

Dr. Dave Turner, John, Session 3, Prologue – John 1:1-18 Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Turner, John, Session 3, Prologue – John 1:1-18, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Turner's teaching session on the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18) explores its significant role as an introduction to the entire book. He likens the prologue to the vestibule of a building, highlighting how it presents the **key themes** that will be developed later in John's Gospel. The session examines the **theological importance** of the prologue, including the pre-existence of Jesus, his role as light and life, and the concept of responding to him. Turner also analyzes the **literary structure**, such as chiasm, and discusses the background of the term "Logos" in both Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Bible, while also addressing a controversial translation. Finally, the session considers the prologue's connection to the **Old Testament**, particularly the relationship between Jesus and Moses regarding the revelation of God's glory, grace, and truth.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Turner, John, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → John).



Turner_John_Session
n03.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Turner, John, Session 3, Prologue – John 1:1-18

Briefing Document: Dr. David Turner on the Prologue of John (John 1:1-18)

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented by Dr. David Turner in Session 3 of his teachings on the Gospel of John, focusing specifically on the prologue (John 1:1-18). Dr. Turner frames the prologue as a crucial introduction to the entire Gospel, akin to the vestibule of a building, laying out the foundational themes and inviting the reader deeper into the narrative. He delves into the theological significance of the prologue, its literary structure, and the background of key terms like "the Word" (Logos).

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Prologue as an Introduction to Key Gospel Themes:

- Dr. Turner emphasizes the literary function of the prologue as an introduction to the central themes of John's Gospel. He compares it to "how an architect might have skillfully and beautifully designed the vestibule or the atrium of a nice building," stating that "many of the topics that he spends a great deal of time on in the book are brought to the fore here in the introduction, in the prologue."
- The prologue serves to "interest the reader to keep reading it."

2. Key Theological Concepts Introduced in the Prologue:

- **Pre-existence of Jesus:** The prologue clearly establishes Jesus' pre-existence before his incarnation: "'in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.' So that text certainly tells us that Jesus had a pre-existence before he came to the world as the incarnation of the divine message for humanity." This theme is further developed later in the Gospel, such as in John 8:58 ("before Abraham was born, I am").
- **Jesus as Life and Light:** The prologue introduces Jesus as both life and light, a connection that recurs throughout the Gospel. Dr. Turner notes, "The fact that Jesus is described as life and the way he later is going to say again in chapter 8, I am the light of the world and I bring life to the world. The way in which Jesus is

spoken of as light and life together is interesting here and it comes up elsewhere in the Gospel."

- **Response to Jesus:** A central theological function of the prologue is to highlight how individuals respond to Jesus. "'He came into his own, the world in which he made, but the world did not know him. He came into his own, his own did not receive him, but as many as did receive him he authorized them to become children of God.'" This theme of reception and rejection is explored through various encounters with Jesus in the Gospel.
- **Glory of God:** The prologue establishes Jesus as the revealer of God's glory, surpassing even Moses' experience. "'As we're told here in John chapter 1 is the one who reveals the glory of God in a way that Moses could only could only dream of.'" This glory is manifested in Jesus' miracles and is a key aspect of his identity, culminating in his prayer in John 17.

3. Literary Structure and Chiastic Pattern:

- Dr. Turner points out the deliberate and memorable phrasing in the prologue, mentioning the ancient literary device of chiasm. He illustrates this with John 1:1-2: "'in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and God was the word and he was in the beginning with God.'" And so, it works out even more neatly if you look at it in Greek."
- He outlines a simplified chiastic structure of the entire prologue, emphasizing the central theme of the response to the Word:
- A: Jesus as original creator (life and light)
- B: John the Baptist witnesses to Jesus as light
- C: Light came into the world, rejected but received
- **X: The Word became flesh (central point)**
- C': John's witness mentioned again
- B': Light coming into the world paralleled
- A': Jesus as ultimate revelator

4. The Significance of "The Word" (Logos):

- Dr. Turner discusses the historical background of the term "Logos," acknowledging its presence in Greek philosophy (as an impersonal principle of reason and order) and Hellenistic Judaism (as a personification of wisdom).
- However, he argues that John's primary intention was likely rooted in the Hebrew Bible's understanding of God's word as active and creative: "'In the Hebrew Bible, God created the world by his word...God spoke the world into existence in Genesis chapter 1 verse 3...God's speech is active, God's speech is performative.'" He cites Psalm 33 and Isaiah 55 to support this view, where God's word accomplishes his purposes.
- Dr. Turner suggests that John's use of "Logos" might have resonated with a broad audience familiar with these different understandings, while ultimately presenting Jesus as surpassing them all.

5. Addressing the New World Translation of John 1:1:

- Dr. Turner directly addresses the controversial translation by the Watchtower Bible Association's New World Translation, which renders John 1:1 as "the word was a god."
- He critiques this translation, stating that it is a "huge mistake" based on a misunderstanding of Greek grammar regarding the absence of the definite article.
- He argues that this translation aligns with their belief that Jesus was God's first creation, a view contradicted by John 1:3 ("through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"). If Jesus were created, verse 3 would have to be interpreted differently.
- Dr. Turner emphasizes the orthodox Christian understanding of John 1:1 as affirming the deity of the Word within the Trinity: "'the person of the father is distinct from the person of the son and is distinct from the person of the holy spirit yet all three of them in nature are truly divine are truly God.'"

6. The Relationship Between Jesus and Moses:

- Dr. Turner highlights the crucial comparison between Jesus and Moses in the prologue, particularly in verses 14-18. He connects the language of Jesus being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, 17) to God's self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 33-34, where God describes himself as "merciful and gracious abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Hebrew: *rav hesed ve emet*).

- He argues that John presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of Moses' desire to see God's glory: "'If this is the case then everything that Moses longed for please show me your glory we have seen in Jesus Christ.'"
- The choice of the reader is framed as whether to accept God's ultimate revelation in Jesus or to remain solely with the partial revelation through Moses. Jesus himself affirmed his connection to Moses (John 5).
- Dr. Turner emphasizes that the law given through Moses was good, but the grace and truth revealed through Jesus are a fuller and more complete revelation. "'It's not to say that Moses did not experience God's grace and truth he did according to Exodus 34 6 but he did not experience it as fully or as completely or as clearly as we can now experience it as we read about Jesus on the pages of scripture.'"

7. The "Spiritual" Nature of John's Gospel:

- Dr. Turner references Clement of Alexandria's description of John's Gospel as "pneumatic" (spiritual), contrasting it with the more "physical" focus of the synoptic gospels. He suggests that John provides a deeper, spiritual understanding of Jesus, revealing what Old Testament saints longed to see.

Conclusion:

Dr. Turner's analysis of the prologue of John underscores its foundational importance for understanding the entire Gospel. It introduces key theological themes such as the pre-existence and deity of Christ, his role as life and light, the concept of God's glory, and the crucial relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament revelation through Moses. The deliberate literary structure and the profound meaning of "the Word" further enrich the prologue's significance, inviting readers to respond to the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The session also addresses potential misunderstandings and misinterpretations of this pivotal passage.

4. Study Guide: Turner, John, Session 3, Prologue – John 1:1-18

Study Guide: The Prologue of John (John 1:1-18)

Key Themes Introduced in the Prologue:

- **The Pre-existence of Jesus:** The prologue establishes that Jesus, as the Word, existed with God before the creation of the world.
- **Jesus as Life and Light:** The prologue introduces Jesus as the source of life and the light of the world, themes that are developed throughout the Gospel.
- **The Ministry of John the Baptist:** The prologue highlights John the Baptist's role as a witness to Jesus, preparing the way for his arrival.
- **Response to Jesus:** A central theme is the varied responses to Jesus: rejection by some and acceptance by others, leading to the possibility of becoming children of God.
- **The Glory of God Revealed in Jesus:** The prologue asserts that Jesus reveals the glory of God in a way that surpasses previous revelations, such as that given to Moses.
- **Jesus as the Word (Logos):** The prologue identifies Jesus with the divine Word (Logos), a concept with roots in both Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Bible.
- **The Incarnation:** The pivotal event of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among humanity is introduced.
- **Grace and Truth through Jesus:** The prologue contrasts the giving of the Law through Moses with the coming of grace and truth through Jesus Christ.

Literary Function of the Prologue:

- To introduce the key theological and narrative themes of the Gospel of John.
- To engage the reader and encourage them to continue reading.
- To present Jesus Christ as the central figure and the ultimate revelation of God.
- To foreshadow the conflicts and decisions that will unfold in the Gospel narrative.
- To establish the divine identity and pre-existence of Jesus.

Key Literary Device:

- **Chiasm:** The prologue exhibits chiasmic structures, particularly in the opening verses, where parallel ideas are presented in an ABBA pattern to emphasize key truths and aid memorization.

Quiz: The Prologue of John (John 1:1-18)

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Turner, what is the literary function of the prologue (John 1:1-18) in relation to the rest of the Gospel of John?
2. What does the prologue tell us about the pre-existence of Jesus, and where does Dr. Turner point to later in John's Gospel to support this?
3. What is the main theological function of the prologue, according to Dr. Turner, in terms of how people respond to Jesus?
4. How does the prologue introduce the theme of God's glory, and what example from later in John's Gospel does Dr. Turner provide to illustrate this?
5. Explain the chiasmic structure mentioned by Dr. Turner in John 1:1-2. What is the purpose of this literary device?
6. According to Dr. Turner, what are the three potential backgrounds for understanding the term "Logos" (the Word) in John 1:1?
7. What is the main issue Dr. Turner raises regarding the Watchtower Bible Association's translation of John 1:1, and what is the theological implication of their rendering?
8. Explain the Trinitarian understanding of John 1:1 ("the Word was with God, and the Word was God") as presented by Dr. Turner.
9. How does Dr. Turner connect the themes of grace and truth in John 1:14-17 to the Old Testament figure of Moses, specifically Exodus 33 and 34?
10. According to Dr. Turner, what does John 1:17 mean when it says "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"?

Answer Key for the Quiz:

1. Dr. Turner compares the prologue to the vestibule or atrium of a building, stating that its literary function is to introduce the key themes of the fourth gospel and to interest the reader to continue reading. It acts as an entryway, beckoning the reader into the broader message of the Gospel.

2. The prologue states that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, indicating Jesus' pre-existence as the divine Word before his incarnation. Dr. Turner points to John 8, where Jesus says, "Before Abraham was born, I am," as a later confirmation of this pre-existence.
3. The main theological function of the prologue is to highlight how individuals respond to Jesus. It shows that Jesus came into the world he made, but while some rejected him, others received him and were given the authority to become children of God, a theme developed throughout the Gospel.
4. The prologue introduces the glory of God being revealed in Jesus in a way that Moses could only dream of. Dr. Turner cites Jesus' first miracle at Cana of Galilee in John 2, where his disciples saw his glory and believed in him, as an early manifestation of this divine glory.
5. The chiastic structure in John 1:1-2, as explained by Dr. Turner, involves the phrases "in the beginning was the word" and "he was in the beginning with God" bracketing the statements "the word was with God" and "God was the word." This ABBA pattern focuses on Jesus' identity with God and his eternal existence alongside Him.
6. Dr. Turner suggests three backgrounds for understanding "Logos": Greek philosophy (impersonal reason or structure), Hellenistic Judaism (personification of wisdom), and the Hebrew Bible (God's active and creative word/speech). He believes John primarily intends the Hebrew Bible understanding while potentially resonating with other concepts.
7. The main issue is that the Watchtower Bible Association's New World Translation renders John 1:1 as "the Word was a god" because the Greek text lacks the definite article before "God." Dr. Turner argues this is a grammatical error and reflects their belief that Jesus was God's first creation rather than being fully divine.
8. Dr. Turner explains that John 1:1, stating "the Word was with God, and the Word was God," supports the Trinitarian understanding of God as one being existing in three distinct persons: Father, Son (the Word), and Holy Spirit. The phrase "with God" indicates distinctness, while "was God" affirms the shared divine nature.
9. Dr. Turner connects the language of grace and truth in John 1:14 ("full of grace and truth") and 1:17 ("grace and truth came through Jesus Christ") to God's self-description to Moses in Exodus 34:6 as "merciful and gracious, abounding in

steadfast love and faithfulness." He suggests John's language intentionally echoes this Old Testament revelation.

10. According to Dr. Turner, John 1:17 does not disparage the law given through Moses, which was holy and good. Instead, it highlights that while the law was a manifestation of God's will, grace and truth are fully and ultimately revealed through Jesus Christ, representing an even better and more complete revelation.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of the prologue (John 1:1-18) in setting the stage for the theological and narrative development of the Gospel of John. Discuss at least three key themes introduced in the prologue and how they are subsequently explored in the rest of the Gospel.
2. Discuss the various backgrounds that may have influenced John's use of the term "Logos" in John 1:1. Evaluate which background Dr. Turner suggests is most central to John's meaning and explain why.
3. Critically examine the theological implications of different interpretations of John 1:1, particularly contrasting the orthodox Christian understanding with the translation offered by the Watchtower Bible Association. Explain the grammatical and theological arguments presented by Dr. Turner.
4. Explore the relationship between Jesus and Moses as presented in the prologue of John (John 1:14-18). How does John portray Jesus as the fulfillment and surpassing of the revelation given through Moses, and what is the significance of this comparison for John's original audience?
5. Evaluate the literary structure of the prologue (John 1:1-18), including the concept of chiasm. How does the structure contribute to the overall message and impact of this opening section of the Gospel of John?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Prologue:** An introductory section of a literary work, often establishing key themes, characters, and context for what follows.
- **Pre-existence:** The doctrine that Christ existed in a divine form before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth.
- **Logos (ὁ λόγος):** A Greek term meaning "word," "reason," or "discourse." In John's Gospel, it refers to the divine Son of God through whom creation occurred and who became incarnate in Jesus.
- **Chiasm (Chiastic Structure):** A literary device in which parallel elements are presented in an ABBA or similar inverted pattern, often to emphasize a central point.
- **Hellenistic Judaism:** A form of Judaism that combined Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture and philosophy, particularly prevalent in the Jewish diaspora.
- **Sophia (σοφία):** The Greek word for "wisdom." In Hellenistic Judaism, wisdom was often personified as a divine attribute involved in creation.
- **Tanakh:** An acronym used in Judaism for the Hebrew Bible, comprising the Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings).
- **Anthropomorphism:** The attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities, particularly to God.
- **Grace (χάρις - charis):** In Christian theology, God's unmerited favor, love, and divine assistance given to humanity.
- **Truth (ἀλήθεια - aletheia):** In the context of John's Gospel, often refers to divine reality, revelation, and the authentic nature of God as revealed in Jesus.
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being in three co-equal, co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
- **Parachoresis:** A theological term, often translated as "mutual indwelling" or "interpenetration," used to describe the intimate relationship and co-operation between the three persons of the Trinity.

5. FAQs on Turner, John, Session 3, Prologue – John 1:1-18, Biblealearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18)

1. Why is the prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) considered so important?

The prologue serves as a carefully crafted introduction to the entire Gospel of John. Dr. Turner compares it to the vestibule or atrium of a well-designed building, highlighting that it introduces the key themes and ideas that John will develop in greater detail throughout his narrative. Its literary function is to capture the reader's interest and provide an initial framework for understanding the significance of Jesus Christ.

2. What does the prologue teach us about the pre-existence of Jesus?

The opening verses, particularly "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," clearly establish the pre-existence of Jesus. This indicates that Jesus existed in divine form before his incarnation as a human being. Dr. Turner points to Jesus' own statement in John 8:58 ("Before Abraham was born, I am") as further support for this theme that is introduced in the prologue.

3. How does the prologue emphasize the divine nature of Jesus?

The prologue repeatedly refers to Jesus as "the Word" (Greek: *Logos*) who was with God and was God. This language signifies Jesus' intrinsic divinity and his unity with God the Father. Dr. Turner discusses the Trinitarian implications of these verses, explaining that while the Father, Son (the Word), and Holy Spirit are distinct persons, they share the same divine essence. The prologue lays the groundwork for understanding Jesus as not merely a man, but as God incarnate.

4. What is the significance of describing Jesus as "light" and "life" in the prologue?

The prologue introduces Jesus as both "life" and "light," themes that recur throughout John's Gospel. This imagery conveys Jesus' role as the source of spiritual life and the revealer of divine truth, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and sin. Dr. Turner notes that the interconnectedness of light and life in the prologue anticipates later pronouncements of Jesus, such as "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

5. How does the prologue set the stage for understanding humanity's response to Jesus?

A central theological function of the prologue is to illustrate how people respond to Jesus. It states that "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." This theme of acceptance versus rejection is a major thread throughout John's Gospel, as various individuals encounter Jesus and make a decision about him.

6. What does the prologue reveal about the "glory of God"?

The prologue states that those who received the Word "have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." It establishes Jesus as the ultimate revealer of God's glory, surpassing even the revelations in the Old Testament. Dr. Turner connects this to Jesus' miracles, such as the one at Cana, where his glory was manifested, and to his prayer in John 17 where he speaks of the glory he had with the Father before creation.

7. How does the prologue relate Jesus to Moses and the Old Testament?

The prologue highlights that "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." This is not intended to diminish the importance of Moses or the law but to present Jesus as the fulfillment and culmination of God's revelation. Dr. Turner emphasizes that the question of how to relate Jesus to Moses was crucial for John's original audience. The prologue suggests that Jesus provides a fuller and more complete revelation of God's grace and truth than what was available through the law given by Moses.

8. What are the different backgrounds considered for the use of the term "Word" (Logos) in the prologue?

Dr. Turner discusses several potential backgrounds for John's use of "the Word" (*Logos*):

* **Greek Philosophy:** In Stoic and Pythagorean thought, *Logos* referred to the principle of reason, structure, and order that permeated the universe. John might have been using this concept to communicate to a Greek audience that Jesus embodies this ultimate principle. * **Hellenistic Judaism:** In Jewish circles influenced by Greek thought, *Logos* was sometimes associated with the personification of God's wisdom (Hebrew: *hokmah*, Greek: *Sophia*). While there are similarities, John goes further by presenting Jesus as the uncreated creator, not a created attribute like wisdom. * **Hebrew Bible:** In the Old Testament, God created through his word (Genesis 1, Psalm 33, Isaiah 55). This concept emphasizes God's powerful and effective speech. Dr. Turner suggests this is the most likely primary background for John's use of *Logos*, portraying Jesus as the divine, creative, and revelatory Word of God in a personal form.