

The Gospel of John (4); The Prologue (1:1-18) (part 4)

Introduction:

This is the fourth Lord's Day that we have given to this prologue, which is contained in John 1:1-18. It was our intention to complete our consideration of this prologue today, but that is not going to happen. We will only address verse 14, I believe.

We have followed a simple outline, which is as follows:

I. The Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18)

A. The Introduction of the Word (1:1-5)

B. The Witness of the Word (1:6-8)

C. The Manifestation of the Word (1:9-13)

And today we begin to consider,

D. The Uniqueness of the Word (1:14-18)

These four divisions of the prologue correspond to what may be discerned as four paragraphs.¹ Let us read the prologue one more time, taking note of these divisions.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

⁹That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" ¹⁶And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but grace and

¹ Commentators differ in opinion as to the distinguishing of paragraph divisions in an English translation. In consideration of today's text (1:14-18), some advocate v. 14 should be placed at the end of the third paragraph rather than at the beginning of the fourth. Edward Klink, who wrote a commentary that we have been using, advocated verse 14 should be included at the end of the third paragraph. He wrote: "Several commentators, as well as the NA²⁷ (the Nestles-Aland Greek NT, 27th ed.) suggest the final section of the prologue begins at v. 14. But the matching grammatical structure between vv. 9-14 and 1-5, the narrative development of v. 14 as the climax of vv. 9-14, and the textual evidence strongly suggest that v. 14 be viewed as the conclusion of the third section of the prologue. Thus vv. 15-18 fulfill the role of an ancient prologue by providing the final stage of the lens through which the Gospel must be read, giving a concluding introduction to the character(s) and unseen forces at work in the story [Klink, *John* (Zondervan, 2016), p. 111]. Considering the content, however, verses 9-13 speak of those who either received or received not the Word, but v. 14 speaks directly of the incarnate Word, to whom John the Baptist bore witness (vs. 15-18). We will consider v. 14 as the beginning of the fourth paragraph.

truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Let us first consider that...

1. The Word of God became incarnate. (1:14)

We read in verse 14, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” Each phrase and clause of this sentence is rich in meaning. We will attempt to take apart this sentence by examining its parts.

(1) “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*”

The first clause of this sentence is perhaps one of the most profound statements of Scripture: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The infinite, eternal God who is Spirit, assumed a human body and soul, so that we might know the one true God and relate to Him through His Son. As one wrote,

“He (John) is clear on the deity of the Word.
But he is just as clear on the genuineness of his humanity.”²

These words, “*And the Word became flesh*”, distinguish biblical Christianity as the only true religion through which the true God may be known by mankind. It is a declaration of the incarnation, in which eternal God became one of us so that God would be with us. Only through the incarnation can people come to know God and relate to Him as their God.

No other religion promotes a similar belief in the incarnation of God, God being born into this world as a human being. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, all reject the belief in the incarnation of God. Christian cults are generally identified as those heretical groups who falsely call themselves Christians, because they reject the biblical and historical Christian doctrine of the incarnation. Therefore, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals (not all Pentecostals), are cults; they are not Christian, for they reject the biblical teaching of the incarnation.

The incarnation is a mystery. By mystery we are not saying that the incarnation cannot be understood in a measure. It does mean, however, that it cannot be understood fully. How could it? This doctrine being a mystery, moreover, also means that an explanation of it can be difficult and misunderstanding is possible. In fact, error respecting the incarnation is one which greatly troubled Christians in the first several centuries. We have spoken often of the error of the Gnostics. By the second century this heretical group caused much difficulty for true Christianity. *Gnostics* denied the humanity of Jesus. They taught that Jesus was God, but he was not fully man; he only appeared to be a man to others. The *Ebionites* of the 2nd century erred on the other side in that they denied the deity of the Lord Jesus—he was only a man. The *Arians* came into prominence in the 4th century. They denied that Jesus’ divine nature was equal with or the same as that of God the Father. They taught that Jesus was a created being. He was the Son of God but not God the Son. The Jehovah’s Witnesses of today have the same error as the ancient Arians. *Apollinarians* arose in the late 4th century. They denied that Jesus had a complete human nature. The *Nestorians* of the early fifth century confessed that Jesus had two natures, but they also said that he had two personalities, a sort of split personality. And then there were the *Eutychians* (a. 450 AD), who taught that the two natures of Jesus were so fused with one another that He was no longer really God and He was not really a man either.

All of these heresies and the confusion that they generated resulted in a general council of churches being convened at Chalcedon (which is now a part of Istanbul) on the eastern side of the Bosphorus Straits. Its findings were concluded and published in AD 451. **The Council of Chalcedon** articulated the classic and biblical teaching regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Here is a summary of their council:

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 102.

“We, then, following the Holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood... to be acknowledged in two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably (ασυγχυτως, ἀτρεπώς, ἀδιαίρετως, ἀχωρίστως); the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.”³

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) wrote of how this council met and dismissed four of the heresies we identified above with four adverbs in its statement. “They said that the divine and human natures when ‘the Word was made flesh,’ were united *truly*, to oppose the Arians, --*perfectly*, to oppose the Apollinarians, --*undividedly*, to oppose the Nestorians, --and *unmixedly*, to oppose the Eutychians.”

Again, the Council of Chalcedon stated:

Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and is acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably... the property of nature being preserved, and concurred in one person.

Or, it might be stated in this way:

The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man, in two distinct natures and one person forever.

Or, as it is stated in our Baptist Confession of 1689:

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man. (Baptist Confession of 1689, Art. 8, par. 2)

And so, Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man.

Again, it was **J. C. Ryle** set forth four important points about Christ’s incarnation that we must hold fast:

(a) In the first place, let us carefully remember, that “when the Word became flesh,” He became so by the union of two perfect and distinct natures in one Person. The manner of this union we cannot explain, but the fact we must firmly believe. “Christ,” says the Athanasian Creed, “is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world,⁴ and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man. Who, although He be God and man, yet He is not two but one Christ; one not by conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God.” These words are very important. The Word was not made flesh by changing one nature into another, or by laying aside one nature and taking up another. In all our thoughts about Christ, let us take care that we do not divide His Person, and that we maintain steadily that He has two distinct and perfect natures. The old Latin line on the subject,

³ William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 84.

⁴ I am entirely comfortable with the way this phrase is expressed, for it might be construed to suggest a time when He became the begotten Son of God. He was not “begotten before the world”, but rather, He was the eternally begotten Son of God. There never was a time when He was not the Son of God.

quoted by Gomar, is worth remembering. It represents “the Word made flesh,” as saying, “I am what I was, that is God:--I was not what I am, that is man: I am now called both, that is both God and man.”

(b) Secondly, when “the Word became flesh,” He did not cease for a moment to be God. No doubt He was pleased to veil His divinity and to hide His power, and more especially so in some seasons. He emptied Himself of external marks of glory and was called “the carpenter.” But He never laid His divinity aside. God cannot cease to be God. It was as God-man that He lived, suffered, died, and rose again. It is written that God “has purchased the Church with His own blood.” It was the blood of one who was not man only, but God.

(c) Thirdly, when “the Word became flesh”, He was made a man in the truth of our nature like unto us in all things, and from that hour has never ceased to be man. His humanity was not a humanity different from our own, and though now glorified is our humanity still. It was a perfect man no less than perfect God, who resisted temptation, fulfilled the law perfectly, endured the contradiction of sinners, spent nights in prayer, kept His will in subjection to the Father’s will, suffered, died, and at length ascended up to heaven with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to man’s nature. It is written, that “in all things it behooved Him to be made like His brethren.” Moreover He did not lay aside His humanity, when He left the world. He that ascended up on the Mount of Olives, and is sitting at the right hand of God to intercede for believers, is one who is still man as well as God. Our High Priest in heaven is not God only, but man. Christ’s humanity as well as divinity are both in heaven. One in our nature, our elder Brother, has gone as our Forerunner to prepare a place for us.

(d) Lastly, when “the Word became flesh,” He did not take on Him “peccable flesh.” It is written that He was made in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). But we must not go beyond this. Christ was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). But He “knew no sin,” and was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and without taint of corruption. Satan found nothing in Him. Christ’s human nature was liable in weakness, but not to sin. The words of the fifteenth Article⁵ must never be forgotten: Christ was “void from sin, both in His flesh and in His spirit.”⁶

And so, we affirm that Jesus Christ is one divine Person but with two distinct natures. When we say that He has two natures, both a divine nature and a human nature, we are saying that Jesus Christ has two *minds*--one human and one divine, two sets of *emotions* or *affections*--one human the other divine⁷, and two *wills*--one human and one divine. That the Lord Jesus had a divine mind, affections, and will is clear, for He is God. That Jesus Christ possessed a human *mind* is clear, for we read of Jesus, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). That Jesus Christ possessed human *affections* is clear, we read, for example, that “He sighed deeply in his spirit” (Mark 8:12), and that “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). And that He had a human *will* is clear when we read of His prayer to His Father, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” (Luke 22:42).

It is important that we understand and affirm that Jesus Christ did not return to heaven just as He had left heaven to become Jesus of Nazareth, that He was not a man only while on this earth, but when He died and rose He returned to heaven exactly as He had been before the incarnation. The death of Jesus on the cross did not end His humanity. The same man that went into the tomb came out of the tomb on the day of His resurrection. This man ascended into heaven and the Father enthroned this man on His own throne. A man, the man Christ Jesus, is now ruling over all mankind and all of history. The incarnation was not merely a historical event; it is a present reality. With the incarnation, the Second Person of the glorious Holy Trinity became a man and will

⁵ Ryle refers to the 15th of “The Thirty-Nine Articles”, which is the confession of the Church of England, to which He was a minister.

⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 30f.

⁷ It is a difficult topic to speak of the “affections” of God, for we tend to project our concept of human emotions upon God, which can lead quickly to problems. The classic and reformed understanding of the nature of God is that He is “without... passions” (Baptist Confession of 1689, Art. 2, par. 1); that is, God does not have emotions that control or sway Him as we have. If He did, then it would mean that He is changeable. But that is not possible, for He is perfect and immutable.

continue unto eternity as a man--one of us and one with us. At the incarnation, the eternal Son of god became Jesus Christ, the God-man, and He will remain the God-man unto eternity.

Now one might respond, "All this discussion or argument over the fine details of Christ's person and nature seem to be minor and unimportant. As long as someone believes in 'Jesus', what does it matter?" But at stake is the eternal salvation of our soul. If you are not right on the person of Jesus in whom you have faith, you cannot have salvation. The apostle Paul expressed his concern for the church at Corinth:

Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly -- and indeed you do bear with me. ²For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. ³But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. ⁴For if he who comes preaches *another Jesus* whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it. (2 Corinthians 11:1-4)

To put your faith in "another Jesus" is to put your faith in one who does not exist. No such person will stand on your behalf on the Day of Judgment.

Now many times someone will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and that one knows and believes that Jesus is both divine and human, but the finer details of the incarnation are not yet understood. This should not unsettle or trouble that believer. But as the truth of the incarnation in the Word of God is presented and explained, the true believer embraces the truth, the result is that the content of his faith is enhanced and enriched.

The Lord Jesus Himself said that *to believe in His deity is essential to salvation*. John 8:24 reads, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am** (He), you will die in your sins." His confession of "I am" is the same statement that God made to Moses at the burning bush. Moses had said to God,

¹³"Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

When Jesus said, "*if you do not believe that I am*", He was saying that if you do not believe that He is God Who showed Himself to Moses and Israel, Whose name is "I am," then you shall die in your sins. Denominations and "churches" and "preachers" who deny the deity of Jesus Christ as has been set before us, such as the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Protestant liberals, do not know God and do not and will not have salvation as long as they persist in their very serious heresy.

But not only is it essential to believe in Jesus' deity in order to be saved, it is equally necessary to believe in His humanity. John the Apostle described this heresy as the error of the antichrist (a reference to the Gnostic heresy of his day). 1 John 4:1-3 read,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and *every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God*. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

John also states this in his second epistle:

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world *who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh*. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. ⁸Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. ⁹Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone

comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 7-11)

Now within the first portion of verse 14, we read the term “flesh.”

(2) “And the Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us...”

This is a rather unusual word that John used which must be carefully defined by the context in which it is found. Actually, there are as many as 13 nuances of meaning of this word in the New Testament.⁸

The term *flesh* (σὰρξ) has various meanings in the New Testament. In our passage it has reference to human nature, considered not as sinful (8:46), yet for a while with the curse due to sin resting upon it, so that until the ransom had been paid it is subject to weariness, pain, misery, death (4:6, 7; 11:3, 35; 12:27; 13:21; 19:30). It was that kind of “flesh” which the Word assumed in his incomprehensible, condescending love.⁹

Here, by the term, “flesh”, John was speaking of Christ simply as coming in a human body, but that He also assumed a human soul. Jesus Christ has *a human body* and *a human soul*. This is what John was expressing by his use of “flesh” in this context. In other contexts, the term, “flesh”, may speak of the principle of sin that resides in every fallen human being. Obviously, John does not use the term in this sense when referring to the “flesh” of the Lord Jesus. **John Calvin** stated this clearly:

The word flesh is not taken here for corrupt nature, (as it is often used by Paul,) but for mortal man; though it marks disdainfully his frail and perishing nature, as in these and similar passages, for he remembered that they were flesh (Psalm 78:39), all flesh is grass (Isaiah 40:6). We must at the same time observe, however, that this is a figure of speech in which a part is taken for the whole; for the lower part includes the whole man.

The term “flesh” suggests the weakness and lowliness to which we are in comparison to our God who took our nature upon Himself.

Now John could have simply wrote, “And the Word became a man.” And if he had done so, it would have probably had the same meaning for us as, “And the word was made flesh.” But the Holy Spirit moved John to use “flesh.” There was an important reason for doing so. When John wrote his Gospel, there was a form of Gnostic heresy called Docetism.

Also there was the seemingly attractive heresy of Docetism, which held that the flesh or body of Jesus could not have been real. Many people believed that matter (thus flesh and bone) was inherently evil, and so, if attracted by the claims of Jesus Christ, they could not understand how this body was real. Thus he only seemed to possess a body. So it was that the apostles insisted on a genuine incarnation and a real resurrection.¹⁰

These Gnostics believed that which was spirit was essentially good and that which was physical, as a human body, was essentially evil. When John wrote, “And *the Word* became *flesh* and dwelt among us”, John was refuting this gnostic heresy that was beginning to adversely affect churches. John did so clearly and directly. He purposed to dismiss and discredit the heresy of the Gnostics forthrightly.

We then read,

(3) “And the Word became flesh *and dwelt among us...*”

⁸ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 107f.

⁹ Hendriksen, p. 84.

¹⁰ Peter Toon, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), pp. 13f.

The eternal Son of God of God became flesh and dwelt among us. What great condescension that God would be one of us and dwell among us! **Matthew Henry** commented on this:

He *dwelt among us*, here in this lower world. Having taken upon him the nature of man, he put himself into the place and condition of other men. The Word might have been made flesh, and dwelt among the angels; but, having taken a *body* of the same mould with ours, in it he came, and resided in the same world with us. He *dwelt among us*, us worms of the earth, us that he had no need of, us that he got nothing by, us that were *corrupt* and *depraved*, and revolted from God. The Lord God came and dwelt even *among the rebellious* (Psa. 68:18). He that had dwelt among angels, those noble and excellent beings, came and dwelt *among us* that are a *generation of vipers*, us *sinners*, which was worse to him than David's dwelling in Mesech and Kedar, or Ezekiel's dwelling *among scorpions*, or the church of Pergamus dwelling *where Satan's seat is*. When we look upon the upper world, the world of spirits, how mean and contemptible does this flesh, this body, appear, which we carry about with us, and this world in which our lot is cast, and how hard is it to a contemplative mind to be reconciled to them! But that the eternal Word was *made flesh*, was clothed with a body as we are, and dwelt in this world as we do, this has put an honour upon them both, and should make us willing to abide in the flesh while God has any work for us to do; for Christ dwelt in this lower world, bad as it is, till he had finished what he had to do here.

The manner in which John expressed the earthly habitation of our Lord Jesus is quite telling. "More literally translated, the Greek verb *skeenoo* (ἐσκήνωσεν) means that the Word pitched his tabernacle, or lived in his tent, amongst us."¹¹ The verb itself precisely means "to pitch one's tent." God was dwelling among His people as God had dwelt in the past in the midst of Israel. **Leon Morris** wrote of this:

As A. M. Ramsay says, "We are reminded both of the tabernacle in the wilderness, and of the prophetic imagery of Yahweh tabernacling in the midst of His people, and of the Shekinah which He causes to dwell among them... The place of His dwelling is in the flesh of Jesus." He goes on to bring out the force of the present passage by saying, "All the ways of tabernacling of God in Israel had been transitory or incomplete: all are fulfilled and superseded by the Word-made-flesh and dwelling among us." That is a great point. What had been hinted at and even realized in a dim, imperfect fashion earlier was perfectly fulfilled in the Word made flesh.¹²

That the eternal Word was "dwelling" among us in His "flesh" suggests that His body, that physical aspect of His human nature, is a **temple** in which God dwells. Of course the Lord Jesus spoke of His body as a temple. We will consider this in some detail in John 2. There we read:

¹³Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. ¹⁵When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

¹⁸So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

¹⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**"

²⁰Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

²¹But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²²Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 127.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 104.

The physical body of the Lord Jesus was the temple in which God dwelled and manifest Himself to the world.

(4) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, *and we beheld His glory*, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

When John wrote, “we beheld His glory”, he more clearly links the idea of the Word dwelling among us in Jesus Christ was like the glory of God dwelling with children of Israel when they journeyed for 40 years through the wilderness to the Promised Land. What John may have been suggesting was that in and due to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God would fulfill His promise of bringing salvation to His people in terms of a *second exodus*, which He had made known through the prophets.¹³

In Isaiah 40 we read a prophecy of John the Baptist announcing the preparation of a highway through the wilderness. But the highway spoken here is not so much the highway in which exiles are returning to Zion. Rather it is a highway through the wilderness, *which is preparation for the visitation of the King*. The highway required filling in valleys and taking off the tops of hills in order to make a straight highway on which ease and rapid travel can occur. Again, Isaiah 40:3 reads,

“Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make straight in the desert
A highway *for our God*.

The voice is preparing the highway by preparing the people through repentance. Isaiah 40:4f read,

⁴Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;
⁵*The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,*
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

John the Baptist was preparing the people to receive their promised King, Jesus Christ, who would usher in the kingdom of God, bringing into its realm all those that repent of their sins and believe on Him. The glory of the Lord would be revealed to them to escort them in their return to the Lord in salvation. Just as God led Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, so the coming Messiah, the promised King, would lead His people out of condemnation and captivity (exile) unto and into the kingdom of God.

And so here in John 1 we have had the ministry of John the Baptist set before us (vs. 7-9), who gave witness to the Word, and now we read of the glory of God seen by the Apostle John in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. **George Beasley-Murray** wrote,

Into that condition of human weakness the Logos¹⁴ “pitched his tent” (ἐσκήνωσεν, from σκηνή, “tent”) and revealed his glory (cf. *Shekinah*, having the same consonants as the Greek σκηνή). The language is evocative of the revelation of God’s glory in the Exodus—by the Red Sea, on Mount Sinai, and at the tent of meeting by Israel’s camp (especially the last; see Exodus 33:7-11; for the glory in and upon the Tabernacle cf. Exodus 40:34-38). The Exodus associations are intentional, and are part of the theme of the revelation and redemption of the Logos-Christ as fulfilling the hope of a *second Exodus*.¹⁵

Donald Carson was perhaps a little more to the point:

¹³ Cf. Isaiah 51:10-16

¹⁴ *Logos*, you will recall, is the Greek word for “Word”, used 3 times in v. 1.

¹⁵ George. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 14.

Whether the allusion in John 1:14 is to the tabernacle or to the tent of meeting, the result is the same: now, the Evangelist implies, God has chosen to dwell amongst his people in a yet more personal way, in the Word-become-flesh.¹⁶

John wrote, “And *we* beheld His glory.” He was not saying “we”, in that “all Christians” have seen His glory. John was probably referring to himself and the other Apostles and disciples who had been with the Lord and had witnessed firsthand our Lord’s ministry.¹⁷ “In the context of the incarnation, the *we* who saw the Word’s glory must refer to the Evangelist and other Christians who actually saw Jesus in the days of his earthly life.”¹⁸

The Evangelist looks back and sees how the whole earthly career of the incarnate Word, and pre-eminently the sacrifice of the cross which crowned that career, revealed the glory of God. ‘We looked on his glory’—the testimony of the Evangelist and his fellow-disciples – might serve as a sub-title for this Gospel; ‘glory’ is one of the principle keywords.¹⁹

(5) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, *the glory as of the only begotten of the Father*, full of grace and truth.”

The above translation is that of the New King James Version (NKJV). The newer English translations vary in their rendering of this verse. The English Standard Version (ESV) reads, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, *glory as of the only Son from the Father*, full of grace and truth.” The New American Standard Version (NASV) reads very much like the NKJV, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, *glory as of the only begotten from the Father*, full of grace and truth. And the New International Version (NIV) reads, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, *the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father*, full of grace and truth.”

These translations attempt to express one of two different opinions of what John was stating regarding the Son’s relationship with the Father in this verse. There are those who advocate John was declaring Jesus to be the eternally begotten Son from eternity. Others argue that John was emphasizing the unique and special relationship that this Son had with the Father. **Edward Klink**, whose recently published commentary I am using and am growing to appreciate, wrote of this debate of meaning:

This glory that was seen was nothing other than the “unique Son” (*μονογενοῦς*). The difficulty of defining this ambiguous term makes its significance here and in verse 18 all the more complex. A large amount of ink has been spilled regarding the two possible meanings of this word: “only begotten (son)” or “only/unique.”

Again, some say that John was asserting was that this Son, who came from the Father, was His unique and favored Son. **D. A. Carson** believed that the NIV was the best rendering of John’s idea. He wrote,

The glory John and others saw was *the glory of the One and Only*. The underlying expression was rendered ‘only-begotten’ Son in earlier translations, but despite the efforts of some to restore that rendering, the NIV is a little closer to what is meant. The glory displayed in the incarnate Word is the kind of glory a father grants to his *one and only, best-loved* Son – and this ‘father’ is God himself. Thus it is nothing less than God’s glory that John and his friends witnessed in the Word-made-flesh.²⁰

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1991), p. 126.

¹⁷ Klink identifies 5 possibilities for the identification of “we”, but after stating them, he affirmed what we do here, that the “we” is a “historical ‘we’: those physically present with Jesus” [Klink, *John* (Zondervan, 2016), p. 109].

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 128.

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 41.

²⁰ Carson, *John*, p. 128.

Those who argue this view cite **Genesis 22:2** which speaks of Abraham's relationship with Isaac. There God gave instruction to Abraham,

Then He said, "Take now your son, *your only son* Isaac, *whom you love*, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

They would say that Isaac is described as Abraham's "only son", but in fact the biblical record declares that Isaac was not his only son, for Ishmael was also a son of Abraham, some 12 years older than Isaac. And so, what was conveyed was that Isaac was Abraham's unique son, the one favored by Abraham, the one that he loved uniquely and supremely above Ishmael. Those then take this idea to John 1:14 and argue that John had already written of other children of God (1:12). They then say, "What John was saying is that Jesus Christ is God's unique or best-loved Son." But what is subtly conveyed by this interpretation is that this Son is similar to His other children, although greatly favored above them. Klink, however, although carefully conveying the idea of the uniqueness of the Son, nevertheless, shows that there is no similarity, but rather sharp distinction between the "Son" of verse 14 and the "children of God" in verse 12:

This title (i.e. "unique son") needs to be viewed in relation to this section of the prologue, vv. 9-14, in which John has already introduced the concept of "children of God" and the nature of their derivation. Verse 14 is not emphasizing that the "unique Son" is similar to these "children": in sharp contrast, it is claiming for him an ultimate uniqueness. Thus, while the concept of the Word's sonship is certainly implied by the use of "unique son" (*μονογενοῦς*), what is made emphatic is that it is unparalleled, incomparable, and wholly other. Both the "children" and the "Son" relate to the Father and are derived, in some sense, "from" him but in manners and classes that are entirely dissimilar.²¹

Yes, Jesus is God's "unique Son", in that He is the eternally begotten Son of the Father, who assumed a human nature in the incarnation. I appreciate the emphasis that the Dutch theologian, **Herman Bavinck** (1854-1921), gave to His "uniqueness":

"But the name *Son of God* when ascribed to Christ has a far deeper meaning than the theocratic: he was not a mere king of Israel who in time became an adopted son of God²²; neither was he called Son of God because of his supernatural birth, as the Socinians and Hofman held; neither is he the Son of God merely in an ethical sense, as others suppose; neither did he receive the title Son of God as a new name in connection with his atoning work and resurrection, and interpretation in support of which John 10:34-36; Acts 13:32, 33; and Romans 1:4 are cited; but he is Son of God in a metaphysical sense: by nature and from eternity. He is exalted high above angels and prophets, Matthew 13:32; 21:27; 22:2; and sustains a very special relation to God, Matthew 11:7. He is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased, Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; the only begotten Son, John 1:18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9ff.; God's *own* Son Romans 8:32; the eternal Son, John 17:5, 24; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; to whom the Father gave to have life in himself, John 5:26; equal to the Father in knowledge, Matthew 11:27; in honor, John 5:23; in creative and redemptive power, John 1:3; 5:21, 27; in work, John 10:30; and in dominion, Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; 22:29; John 16:15; 17:10; and because of this Sonship he was condemned to death, John 10:33; Matthew 26:63ff."²³

(6) "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth*."

²¹ Klink, *John* (Zondervan, 2016), p. 110.

²² However, I believe this to be true of our Lord's human nature as the Son of David. See Psalm 2:7, Rom. 1:3, 4; Acts 13:33.

²³ Herman Bavinck in *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids, 1951), 1951, p. 270; which is cited in William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 87.

These words, “full of grace and truth”, do not refer to the Father, but to the Son of the Father. John affirms that Jesus Christ is “full of grace and truth.” By the way, this verse contains the first direct reference to God the Father in the prologue.

One said of the expression, “full of grace and truth”, that “The phrase is almost certainly an allusion to Exodus 34:6.”²⁴ In this passage God gave instruction to Moses to fashion two new tablets on which the Ten Commandments would be written. We then read in **Exodus 34:4-9** these words:

⁴So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

⁵Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. *⁶And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,* ⁷keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”

⁸So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. ⁹Then he said, “If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.”

In Jesus Christ the full grace and truth of God is revealed to the world.

But there is a richer thought conveyed through the use of these words:

What makes the Word-become-flesh unique is that he is “full of grace and truth” (πλήρης χάριτος και ἀληθείας)... Interestingly, in Exodus 33:18 Moses begs God, “Now show me your glory.” The Lord replies by agreeing to “cause all my goodness to pass in front of you” (33:19). The Lord’s goodness, therefore, is the glory of God. And “grace and truth” become terms in the Old Testament that define the goodness which is God’s glory. The use of “glory” and “grace and truth” in v. 14, therefore, implies that God’s original expression of covenantal faithfulness to his people, Israel, has been transcended. The sending of the “unique Son” from the Father is the ultimate expression and source of covenantal faithfulness. The unique Word-become-flesh is God’s glory and covenantal faithfulness. He is explicit evidence that God is a Father to His children.

Both these words, grace and truth, are important terms in the Scriptures. Regarding “grace”, “it is a minor mystery that John uses it three times in the Prologue and not again throughout the Gospel.” However, John uses the term, “truth”, 25 times in His Gospel.

Grace carries the idea of God’s unmerited favor that He has toward His people and that which He bestows upon people. The word speaks literally of “that which causes joy.”²⁵ The ideas conveyed are that God bestows His goodness, kindness, mercy, and blessing, even on those who are undeserving of His favor.

Truth speaks of the reality in contrast to shadows and types that came before His incarnation. Truth speaks of what really is. In John’s Gospel truth is set forth as eternal reality being revealed to mankind.

It is a shame that we cannot unpack this expression to the degree to do it justice. But here is a good summary by **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) of these words:

Some think that they describe our Lord Jesus Christ’s character, during the time that He was upon the earth, in general terms. Full of grace were His lips, and full of grace was His life. He was full of the grace of God, the Spirit dwelling in Him without measure; full of kindness, love, and favour to man; full of truth in His deeds and words, for in His lips was no guile; full of truth in His preaching concerning God the Father’s love to sinners, and the way of salvation, for He was ever unfolding in rich abundance all truths that man need to know for his soul’s good.

Some think that the words describe especially the spiritual riches that Christ brought into the world, when He became incarnate, and set up His kingdom. He came full of the gospel of grace, in

²⁴ Klink, p. 111.

²⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 106.

contradistinction to the types, and figures, and shadows of the Law of Moses. In short the full grace of God, and the full truth about the way of acceptance, were never so clearly seen until the Word became flesh, dwelt among us on earth, opened the treasure-house, and revealed grace and truth in His own person.²⁶

Conclusion:

We stated out the outset that the incarnation is a doctrine unique to biblical Christianity. All other religions deny the incarnation in very clear and unambiguous terms. All Christian cults are in error respecting the incarnation. The manner in which John set forth the incarnation in this prologue should instruct us and encourage us in our witness of Jesus Christ to the world about us. Although there are many professing Christians, who are in reality unconverted, and they may claim to believe the biblical teaching on the incarnation, as we face and engage the world with the Gospel, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ should be one of our foremost claims and assertions. We do press upon a soul a responsibility to act when we confront them with the truth that God has become one of us, in order to impart to us grace and truth, in order to redeem sinners from their sin and bring them into a saving, covenantal relationship with God the Father. This should be central to our message. May the Lord enable to press this truth to the hearts and minds of many in our world!

And then, let us see in the incarnation the importance and the value of human beings about us.

Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself, and take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.²⁷

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,
which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
(Acts 20:32)

²⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 34.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 28.