seems natural, however, that since “light” was the main aspect left off at the end of v. 5 and that this light was rejected by the darkness, that it would be “light” that is highlighted in this section (giving narrative continuity). This section will also repeat the rejection of Jesus.

⁴³ All of this language of subordination should not detract from the fact that being “sent from God” carried with it the authority and voice of God himself. McHugh (*John 1–4*) notes that ajpostevllw often emphasized the authority of the sender carrying “the plenipotentiary delegate of a divine being” (22), often “stressing the commissioning, the task involved and the empowering authority behind the mission” (23).

emphasizes the initiative of God. The light comes into the world rather than the world seeking the light (much less being the light). Perhaps even John's choice of "world" as rather than *ghÆ* is also telling, for he often uses *kovsmoV* negatively to refer to the chaotic, corrupted system and powers.⁴⁴ Using *ghÆ* would have secured a more plainly neutral sense, one that would still be a fitting contrast to heaven (*oujranovV*). What else could one expect from a fallen world than rejection? For although God "determined allotted periods and the boundaries" of where every person was born and would live for the purpose "that they should seek God" (Acts 17:26-27), nobody did. The world failed to inquire of God or diligently pursue his light. It was God who had to chase us down and show us the light. Worst of all, even after God did this, when confronted with the awesome purity of this gospel-light, this world, far from grateful acceptance, rejected God by rejecting his Son and his gospel (v. 10).⁴⁵ Not even his own people who had the most enlightenment thus far received it (v. 11).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Köstenberger, *John*, 34-5; Bultmann, *John*, 54-55; Ridderbos, *John*, 44; Bruce, *John*, 36; Carson, *John*, 122-3. McHugh (*John 1-4*, 34-9) has a lengthy discussion of *kovsmoV*, observing that it has a wide variety of uses in John's works. He sees in particular that "in the NT, as in the early Christian writers, the term *kovsmoV* is taken 'existentially' and refers to a world full of sinfulness and hostile to God. This is nowhere more true than in John" (38). So in John 1, the *kovsmoV* is the "theater" of where salvation takes place (*kovsmoV*) whose audience is vastly hostile to him (*kovsmoV*) (39). Barrett (*St. John*, 162) sees it more as a term that describes the "organized and responsible world" and does not emphasize its hostility to God and Christ. Borgen ("Hellenism," 113) sees both the Jews ("his own") and "the world" as both representing hostility against God.

⁴⁵ Thompson ("John," 373) notes, "The prologue foreshadows the division between belief and unbelief so characteristic of the rest of the Gospel (1:10-11)."

⁴⁶ Köstenberger (*John*, 36) calls this turn of events an "irony, even tragedy" for humanity. Similarly, Kruse (*John*, 66) notes, "There is irony here", and later calls it "tragic irony." See also Erdman, *John*, 15. Ridderbos (*John*, 44) says, "The world *should* have known him. The inner contradiction of this not knowing is not explained," at least not until v. 14. M. Hooker ("The Johannine Prologue and the Messianic Secret," *NTS* 21 [1974]: 40-58) has an interesting study whereby she compares Mark's prologue (and use of the apparent "Messianic secret" idea) to John's Prologue and the Logos. She says, "And just as, in Mark, the secret is on occasion shouted aloud but falls on deaf ears, so in John, Jesus speaks of himself in terms which to us seem obvious—but which the Jews fail to comprehend" (49).

Despite the divine initiative, both the world and Israel not only scoffed and spat on the Word but had him put to a horrific death.

3c. God's Initiative with Believers

Human responsibility is not in question in John's prologue. Everyone is expected to "know" (v. 10), "receive" (vv. 11, 12), and "believe" (v. 12).⁴⁷ There is no doubt about this. What they may have doubted, though, is that God can hold us accountable for our choices yet make us depend entirely on his initiation for the success of and ability to make those choices.⁴⁸ Thus, we are not surprised that John goes out of his way to specify how everyone who successfully received and believed Christ came to their saving faith.

John first describes how salvation was obtained: "he gave them the right" (εἰς τὸ δικαίωμα αὐτοῦ ἀξιοῦσαν). This was not a right earned, prize snatched, or a power that welled up from within. It was a gift to be received only when given. Second, the Apostle offers a set of descriptions of how salvation was not obtained. It was "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (v. 13).⁴⁹ One might quibble over what some of these may refer to specifically, but such controversies cannot drown out John's clear message here: human beings are not the source of salvation; God is. Unpacking each of these phrases may lend further insight into the specifics of John's emphases. John does not leave room for human effort but places the rebirth all squarely in the divine source and initiative.

⁴⁷ Kruse (*John*, 67) correctly notes that "receive" here is used virtually synonymously with "believe". McHugh (*John 1-4*, 44) similarly sees that *lambavnw* is often equated with *pisteuvw* in John (and here is equated most directly with *paralambavnw*). Thompson ("John," 373) correctly sees the human response here as key for introducing the contrast between belief and unbelief in all of this Gospel. Bultmann (*John*, 57 fn 3) interestingly notes of *parevlabon* in v. 12, "The idea that the few are predestined by virtue of their heavenly nature . . . is foreign to the text." Westcott (*St. John*, 8) takes *paralambavnw* to refer to the receiving of traditions handed down.

⁴⁸ Brown (*Gospel*, 23) directly states that v. 13 speaks of "those predestined by a predestination that shows itself in doing the good work of God."

⁴⁹ Witherington (*Wisdom*, 56) believes that this verse is inserted by John as further argumentation for his ultimate goal of the hearers receiving Christ and being born again.

“Not of blood” is a tricky phrase.⁵⁰ Its difficulty is merely the tip of a larger iceberg-sized problem with this verse, especially if one holds to the majority-view interpretation of it. For such interpreters noticeably walk on exegetical eggshells to navigate to their way through their view. Some like E. Haenchen even call the verse not “at all comprehensible”, whose “awkwardness” of expression has “created a riddle in this passage and forced interpreters to take refuge in the hypothesis that here the Evangelist is speaking ‘indirectly.’”⁵¹ Haenchen’s solution is simply to view the verse as a later insertion, a clumsy redaction. Is this the only solution? It seems that we must not give up on the possibility of an internally coherent interpretation, which means that either the majority interpretation needs to be better explained and nuanced or that an alternative view needs to be forwarded. The latter will be argued for below, though a coherent form of the former is also acceptable.

Returning to the “not born of blood” phrase, we observe with many others that “blood” (αἷμα) most often refers to the liquid as the source or seat of biological life. Thus, many take it to mean “natural descent” or bloodline connections⁵². This makes sense as many Jews thought that their blood ties to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob insured their salvation.⁵³ Many Gentiles boasted in being able to trace their lineage to a great king, warrior, or even the gods.⁵⁴ The difficulty of this connection, however, comes in explaining the plural use of αἷμα (αἵματα), the only plural use in the NT. Some treat the plural form as having no different a meaning than the singular, but most regard the shift as significant asserting it points to the ancient

⁵⁰ Ridderbos (*John*, 47) says, “The plural of ‘blood’ is hard to explain.” Barrett, (*St. John*, 164) says, “The plural, ‘bloods’, is unusual. . . .”

⁵¹ Haenchen, *John I*, 118-19.

⁵² Bruce, *John*, 39.

⁵³ Morris (*John*, 90) affirms these phrases are “to be understood in the light of the Jewish pride of race. The Jews held that because of the ‘Fathers,’ that is their great ancestors, God would be favorable to them.” See also Köstenberger, *John*, 39-40.

⁵⁴ It is a well-known staple of Greek mythology, for example, to have a claim to be descended from one of the gods, whether it is a direct god-human offspring like Heracles, Achilles, or Aeneas or someone like Trojan King Priam who is about five generations removed from the Zeus-Electra offspring Dardanus.

view that procreation results from the mixing of the blood of two parents, hence a plurality of blood or “bloods”.⁵⁵

Why do many proceed down this interpretive pathway, despite the fact that blood-mixing-for-procreation is an odd if not a biologically incorrect view? ⁵⁶ They see that the metaphor used to describe salvation here is “birth” (ejgennhvqhsan) and assume that the “from...” phrases that follow are required to follow the birth imagery. Thus, the majority sees the three phrases in v. 13 as affirming the same principle: salvation is not like biological birth, something that results from the mixing of blood (“bloods”), the sexual desire that results in pregnancy (“will of the flesh”), or the choice to have children (“will of a husband”).⁵⁷ And this series, it is argued, is

⁵⁵ Kruse (*John*, 67) agrees that “bloods” means the mixing of blood from mother and father. Hendriksen (*John*, 82, fn 30) cites similar views. Keener (*John*, 404) is also a bit perplexed by the plural calling it “curious” but not seeing its oddity as obfuscating his seeing it as referring to “human origins”. Perhaps many have been persuaded by J. Behm (“ai»ma - aiJmatekusiva,” in *TDNT*, vol. 1, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 172-3) who strongly stated, “The notion that blood is the material of conception ... underlines the expression in Jn. 1:13 ... the distinctive plur. ai{mata indicating the union of the lifebearing blood of both parents in the child.” Ridderbos (*John*, 47) perhaps wisely puts aside this idea and settles for “something more general: ‘whose birth is not a question of blood’ or the like.” See also Westcott, *St. John*, 9.

⁵⁶ One should be cautious to affirm a view that dances close to a false understanding of procreation. If some in that time believed that procreation happened by the intermixing of blood, this is biologically and thus factually in error (unless one generalizes “blood” as “life” or tries to equate it to DNA).

⁵⁷ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 47) summarizes it this way: “The three negative phrases thus affirm that the birth of believers comes not through sexual congress, nor from those natural urges which lead to sexual congress, nor from the desire of a husband, here considered as the one who initiates the move towards physical union.” Barrett (*St. John*, 164) further observes that “the threefold negation (not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of a husband) seemed to correspond exactly with the church’s belief about the birth of Jesus, and since the Virgin Birth is nowhere expressly mentioned in John it was natural to introduce a reference to it here.” Of this view he says, “The reading which refers explicitly to the birth of Jesus is to be rejected; but it remains probable that John was alluding to Jesus’ birth, and declaring that the birth of Christians, being bloodless and rooted in God’s will alone, followed the pattern of the birth of Christ himself.” Hendriksen (*John*, 82) says, “All three emphasize that in no sense whatever do believers derive their birth or standing from physical or biological causes.” Morris (*John*, 90) sees the “piling [Footnote continued on next page ...]

further summed up in John 3:6's statement: "That which is born of flesh is flesh".⁵⁸

Is this the only way to read this text? Another option—one utterly absent from scholarly consideration—is that blood is a reference to temple sacrifices. If so, then would John be denying that blood pays for sins? Would this contradict the blood atonement of Jesus? It would do so more evidently if αἷμα were in the singular form,⁵⁹ as the once-for-all death of Christ has been a staple of christological soteriology in the early church, especially as explicated in the Book of Hebrews. Here is where the unique plural may come into play. Rather than seeing the plural as a reference to a plurality of drops or the mixing of blood for conception, we see it as a reference to the blood sacrifices of Israel. "Bloods" point to the ongoing, never-ceasing animal sacrifices, the streams of blood that flowed from the tabernacle and temple.

With no other plurals uses in the NT, we have to look elsewhere. The LXX contains forty-nine uses of the plural form of αἷμα, and none of them are remotely procreative or have any reference to "bloodlines". Forty-seven of the forty-nine refer to violent acts of bloodshed. These do not fit John 1:13. But the remaining two instances refer to blood sacrifices (Ps 16:4; 2 Chr 30:16).⁶⁰ Could

up" of these expressions all point to the biological source of salvation argues against here. See also Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 138; Witherington, *Wisdom*, 56; Westcott, *St. John*, 9.

⁵⁸ See Keener, *John*, 405; Carson, *John*, 126; Kruse, *John*, 67-8.

⁵⁹ Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 146-7) says, "The Evangelist cannot write that the Christians were not born of blood (singular), because their birth does in fact depend upon a death which later he describes as involving the outpouring of blood (xix. 34). For this reason the discourse with Nicodemus on regeneration leads up to the death of Christ (iii. 16, cf. I John i. 7); for this reason, too, perhaps, he chooses here the plural rather than the singular." See also Barrett (*St. John*, 164) and Morris (*John*, 89, fn 87) who reference Hoskyns. Contra Bultmann (*John*, 60 fn 2) who says, "Hoskyns' explanation is very forced. . . ." Interestingly, Hoskyns' observation may bolster the idea that John had blood sacrifices in mind. Is it not more logical that a move away from a singular sacrifice is a move toward a plural sacrifice rather than toward a biological image?

⁶⁰ The only plural form noted in LSJ's lexicon conveys the idea of "streams of blood" (58), an apt picture of the result of so many blood sacrifices. The LXX has twenty-three genitive plurals, eight dative, and eighteen accusative/ [Footnote continued on next page ...]

John be saying that the “blood sacrifices” of the Jewish (and even pagan) cult system cannot make someone born again? The long lines of Jews coming to offer blood year after year only affirms its impotence to save. Only the single sacrifice, the one blood offering of Jesus the God-man could do it. And this was his purpose for coming into the world: to endure the rejection and let himself have his blood spilled in order to do what the “bloods” could not do. This is the point of the writer of Hebrews when he contrasts the multiplied “blood of goats and calves” with Jesus’ own “once for all” blood offering (9:12). This system “can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near” (10:1). For “every priest stands daily at his service, offering

nominative for a total of forty-nine plural uses. Forty-seven of the forty-nine are used to describe mainly the violent spilling of blood: “murders” (2 Chron 24:25), the “bloodthirsty” (Ps 5:6; 26:9; 55:23; 59:2; 139:19; Prov 29:10), “bloodguilt” (Ps 51:14), violence (1 Sam 25:33; 2 Sam 16:8; 3:28; 16:7-8; 21:1; 1 Ki 2:5, 33; 2 Ki 9:7, 26; 1 Chr 22:8; 28:3; Ps 9:12; Jer 2:34; 19:4; Ezek 22:2; 24:6; Hos 4:2; Micah 3:10; 7:2; Nah 3:1; Hab 2:8, 12, 17; Ezek 16:36; 22:3, 4, 13; 24:14), and the blood shed in human sacrifices (Ps 105:38, LXX). Keener (*John*, 404-5) rightly calls the violent sense “wholly removed from the sense here”. The last one, the blood shed in human sacrifices, crosses over to two non-bloodthirsty references, those of sacrifices of worship (Ps 16:4; 2 Chr 30:16). There are no plural uses that refer to “bloodlines”. Even Behm (“αιμα,” 172 fn 6) who argues for its procreative meaning cites only a single reference to support this (“Eur. Ion, 693”), a non-biblical source, and even admits that the vast majority of uses are that of violence blood spilling (“plur. elsewhere of mass bloodshed”). Bultmann (*John*, 60 fn 2) and Barrett (*St. John*, 164) also reference Euripedes (*Ion*. 693) for support. Thus McHugh (*John 1-4*, 47) accurately says, “All are agreed that οἱ οὐκ εἰς αἱμavtwν is intended to exclude birth as a result of (εἰς) sexual congress, through the joining of two blood-lines, but no-one seems able to bring forward another example of the usage.” He further notes the the Euripides reference (as Behm gives) “is not quite exact, for it refers to the child born of the demi-god Apollo and the wholly human Creusa” (47 fn 61). Brown (*John*, 12) displays his struggle with the text, discussing the options he denies or finds merely interesting (bloodshed, mixing of bloods, flesh & blood=man, blood=seed) instead of what he affirms to be correct (which is still uncertain though his interpretation of the next two phrases seems to fall in line with the “birthing” analogy view). Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 264 fn 151) says, “[The plural form] is found only in classical Greek for birth.” He gives the most convincing extra-canonical parallel from *1 Enoch* 15:4, “And though ye were holy, spiritual, living the eternal life, you have defiled yourselves with the blood of women, and have begotten (children) with the blood of flesh, and, as the children of men, have lusted after flesh and blood as those <also> do who die and perish.”

repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifices for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (10:11-12).

Granted, “bloods” as procreation polemically works for John’s argument and makes sense if all three phrases are seek to eliminate sources of salvation rooted in human lineage. But if one is not tied to a literal sense of birth but rather sees it in a metaphorical sense as virtually equivalent to meaning “saved by”, “renewed by”, or “transformed by” (as is its core sense in John 3:3-8 as referencing back to Ezekiel 36-7),⁶¹ then necessary ties to the birth image are loosened if not severed. One is free to reevaluate the meaning of each of the three phrases.

Arguments marshaled for the birth view are many, but the sacrificial interpretation is an overlooked option, one that deserves consideration. But whether “bloods” refer to ancestry or sacrifices, either possibility supports John’s insistence that human resources cannot account for the power to save. Divine intervention begun by divine initiative is the only solution.

“Nor of the will of the flesh” refers to human self-will. Paul may often narrow “flesh” to the sinful aspect of fallen humanity, but John is less inclined to do so.⁶² After all in v. 14, when the Word became

⁶¹ A similar error is often made in regard to John 3:5, the phrase “γεννηθη: εν υδατι και... πνευματι”. There also some tie “water” necessarily to the image of “born”, forcing it into some image of the breaking of amniotic fluid at childbirth or some odd semen imagery. But if the concept of (re)birth as radical life transformation is the key then the phrase “born of water and spirit” takes its meaning rightfully from the concept of radical life change taught in Ezekiel 36-7, where it uses water, heart, and wind/spirit all to depict this transformation. Thus, “of bloods” in 1:13 does not have to follow the image of birth just because it follows from γεννηθη anymore than “of water” does in 3:5. See Carson, *John*, 191-5. This is further strengthened seeing that John’s three other uses of “born of...” in 1 John (using γεννηθη instead of the bare genitive perhaps to emphasize source) each has “God” as the source. Do we have to force “God” to fit the image of “birth”?

⁶² Barrett (*St. John*, 164) says, “σάρξ in John is not evil in itself. . . .” Morris (*John*, 89) says that “we should bear in mind that John does not use the term ‘flesh’ with the evil sense it commonly has in Paul.” McHugh (*John 1-4*, 47) agrees that “σάρξ here carries no hint of sinfulness, or of opposition to God. . . .” See also Erdman, *John*, 17.

“flesh”, few would dare to suggest that “sinful nature” is in view. Instead, many like Keener describe it as “the father’s authority in deciding to ‘have’ a child”.⁶³ Carson says it means “the product of sexual desire”.⁶⁴ These may contain truth but are overly limiting.⁶⁵ The birth language is metaphorical for “new life,” and so the *ejk*+genitive prepositional phrases should not be chained to the birth image. What is emphasized here instead is “will”, an element repeated twice.⁶⁶ The only other NT instance where “will” (*qevlhma*) and “flesh” (*savr̄x*) are used together is in Eph 2:3 where Paul speaks of the “will of the flesh” as sinful, a usage unlikely in John’s context. Nor is the procreative or sexual sense of *savr̄x* likely since there is no example of *savr̄x* having a sexual meaning or connotation in John’s entire corpus.⁶⁷ John uses *savr̄x* more often to refer to the body or to the whole person.⁶⁸ It makes better sense, then to see “will of the flesh” as referring to the will of the whole person or self-will. J. A. T.

⁶³ Keener, *John*, 404. See also Barrett, *St. John*, 164.

⁶⁴ Carson, *John*, 126. See also Bruce, *John*, 39; Hendriksen, *John*, 82. Similarly, Westcott (*St. John*, 9) sees “will of the flesh” as contrasted with “will of man” in that “flesh” refers to desires “from the animal nature” and “man” as “that which comes from the higher human nature.”

⁶⁵ McHugh (*John 1–4*, 47) who is skeptical about “bloods” referring to sexual congress also displays hints of doubts about “will of the flesh” meaning sexual desire. He says, “*qelhvma*, rare in Classical Greek, but frequent in Christian literature, means *will* or *desire*, and here especially *the sexual desire or urge*, a sense found (according to many) in 1 Cor 7.37 and perhaps in Eph 2.3 as well.” Ridderbos (*John*, 47) asserts, “The double ‘of the will of’ refers to sexual desire. . . .” Brown (*John*, 12) lists the same texts as the above where “flesh” refers to sexual desire but does not seem overly enthusiastic about this interpretation, jumping quickly to the note (as others like Bruce [*John*, 39] do) that this does not have a sinful edge to it.

⁶⁶ Keener (*John*, 405) observes, “God’s will is a major emphasis in this Gospel ..., and is implicitly contrasted with human will and probably human religion in 1:13....” Morris (*John*, 89) sees “will of the flesh” as a reference to motives, namely, “the desire that arises out of the human bodily constitution.”

⁶⁷ BDAG (915) lists “source of the sexual urge” as a possible meaning, citing only, of course, John 1:13 as its example.

⁶⁸ Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 147) oddly says of v. 14’s use of *savr̄x*: “Flesh means man, not body.” Yet if this is applied to just one verse before then he has John saying in effect: “nor of the will of man [*savr̄x*], nor of the will of man”. Though he links these two ideas, they cannot be merely repetitious.

Robinson is correct to connect John 1:13 with John 6:51-58 where Jesus teaches that it is his “flesh” that gives eternal “life”.⁶⁹ It is Jesus’ body and life that he gives. There is no birth analogy, and Jesus even includes drinking his “blood”! The Prologue has already removed the thought that eternal life is sourced in our flesh and blood decisions and actions. Rather, it is Jesus’ will, actions, and very body that will be the source of that life.

Thus, it is the human decision in general that John means to eradicate.⁷⁰ He does not explain the mechanics of how this works out, how a person’s will does not initiate the choosing of God yet that choice clearly happens in receiving and believing in him (v. 12). He wishes to eliminate all possible notions of human contribution to salvation. However that choice happened, it did not arise from self-initiation.

“Nor of the will of man” speaks to another person’s will. Some have rendered *ajnhvr* as the more specific option of “husband” even narrowing it to the procreative desire of the husband.⁷¹ Such a reference does not seem consonant with John’s broader goal. We agree with L. Morris who suggests it means “nor of any human volition whatever”.⁷² This speaks to all kinds of relationships: husband-wife, parent-child, sibling-sibling, and friend-friend. John recognizes that even if the self-will is taken out of the question—as the previous phrase does—one might argue that another human being can

⁶⁹ Robinson (“Prologue,” 123) says, “It is true that in the Prologue there is the same antithesis between being born ‘of the will of the flesh’ and being born ‘of God’ (i. 13) and in chapter vi it is the ‘flesh’ of the Son of man that gives ‘life’ (vi. 51-8).”

⁷⁰ Köstenberger (*John*, 40) affirms that “human decision” is in view but that this as a contrast between what is natural versus supernatural not necessarily sinful versus spiritual.

⁷¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 82; Barrett, *St. John*, 164. McHugh (*John 1–4*, 47) at this point bends to the weight of conceding the first two as referring to sexual congress. Bruce (*John*, 39) argues that the expectation of *a[nqrwpoV]*, which is replaced instead by *ajnhvr* is suggestive of the meaning as “husband” rather than “man.”

⁷² Morris, *John*, 90. See also Erdman, *John*, 16. Köstenberger (*John*, 40) also seems to agree that a broader view beyond “a husband’s will” is in the Apostle’s mind.

take credit. The godly example, the evangelizing parent, the praying spouse could all try to lay hold of the glory of a person coming to faith. John removes this from our radar screen leaving only the work of God to create our spiritual rebirth, an idea that John later adds more meat to in chapter three when he confronts Nicodemus. For now, John is content to trounce any notion of the human initiative in salvation. A. C. Gaebelein says,

The above negative statements answer all the modern inventions which deny the new birth. Not of blood, that is by inheritance, as the Jews boasted of having Abraham for their father; not of the will of the flesh, by reformation, and the efforts of themselves; nor of the will of man, by the acts and deeds of others, as the religious man does, by looking to an ordinance or a man-made priesthood to help him.⁷³

“New birth,” Carson says, “is . . . nothing other than the act of God.”⁷⁴ It is by his divine initiative. This sums up the sentiment of verse 13 nicely.

4. The Incarnation (vv. 14-18)

If there is a crux in this prologue, it is found in the incarnation.⁷⁵ Neither Johns introduced to their listeners a Word who remained in the eternal comfort of the Holy Trinity. Here was a *lovgoV* destined for a union with humanity in an utterly unique and possibly permanent way. Thus, the Apostle arrives at this climactic point in v. 14: “the Word became flesh”. He has already jumped the gun on the incarnation in v. 10 telling us that this Word was in the world, but this was to facilitate a statement on the rejection of this Word by the very world he created. Now John returns to the divine *lovgoV* of vv. 1-5

⁷³ Gaebelein, *Gospel*, 21. Though preferring a different read on “blood”, his readings of the other two are consonant with this paper’s view.

⁷⁴ Carson, *John*, 126. Morris (*John*, 90) similarly says, “Nothing human, however great or excellent can bring about the birth of which he speaks.” Holding to the procreation view but still capturing the heart of the message that John is rejecting human means of salvation Ridderbos (*John*, 47) says, “In all three the reference is to the natural process of procreation—that which lies within human power. . . .” Barrett (*St. John*, 164) says, “No human agency is or can be responsible for such a birth as this.”

⁷⁵ Morris, *John*, 63.

and proceeds to narrate what happened when he waded into the human stream.

This is why John's Gospel diverges from the example begun by Matthew and Luke who followed both the normal pattern of Greco-Roman biographies and the priorities of the Israelites by starting with a human genealogy. The ability to trace one's lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was of paramount importance. John does have genealogy; it is of a different kind. His traces Jesus back farther to the Father.⁷⁶ The Apostle's vision leaves the confines of earthly ties and affirms without reservation or apology the preexistent deity of Jesus of Nazareth. So, Haenchen says, "The Fourth Gospel leaves the other three far behind in a single super leap by starting its account in the time before creation, in eternity."⁷⁷ John sets all of this up so that we are startled to read that this amazing, exalted, transcendent *lovgoV* decided to become a human being.

Why would he do this? A gulf created by sin separated heaven from humanity.⁷⁸ God had to initiate the bridge-building project from his side, since we lacked the materials and capability from ours. If humans were ever to communicate with ants, we would have to take the initiative to reach down to their level, for there is no hope that they could reach up to ours. So it is with God and us. The *lovgoV* becoming *savrx* represents a condescension of the highest order. Thus, Carson aptly describes Christ's enfleshment as "the supreme revelation".⁷⁹

Also noteworthy is John's language of "dwelt". It bears the inescapable reference to the wilderness tabernacle and the wanderings

⁷⁶ See Plummer, *Gospel*, 60. Barrett (*St. John*, 149) may go too far in saying that John "must have regarded [Matthew's and Luke's genealogies] as inadequate, and as possibly misleading."

⁷⁷ Haenchen, *John 1*, 101.

⁷⁸ Keener (*John*, 405) says, "The chasm was unbridgeable from the human side...."

⁷⁹ Carson, *John*, 127. Neyrey (*John*, 45) declares, "At first glance this is improbable and downright scandalous. What sense could anyone make of an immoral figure taking on mortality? And in the world of purity concerns and separation from all evil and corruption, how bizarre to hear of a heavenly being camping in the company of sinners and enemies."

of wayward Israel.⁸⁰ The term *ejskhvnwsen* could simply refer to a temporary, earthly existence. Its basic sense is “pitching a tent”, an apt description of transitory human life though this is not the emphasis here.⁸¹ Paul uses its less common noun form, *skhænoV*, to refer to a literal tent as a metaphor for this body and this life (2 Cor 5:1, 4). Its more common noun form, *skhvnh*, is used to refer to a temporary “shelter” (Matt 17:4; Heb 11:9),⁸² but is far more often used to speak of the wilderness tabernacle (Acts 7:44; Heb 8:2, 5; 9:2, 8, 11, 21; 13:10). This is the best candidate for the Apostle’s reference. Why draw upon this image?

The wilderness allusion is a storehouse of referential wealth out of which one could pull many treasures engraved with the divine initiative. These would be valid connections. But John prizes above all other riches the glory of God,⁸³ the most important aspect of the

⁸⁰ See Köstenberger, *John*, 41; Carson, *John*, 127-8; Kruse, *John*, 68. Contra Barrett (*St. John*, 165-6) who does not buy the tabernacle connection and believes *ejskhvnwsen* simply refers to taking up a temporary residence.

⁸¹ See Hendriksen, *John*, 84-5. W. Michaelis (“*skhnhv - skhnopioivV*,” in *TDNT*, vol. 7, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 386) sees this connection but argues that in John 1:14 the verb “does not refer to the temporary and transitory element in the earthly existence of the Logos but is designed to show that this is the presence of the Eternal in time.” McHugh (*John 1-4*, 55) agrees that “it is hard to think . . . he wished to stress that Jesus’ life on earth was so transitory.” See also Ridderbos, *John*, 51. Contra Käsemann (*Jesus*, 10) who seems to think that it refers to the temporality of life as he connects it with Jesus’ ‘a little while’ discourses in John. Bultmann (*John*) sees the reference to “a guest who took his leave again” (67) and connects the temporary dwelling with the movement of Wisdom among men (67 fn 1). Westcott (*St. John*, 11-12) sees temporality as primary meaning and acknowledges connections with the Tabernacle and cautions against a jump to an etymological connection to “Shekinah”. See also Haenchen, *John 1*, 119.

⁸² This is apt in light of the contrast with the eschatological existence in the New Heavens and New Earth where in Revelation there are descriptions a heavenly “tent/ dwelling”, which may very well be merging the tabernacle idea into the believer’s daily habitation as the eternal state will be one gigantic holy of holies.

⁸³ G. M. Burge (“Glory,” in *DJG*, ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall [Downers Grove: IVP, 1992]) sees a connection between John’s use of glory and light (270). He also asserts, “Glory is never associated with any futurist Son of man saying. John vigorously advances the theme into the earthly ministry of [Footnote continued on next page ...]

tabernacle reference in this context.⁸⁴ For the very next clause says, “and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” Twice, “glory” is mentioned. God revealed himself in and to Israel by the pillar, the cloud, and the Shekinah glory.⁸⁵ But amazing as was the glory then, it was yet dim compared to the glory of the Son now revealed in the flesh. As with every instance of God’s revelation of glory in the OT, there is the understanding that it came by God’s grace not man’s merit. Hence, the Apostle says that this glory is “full of grace and truth.”

In verse 15, the Baptizer is once again pulled into the Logos-narrative. While some translations like ESV put it in parenthesis, the verse’s function is like that of vv. 6-8.⁸⁶ As before, John serves simply as a herald of the incarnate Word, a subordinate to the greater light. For the Baptizer himself declares that Jesus outranks him because of his preexistence.⁸⁷ John himself points to Jesus prior existence in the

Jesus” (269). Käsemann (*Jesus*, 6) even asserts, “The prologue in 1.14 has already summarized the content of the Gospel with ‘We beheld his glory’.”

⁸⁴ Ridderbos (*John*, 53) says that “in the Old Testament there is a persistent connection between God’s presence in tabernacle and temple and the divine *kabod* revealing itself there.” See also Brown, *Gospel*, 23. In a nice parallel to the Decalogue, Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 139) says of this incarnation, “The Word of God is now engraved, not in stone, but in human flesh.”

⁸⁵ Keener (*John*, 408) notes that the Israelites might have favored this Greek word for tabernacle because its consonants (s-k-n) matched the Hebrew word Shekinah. Carson (*John*, 127) asserts that “Hellenistic Jews with at least a smattering of Hebrew” would be able to pick up on this lexical connection. McHugh (*John 1-4*, 56) says that “the correspondence between *skakan* and *skhnou* must have seemed too good to miss.” See also Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 148; Bruce, *John*, 40. Michaelis (“*sknhv*,” 381) admits that some uses, especially those in Revelation, seem consonant with a shekinah connection.

⁸⁶ Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 151) asserts, “This verse does not break the development of the prologue; and its position is, therefore, the result neither of a dislocation in the text (Calmes) nor of a redaction (Bultmann).” Westcott (*St. John*, 13) reaffirms that John’s witness here serves “as representing the final testimony of prophecy.”

⁸⁷ There is a bit of difficulty rendering εἰς πρόσωπόν μου γενόμενος, ὁ ἦν πρόωθέν μου ἡν, because both clauses could be saying the same thing resulting in an oddly repetitive rendering: “he was before me because he was before me”. The ESV chooses to retain the “before me” sense in πρόωθέν μου deciding instead to tease out a hierarchical sense from εἰς πρόσωπόν μου (“ranks before me”).
[Footnote continued on next page ...]

Godhead as the reason for his subordinate role. The emphasis on a temporal preexistence cannot help but reinforce the divine initiative. We are reminded that he who was before all things is the Creator-Word who began all things. The incarnation is no different; it is an act of new creation initiated by he who stepped into flesh.

The emphasis upon grace in vv. 16-17 continuing the “grace and truth” from v. 14 points once again to the theological heart of the divine initiative. God stooped down to the lowly sinner to raise him up from the depth of his miry sins. The “fullness of his grace” (v. 16, $\kappa\alpha\lambda\upsilon\rho\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$... $\kappa\alpha\lambda\upsilon\rho\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$) is a rhetorical way of emphasizing what E. Hoskyns calls “super-abounding grace”,⁸⁸ whether it is grace

Avoiding a tautology is eminently desirable as this cannot be the Apostle’s meaning. The use of $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\rho\sigma\gamma\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\iota$ as indicating rank is not common and such a use is attested in the LXX but not the NT. Expressing chronological and spatial positioning is far more typical of $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\rho\sigma\gamma\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\iota$. But $\pi\rho\omega\tau\circ\iota\tau\eta\tau\alpha$, while often indicating a temporal order, seems a better candidate for expressing prominence or preeminence than $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\rho\sigma\gamma\epsilon\iota\tau\alpha\iota$. It makes just as much sense to translate the whole phrase as “He who comes after me existed before me, because he is superior to me.” Westcott (*St. John*, 13) notes that $\pi\rho\omega\tau\circ\iota\tau\eta\tau\alpha$ $\mu\omicron\upsilon$ “is very remarkable. It expresses not only relative, but (so to speak) absolute priority.” Bruce (*John*, 42) seems to halfway agree saying, “[The Word’s] precedence over John, however, is expressed in exceptionally emphatic terms. John does not simply say *pro mou en* (‘he was before me’) but *protos mou en* (literally ‘he was first in respect of me’), that is to say, ‘he had absolute primacy over me’ or better, as the NEB renders it, ‘before I was born, he already was.’” The good news is that regardless of which way it is rendered, both temporality and preeminence are expressed. But most follow the ESV’s rendering. See McHugh, *John 1–4*, 62-3; Ridderbos, *John*, 55; Kruse, *John*, 71-2; Hendriksen, *John*, 88. Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 139) nicely sums up the main idea saying, “On the plane of mere historicity Jesus is younger than John. Seen, however, as John saw Him, in His relation to the eternal Word of God, Jesus is altogether pre-eminent.”

⁸⁸ Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 152. Carson (*John*, 131) reads this as “superabundant, overflowing grace” and acknowledges that this is “[b]y far the most popular modern interpretation”. He chooses instead “grace *instead of* grace”, the first grace being that of the Old covenant and the second of the New (132). See also McHugh, *John 1–4*, 64-7. Morris (*John*, 98) blends these two seeing the phrase as speaking of grace as “continuous and is never exhausted” based upon this continuity proceeding from Law-grace to Christian-grace. See also Hendriksen, *John*, 88-9; Neyrey, *John*, 46. Contra Bultmann (*John*, 78 fn 2) who also takes $\alpha\iota\upsilon\tau\iota\omega\varsigma$ as “instead of” but rejects the OT to NT movement. Instead, taking a cue from Philo, he sees it as referring to “the $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ of the Revealer, whose [Footnote continued on next page ...]

replacing or replenishing grace it is evident that grace is overflowing. Bruce describes it beautifully saying, “What the followers of Christ draw from the ocean of divine fullness is grace upon grace— one wave of grace being constantly replaced by a fresh one. There is no limit to the supply of grace which God has placed at his people’s disposal in Christ. . . .”⁸⁹ The superiority of the new covenant ushering in by Jesus who brought “grace and truth” (vv. 14, 17) reminds us that while the divine initiative began in Genesis creation, it reached its heights in Gospel incarnation. Thus, John Chrysostom commenting on the fullness of God’s grace in vv. 16-17 rightly observed that “God always takes the initiative in the giving of benefits.”⁹⁰

5. The Apostle’s Rhythmic Prose

If there was any hesitation at all that the divine initiative is central to the prologue, the last words leave no room for doubt. In a striking flourish, John ends his introduction with an impressive, meaty word: *ejxhghvsato*. In fact, all three distinct sections in vv. 1-18 each conclude with a significant verb, arguing for a three- instead of a four-fold division. Verses 1-5 end in *katevlaben*, 6-13 in *eΔgennhvqhsan*, and 14-18 with *eΔxhghvsato*. Each action is a poignant conclusion to the section. This pattern is not repeated after the prologue. While not quite “poetry”, elements such as this argue that the Prologue is what both F. F. Bruce and Carson call “rhythmical prose”.⁹¹ Not

inexhaustibility is unfolded in its ever changing variety. . . .” See also Haenchen, *John 1*, 120. Schnackenburg (*St. John*) acknowledges that “the ceaseless stream of graces which succeed one another” (275) is the dominant view of his time, but he suggests that it refers to the idea that the first “grace” is that we receive, which corresponds to the second “grace” that comes from Him. Thus, “what they possess, they have received from him, and it corresponds to what he bears within himself in supreme fullness” (276).

⁸⁹ Bruce, *John*, 43.

⁹⁰ *Homily 14 (John 1.16,17)* from *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, Homilies 1-47*, in *The Fathers of the Church* series (Washington, D.C.: CUAP, 1957), 136.

⁹¹ Bruce, *John*, 28; Carson, *John*, 112. Morris (*John*, 64) similarly calls it “elevated prose.” Many like Brown (*Gospel*, 21) calls the prologue “a hymn, a poetic summary of the whole theology and narrative of the Gospel. . . .” Epp (“Wisdom, Torah, Word”, 129, italics his) affirms what he sees as “the well-known poetic character of the Johannine Prologue” as well as its “widely recognized [Footnote continued on next page ...]

surprisingly, each of these verbs points to the divine initiative. Rejection of and failure to receive the light (*katevlaben*, v. 5) is the human response to God's initiation. Being reborn (*eΔgennhvqhsan*, v. 13) puts humanity in the passive position, as such a transformation only can happen by the power of God. The revelation of God to us (*eΔxhghvsato*, v. 18) in the incarnation resulted from the will of the Father and the agreement of the Son to take on flesh and pitch his tent among us.

The lack of a direct object to *eΔxhghvsato* may invite an implied "Him", that is the Father.⁹² This is contextually and theologically fitting. But what if John meant for the sentence to remain object-less? If so, then we should consider letting it stand simply as: "He has

hymnic character." Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 223) argues for a "middle way" view between calling it John's own creation and one taken from a known hymn. He says, "[John] must have used . . . a primitive Christian hymn which celebrated the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ, added his own comments and forged links between it and the Gospel narrative." Witherington (*Wisdom*, 49), who sees connections to Wisdom hymns almost everywhere in this Gospel, does not find it necessary to see John inserting a known hymn into his Prologue, for John "may have composed this based on precedents in wisdom literature." He calls the Prologue "poetry, with some lapses into prose at the end, or poetic prose." Similarly, Robinson ("Prologue," 125) while calling the forms of "prose" and "poetry" oversimplified, settles for describing the Prologue as "a poem with prose additions". Contra Boyarin (*Memra*, 264) says, "I will throw in my lot here with the minority" and proceeds to argue that the Prologue is not hymnic, "not one of praise or adoration" but rather "a homiletic retelling of the beginning of Genesis". It is "targumic/midrash," an interpretation and expansion of a known text (267). He further intimates that the homiletical reading explains why John used "Logos" and not "Sophia". Since the Genesis 1—the object of interpretation—emphasizes God "speaking", it is more properly the "Logos" and not any other description of God (like "Sophia") that fits the context (269).

⁹² Brown (*John*, 16) says, "The 'Him' is not expressed but is demanded if we translate the verb as 'reveal'," which he does. Contra F. Büchsel ("*hJgevomai - dihvghsiV*," in *TDNT*, vol. 2, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 908 fn 4) who asserts, "One can hardly supply *qeovn* as obj. from v. 18a, since God is not an obj. of explanation." Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 279) helpfully says that "where there is no object, but where it is a question of 'seeing God', it must mean speaking of things hidden in God, tidings of the divine glory." Bultmann (*John*, 83 fn 3) similarly sees that this verb "stands without the obj., for the verb as such can mean: to give divine knowledge, divine instructions; cp. Aesch., Choep. 118; Plat., resp. 427c."

revealed.”⁹³ Revealed what? Well, that requires further reading.⁹⁴ Hence, in this final declaration we find both a summary statement and the piquing of our curiosity and not just of what the *lovgoV* revealed. Just who is this incarnated Word? What did he do? How did God put forth this gospel, and why did the people reject it? What was revealed? These are answered in the rest of John’s Gospel. This open-endedness is intriguing and entices our curiosity. If an introduction is meant to leave us longing for more, how better to end it than with such a cliffhanger? So, A. Köstenberger says, “As he concludes his introduction, John therefore makes the important point that the entire Gospel to follow should be read as an account of Jesus ‘telling the whole story’ of God the Father.”⁹⁵ Whatever else we anticipate about the rest of the story, we can expect that it will be couched in the

⁹³ Westcott (*St. John*, 15) says, “The absence of the object in the original is remarkable. Thus the literal render is simply, *he made declaration*.” He also notes that the term “is constantly used in classical writers of the interpretation of divine mysteries.” Hoskyns (*Fourth Gospel*, 153) similarly notes that it is a “technical term for the Rabbinic interpretation of the Law . . . and for the making known of divine secrets. . . .”

⁹⁴ Keener (*John*, 424) is right to anticipate that “Jesus unveils God’s character absolutely”. McHugh (*John 1–4*, 75) dangerously pulls in multiple senses of the word rendering its as: “*has been our guide, and show and led the way*”. Kruse (*John*, 74) skates a bit too close to anachronism by pushing the meaning of *eΔxhghvsato* with “exegesis” and saying that Jesus has “expounded” the Father. Epp (“Wisdom, Torah, Word”, 138) similarly says, “Jesus Christ is now the interpreter, the narrator, the exegete of God!” Käsemann (*Jesus*) calls Jesus “the Father’s ‘exegete’ (1.18)” (11), and he says again later that Jesus is “the exegete of the invisible God” (70). See also Hoskyns, *Fourth Gospel*, 153. Bruce (*John*, 45) only cautiously recommends saying “the Son is the ‘exegete’ of the Father.” Ridderbos (*John*, 59 fn 143) notes the use is “not in the sense of ‘explain’ but ‘reveal’ . . .” Büchsel (“*hJgevomai*, 908) argues that because *eΔxhghvsato* has no direct object, it cannot be rendered with a sense of “explain” (since the lack of an object itself fails to explain what is being explained). He instead sees “reveal” as better as it does not require an object as necessarily as “explain”, and the idea of God being “revealed” makes better sense to him than God being “explained”.

⁹⁵ Köstenberger, *John*, 50. McHugh (*John 1–4*, 76) says, “The evangelist, as he was writing these last lines of the Prologue, must have been fully aware that his Gospel was quite different from any other gospel book then circulating.” This is a fitting observation to justify that aforementioned elephant-in-the-room. John’s not repeating what’s been done before; he is definitely adding some new ingredients to the pot.

assumption of the divine initiative. For in doing so, God the Father takes all the credit for the salvation wrought by his Son and thus is maximally glorified.

Conclusion

The brilliance of John's Prologue bedazzles our spiritual senses from beginning to end: from the Creator's light that shines in the darkness (vv. 1-5) to the incarnated illuminator rejected (vv. 6-13) who the Apostle enlightens us as being the glory of the tabernacled Word (vv. 14-18). Thus, Gaebelein says, "No man could ever conceive such wonderful truths as they are put together in these first eighteen verses of this chapter."⁹⁶ Certainly, no man alone produced this text but an inspired man who concursively wrote by the leading of the Holy Spirit, a man whose desire to pen this very text was itself, no doubt, prompted by divine initiation.

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⁹⁶ Gaebelein, *Gospel*, 27.

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