

e. Verses 10-13 contain John's summary statement of the Logos' interaction with the world of men, their response to Him and the outcome that results for them. Some have viewed this passage as completing John's treatment of the pre-incarnate Logos; most, however, interpret these verses as referring to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, and His ministry among the people of Israel.

- One argument in favor of 1:10-13 pertaining to the pre-incarnate Logos is the parallelism of verses 3-5 and 9-11. And if this interpretation is assumed, it follows that John's statement, "He came to His own," (literally, He came to the things which are His, v. 11) is essentially a rephrasing of 1:10a. Thus *His own* refers to the *world*, and more specifically to the world of men (hence John's assertion that the world did not *know* Him). And the world was "His own," not only because He'd brought all things into existence (v. 3), but because the creation testified to Him as the expression of His own knowledge, will and governance. According to this view, then, the Logos was "in the world" and "came to His own," not *bodily* as incarnate, but as the *light*: the manifest life of God which shines in the darkness and illumines men (cf. esp. vv. 4-5, 9).

This interpretation also derives support *negatively* from the apparent difficulties arising from the alternative (that is, treating this passage as speaking of the incarnate Christ). One such difficulty is that it seems out of place for John to have introduced *Israel* at this point in his prologue (i.e., "His own" refers to the people of Israel), and yet this seems to follow from the premise that it was the incarnate Christ who came to His own. Thus far John has treated the Logos' relation to the creation and the world of men in general, and so the contention is that it wouldn't make sense for him to immediately – and without explanation or clear identification – insert Israel into the discussion. Moreover, John's use of the neuter plural (His own *things*) also seems to argue against Israel being the referent.

Another related difficulty is the seeming challenge of reconciling verses 10 and 11 if the former refers to the *world* as a whole while the second refers to the people of *Israel*. In this reading, after stating that the Logos was in the world, John immediately redirected himself to say that the Logos came to Israel. So also with the corresponding statements, "the world did not know Him" and "Israel did not receive Him." The question then becomes, in what sense did Israel's rejection of Jesus correlate with the larger issue of the world not knowing him? John was obviously drawing some correlation, but what exactly is it?

Perhaps the strongest support for treating these verses in terms of the pre-incarnate Logos is the fact that John introduced the incarnation immediately after this passage. The argument is that it makes no sense to summarize the earthly ministry of the incarnate Christ (vv. 11-13) and then afterward introduce the incarnation and speak to its significance.

- On the other hand, several things about the passage do seem to fit well with the post-incarnate interpretation. Among them is John's emphasis on *faith* – its presence or absence – as the core issue in people's response to the Logos (1:12). This harkens back to John's statement that the goal of the Baptist's witness was that all should *believe* in the Logos (1:7). Connecting the response of faith with the Baptist's witness, then, seems to indicate that John was here speaking about Jesus and His ministry among men, not the interaction of the pre-incarnate Logos with the world.

As well, John's transition from the *light* that illumines *men* to the *true light* that illumines *every man* suggests that he was now speaking to a new and heightened manifestation of the Logos' presence and operation in the world. Granted, John didn't yet mention the incarnation, but the fact that he previously spoke to the Baptist's witness to the Logos – *which witness was to the incarnate Logos* – suggests that he had the incarnation in mind when he referred to the true light which was coming into the world.

Though there is much more to be considered, these observations are sufficient to demonstrate that both views find plausible support in the text and context. *But, in the end, choosing between them in either/or fashion isn't necessary and may, in fact, be the wrong approach.* It's been noted that John took a thematic and theological approach to his prologue. And this orientation strongly suggests that both the pre-incarnate and incarnate dimensions are in view here, but in a manner that reflects transition from the one dimension to the other. John entered this passage with the pre-incarnate Logos as his subject (vv. 1-8) and he exited it with his proclamation of the Logos becoming flesh (v. 14). Thus this section clearly forms a transition – one that may be likened to the green area on a canvas where yellow paint flows into blue: Both primary colors are present, but as they flow into one another and each colors the other. So it is in this passage with the presence of the pre-incarnate and incarnate Logos. Several things support this way of viewing this passage, but the most obvious – and most compelling – is the way John incorporated the Baptist into his treatment of the Logos.

John introduced the Baptist before mentioning the incarnation and did so by stressing that he was a witness to the *light* (vv. 4-8) rather than to the incarnate Christ. In this way John implicitly connected the Baptist and his witness with the pre-incarnate Logos, thereby implying that the Logos was the Yahweh of Isaiah's prophecy: *the God of Israel and all creation whom the Baptist, as the forerunner, was called to herald as coming into the world* (ref. again Isaiah 40:3-5, 9-11).

John obviously knew that the Baptist fulfilled his role as Yahweh's appointed witness by testifying to *Jesus* as the long-awaited Servant-Messiah; indeed, this is the first subject of his account (1:19-34). But John also recognized that the Baptist was the forerunner promised by Isaiah, so that his witness to Jesus was his witness to the theophany of Israel's God, and therefore to the Logos' coming into the world in a new and unforeseen way as the true light that illumines every man.

Thus John introduced the Baptist before the incarnation in order to lay the groundwork for verse 14; he wanted to provide his readers with the frame of reference and background necessary to grasp the full significance of his statement, “*the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.*” Jesus of Nazareth whom the Baptist proclaimed to be the Messiah was first the Logos who is Yahweh Himself and the creator and sustainer of all things; as a man, Jesus is the Logos incarnate and so the incarnation of the God who had sworn to come into the world to deliver, purge, restore and regather His estranged and cursed creation.

John’s incorporation of the Baptist in his prologue reflects his understanding of his role and significance in the salvation history. The Baptist heralded the in-breaking kingdom and its King and sought to prepare Israel to discern and embrace both. Thus he formed the hinge between the preparatory age and the new age of the kingdom of God. He was a prophet of the old order, but with a view to the new order. John was a prophet filled with the Spirit in a unique way befitting his unique role of testifying to Yahweh as present in the world – no longer as the *immanent* Logos, but as the *incarnate* Logos (ref. Matthew 11:1-15).

The Baptist announced and prepared Israel for the new order of the kingdom of God, but as one who stood on the threshold of it, not within it (so Jesus’ enigmatic statement in Matthew 11:11). He was like Moses who led the children of Israel to the verge of the promised land but didn’t enter it himself. John didn’t enter the kingdom in his lifetime, but not because he was disobedient or unfaithful; death precluded him from entering because the kingdom wasn’t inaugurated until the King assumed His throne and entered upon His reign and the building of His kingdom by sending His Spirit to gather subjects to Himself (cf. Zechariah 4:1-10 and 6:9-15 with Matthew 16:13-19; Acts 1-2 and Ephesians 1:18-23).

John understood that the Baptist was the bridge between the old order and the new order, and therefore between the immanent Logos and the incarnate Logos. This is why he situated him at the point of transition in his prologue – as it were, in the region of green lying between the yellow of the pre-incarnate Logos and His light and the blue of the incarnate true light. The Baptist didn’t orchestrate or accomplish this transition, but his presence in the world signaled it and his ministration disclosed it to the people of his generation (cf. Luke 1:5-20, 57-79).

The transitional role of 1:9-13 is evident in the way John introduced and framed it with the person of the Baptist. And once the passage is seen in this light, the answer to the question of whether it deals with the pre-incarnate or incarnate Logos is clear: Both dimensions are in view. *But how, specifically does this play out in terms of John’s statements in these verses?* The following observations will hopefully prove helpful:

- 1) Verse 9 is a summary statement regarding the Logos’ relationship with the world He created and in which He is present. At the same time, it indicates a significant development in that relationship: *The Logos whose life was the light of men was now coming into the world as the true light that illumines every man.*

- 2) Verses 10-11, then, serve to clarify this development. The Logos' light had, from the time of creation, existed in the world. And, having created them and testified of Himself to them, men should have known Him and yet they did not (1:10). This statement parallels vv. 4-5, indicating that John was here referring to the long-standing relational dynamic between the world and the pre-incarnate Logos. Verse 11, in turn, follows the structure of verse 10, but its language shows that John was making a significant transition: The One who had been present in the world from the beginning ("he *was* in the world") now *came* into it in a fresh way. Some believe John was here alluding to the incarnation, but he explicitly associated this coming with the fact that the Logos came *to His own*. And while verse 9 suggests that this may simply be another way of referring to the world of men, it appears that John was saying something more: *The Logos had come into the world anew and His coming was marked by a particular, more narrow focus.*

This narrow focus of the Logos' coming doesn't ignore the central issue of incarnation; rather, it presupposes it. For, prior to the incarnation, the Logos revealed Himself primarily through the creation's order and function, and therefore His self-revelation was *universal*; His life was the light of all mankind. But now, incarnation *localized* the Logos' witness. First of all, bodily existence obviously restricted the Logos' presence so that He could not manifest Himself to the whole world as He did formerly. But more than the physical constraints it imposed, incarnation limited the Logos' witness as a matter of promise and fulfillment: Yahweh had promised the people of Israel that He was coming to them in a Servant who would both embody and deliver Israel. *He was going to come to Israel in a Messiah drawn out of Israel for the sake of Israel.*

This seems to be the meaning of John's first statement in verse 11. The Logos that had existed in the world for the sake of the world had now come into the world to fulfill God's purpose for the world. But in that this purpose was bound up in Israel as the Abrahamic people, the Logos' coming for the sake of the world meant that He had to first come to Israel. For it was only by Israel becoming truly Israel in Him that the Logos' effectual witness could go out to the world. Thus the Logos came to His own (His heritage and people), not because He had narrowed His concern, but precisely because His concern remained universal: *The Logos who is God in and unto the creation was determined to fulfill His will for His creation, but this meant coming to Israel. And He "came to His own" in order that, in Him, Israel would become Israel indeed and so fulfill its calling to mediate the knowledge of Yahweh and His blessing to all of the earth's families. By divine design, the Logos' role in the creation depended upon Israel being Israel.*

Per divine design and promise, the Logos' coming into the world in incarnation had its initial focus in the nation of Israel (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11; Jeremiah 23:1-8, 30:1-33:26; Zechariah 1:7-2:13, 8:1-15; etc. with Matthew 10:1-14, 15:21-28). And John the Baptist was the herald appointed to prepare Israel for this unique and monumental theophany. John was faithful to his calling, but few heeded his words: The Logos came to His own, *but His own did not receive Him* (1:11b).