

Dr. David L. Turner, John, Session 3,

Prologue John 1:1-18

6-Min. Video Overview

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In the beginning? I mean, talk about an epic way to start a story, right? But what happens when the story you're telling isn't just a story, but THE story of reality itself? Today, we're diving into one of the most incredible introductions ever written: the first 18 verses of the Gospel of John. It's this poetic, powerful prologue that, believe me, sets the stage for everything that follows. Seriously, just think about that challenge for a second.

How do you possibly kick off a story that you believe redefines everything? I mean, other Gospels start with a family tree or a simple birth narrative. John starts in eternity, with a concept that is somehow both cosmic and incredibly personal. So to really get what John is doing, the scholar Dr. David Turner gives us this perfect analogy.

He calls the prologue a literary atrium. You know, imagine walking into some magnificent building, that grand entryway, the atrium. It doesn't just get you inside; it gives you a feel for the entire place, right? You see the main themes, the style, the whole vibe.

And that is exactly what's happening here. This literary atrium is designed to introduce you to all the major ideas you're going to run into later in the book. You get a glimpse of Jesus existing before time.

You get these powerful metaphors of light and life, and you get the ultimate goal of the whole story, revealing God's glory. This is just the genius of the prologue's design. In just 18 short poetic verses, John basically hands you the blueprint for the entire book.

He previews the big arguments about Jesus' identity. He introduces that core tension you'll see between belief and unbelief. And he makes his central claim right up front: that Jesus is the ultimate, final, complete revelation of God.

Okay, so right at the center of this atrium, like the main pillar holding up the whole ceiling, is this one kind of mysterious, but really powerful term — the Word. In the original Greek, it's Logos. And trust me, understanding what John means by Logos is the key to unlocking this entire prologue.

Now, what's so smart about using the term Logos is that it would have meant something to pretty much everyone in John's audience. If you were into Greek philosophy, you'd think of this impersonal, cosmic principle of reason. If you were a Hellenistic Jew, maybe you'd think of Lady Wisdom from the book of Proverbs.

But it seems pretty clear that the main source John is pulling from is the Hebrew Bible. Just think back to the very first page of the Bible, in Genesis. When God speaks, stuff happens.

His Word isn't just describing things; it's performative. He says, "Let there be light, and boom, light exists. This is a word that literally creates reality.

And this idea just keeps popping up. The Psalms flat-out say the heavens were made by the Word of the Lord. This isn't just talk.

This is God's active, powerful, creative force getting things done. And then the prophet Isaiah adds this other amazing layer. He says God's Word is like rain.

It has a purpose, and it never fails. It always accomplishes what it was sent to do. So when John uses the term Word, he's pulling all of this rich history together — the personal, creative, and totally unstoppable will of God.

But John doesn't just define what the Word is. He drops what you can only describe as a theological bombshell on his audience. He tells them who this Word is.

And here it is, the heart of it all. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Did you catch that incredible tension? The Word is with God, which suggests they're distinct.

But the Word also was God, which suggests unity. This single verse became, as you can imagine, a foundational pillar for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Now this one verse is also at the center of a pre-major translation debate.

The New World Translation, for example, renders that last phrase as the Word was a God. Their argument is based on a specific rule of Greek grammar about definite articles. However, it's worth noting that the overwhelming consensus among Greek scholars is that this translation is incorrect and that it just doesn't fit the context John is building.

In fact, you could say the strongest argument against that translation comes from John himself just two verses later. He writes, Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.

So, let's just think this through for a second. This creates a huge logical problem for the A God translation. If the Word was a created being, a lesser God, how could it be true that without him nothing was made? That would mean the Word had to have created itself, which is impossible.

John's own logic here demands that the Word has to be the uncreated creator. Okay, so for the grand finale of this whole prologue, John pulls everything together. He makes this direct and honestly really daring comparison between Jesus and the single most respected figure in all of Jewish history, Moses.

Now, to get this, we've got to remember a key story from the book of Exodus. Moses, the great lawgiver, asks to see God's full glory, but God tells him, "No one can see my face and live. Instead, Moses gets just a partial, fleeting glimpse, what the text symbolically calls God's back.

And that story sets up John's final mind-blowing contrast. On one hand, you have Moses, who delivered the law after seeing only a partial glimpse of God's glory. But Jesus, John says,

brings grace and truth because he reveals the full glory of God, the very face that Moses couldn't see.

The implication is just staggering. Jesus is the complete and final revelation of who God is. The early church father, St. Chrysostom, put it so beautifully.

He said the whole point wasn't that God diminished himself. The idea was that the divine high came down to the human low so that it could raise humanity up. It's all about elevation, not reduction, which, you know, brings us right back to where we started.

If these first 18 verses are the grand theme-filled atrium, it just leaves you with this one big question, doesn't it? What incredible things does the rest of the building have to show us?