

The pinnacle of John's prologue is his announcement of the incarnation. But John was concerned with more than the mere fact of the Logos becoming flesh; he wanted his readers to have some sense of the incarnation's significance. Thus he followed his announcement with a brief commentary section (1:14b-18) which closes out his prologue. Notably, John's commentary consists of a series of statements unified by the idea of *witness*. Specifically, each statement provides some form of witness to the incarnate Logos so that together they form a composite picture of Him and His significance. In summary, then, John climactically closed his prologue by stating the fact of the incarnation and then authenticating and interpreting it through the testimony of witnesses.

- b. The first witness John cited was those who "beheld the glory" of the incarnate Logos (1:14b). He didn't identify these individuals, but two considerations indicate that he had in mind Jesus' disciples – those who knew and experienced Him in a personal, intimate way. First, his pronoun (*we*) shows that John included himself within this group; second, his verb connotes, not casual observation, but close and careful consideration that seeks to understand the object in view. Hendrickson's comment is helpful here: "*It describes the act of one who does not stare absent-mindedly nor merely look quickly nor necessarily perceive comprehensively. On the contrary, this individual regards an object and reflects upon it. He scans it, examining it with care. He studies it, viewing and considering it thoughtfully.*"

The incarnate Logos embodied Yahweh's presence among men (His sanctuary) and, of those who experienced His presence, there were some who truly fixed their gaze upon Him, observing Him, reflecting on Him and marveling at Him. And these who witnessed Jesus in this way were granted this privilege as a calling that they should become witnesses of Him to others, even as John was doing with his gospel account (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

John and his fellows were witnesses of the incarnate Christ – here, witnesses of *His glory*. Glory is a broad term in biblical usage (in Hebrew as well as Greek), applying in different contexts to men, God, things and circumstances (cf. Matthew 4:8, 6:29, 19:28; Luke 2:9, 14, 32, 9:30-31; Revelation 21:10-26). When used with respect to men, *glory* typically carries the sense of honor and distinction (Luke 14:10; John 7:18, 8:50-54, 12:42-43; Romans 2:5-10). The same connotation exists, but is heightened, when the noun is used of God (Revelation 4:11, 15:8, 19:1-2). Sometimes glory emphasizes a tangible manifestation (Luke 9:30-31; John 2:11, 11:4, 39ff, 12:41; Acts 7:55); other times it emphasizes an intrinsic quality that may not be openly evident (John 17:22; Acts 7:2; Romans 1:22-23). So also, glory can be a virtual synonym for praise, as in the expression "give glory" (cf. Luke 19:38; John 5:41, 44, 9:24; Acts 12:23). In this case, the idea isn't one's possession of honor and distinction, but others' recognition and acknowledgment of it. *Notably, in most instances where this term is applied to Jesus, it refers to the glory which He possesses – and which He manifests to the world – by virtue of His exaltation and enthronement* (cf. Matthew 24:30, 25:31; Mark 8:38, 10:37, 13:26-27; Luke 21:27, 24:26; John 17:5; Acts 22:11).

In this context, however, John clearly had a different sense in mind; he was speaking of a glory which the Logos possessed by virtue of His incarnation and which was manifest to those who came to know Him intimately. Taken together with John's description of the incarnation as the Logos *tabernacling* among men, it seems he was drawing on the idea of the divine glory associated with Yahweh's presence in His sanctuary.

- As noted previously, the Lord's presence in His sanctuary – and so His dwelling in the midst of His people as their enthroned King – was the centerpiece of the Israelite kingdom and the sole circumstance which authenticated that kingdom as His kingdom.
- Eventually Israel's apostasy provoked Yahweh to abandon them, evident in the departure of His Shekinah (His "glory-presence" manifested as a kind of luminous phenomenon) from His sanctuary (Ezekiel 10). His departure signaled the end of the kingdom, which end came about when His sanctuary was destroyed and His people were driven away in exile.
- A gradual return of Judah's exiles followed five decades of empty desolation and, not surprisingly, the first task they undertook was rebuilding the temple. The Lord's promise of restoration depended upon His return and that could not happen until His house was rebuilt. These Jews eventually completed their work, but only to have an empty sanctuary; Yahweh did not return to the rebuilt temple, instead declaring through His prophets that He was going to return in His messianic Servant (cf. Ezekiel 43:1-5 with Zechariah 1-6; Haggai 2; Malachi 3:1).

More than five centuries passed with the children of Israel continuing to wait for Yahweh's promised theophany in which His glory would again fill the temple. John was saying that that day had now come: The Lord's glory-presence had returned to His sanctuary in a way that was tangibly manifest to men. But this hadn't occurred as expected, so that beholding Yahweh's glory resulted from a close and careful consideration of the incarnate Logos. Never again would the Lord manifest His glory in an ethereal Shekinah; now and forevermore, His glory was manifest in the face of Jesus Christ (cf. 14:1-9 with 2 Corinthians 4:6). Thus, when John said that he and Jesus' other disciples had beheld His glory, he wasn't referring to the spectacle of the transfiguration or to any miraculous manifestation of Jesus' person and power; he was referring in the first instance to Jesus Himself: the Logos now incarnate as a true son of Adam – the man, Jesus the Messiah, the "*only begotten from the Father,*" whom seeing, is to God.

John associated the glory of the incarnate Logos with His identity as the unique Son who proceeded from the Father: "*glory as of the only begotten from the Father.*" But this incarnate Son is also Yahweh come into the world to accomplish His purpose on behalf of the creation. That is the crucial framework for understanding that He is "*full of grace and truth.*"

Because this expression contains familiar terms with broad biblical signification, the question of John's meaning can only be answered by considering the phrase in context. That consideration highlights three things:

- 1) First, *grace* and *truth* must be interpreted alongside their second occurrence in verse 17. There John insisted that grace and truth came about in connection with Jesus Christ rather than the Law of Moses. This statement will be addressed in turn, but here it's important to note that John saw the principles of grace and truth realized in the incarnate Logos.
- 2) Secondly, and as noted above, John understood the incarnation of the Logos to be Yahweh's fulfillment of His promise to return to Zion and accomplish His good purposes for her and, through her, for the world (cf. again Isaiah 40-55 with Hosea 1-3; Micah 4:1-5:4; Zechariah 1-14; etc.).
- 3) Lastly, John's meaning must fall within the biblical semantic range of these terms. Whatever he meant by *grace* and *truth*, his meaning must accord with biblical usage.

Taken together, these observations indicate that grace and truth speak respectively to *intentionality* and *integrity*, but as they pertain to Yahweh's realization of His redemptive and restorative purposes in Jesus, the incarnate Logos.

- This means first of all that grace and truth cannot be reduced merely to divine attributes. One might be tempted to read John as saying that God's graciousness and truthfulness are on fullest display in Jesus, such that we see in Jesus a person of complete honesty and integrity who always expressed God's graciousness (undeserved kindness and favor) toward men in mercy, forgiveness, cleansing, etc. Obviously Jesus *was* such a person, but John was making a different, though related point.
- Again, John was considering grace and truth as they are implicated in the incarnation of the Logos – grace and truth as they came to full realization and expression in the person and work of Jesus.

*Thus John's point is that, in Jesus the Messiah, God's gracious design for His creation and His integrity in fulfilling that design have now been fully realized in the incarnate Logos; it is in this sense that grace and truth converge in perfect fullness in the person of Jesus Christ (cf. John 5:24-36 with 14:6).*

- c. Jesus' disciples bore witness of Him, but so did the Baptist (1:15). What John previously noted in general terms (vv. 6-8), he now addressed with some specificity by citing from the Baptist's testimony to the Messiah. John presented this as a quotation, but it's clear that he intended it as a summary of the Baptist's witness to Jesus, particularly as his witness sought to distinguish between himself and the One he proclaimed and interpreted (ref. 1:19-28, 3:22-36).

John's quotation emphasizes that a key component of the Baptist's testimony to Jesus was his insistence upon the distinction between the two of them. Jesus was superior to John the Baptist, and not merely because a king is greater than his herald. The fundamental issue of superiority – which John wanted to emphasize – was the fact that Jesus was the incarnate Logos and the theophanic presence of Yahweh. Different English versions convey slightly different impressions, but the following expanded rendering hopefully captures the gist of John's citation:

*The One coming after me originated before me; He preceded me as the only begotten from the Father and so has preeminence over me.*

This citation from the Baptist's witness highlights the important truth that, though he preceded the incarnate One as a prophet to Israel, that didn't grant him primacy or preeminence (ref. 3:22-26). The truth was that Jesus enjoyed primacy over John the Baptist, and He did so because He was the incarnation of the Logos who was in the beginning with God and was God.

But the Baptist's design in proclaiming Jesus' superiority was not to establish His deity, but to identify Him as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Going back to the Maccabean period, several individuals had emerged as potential messiahs, but all had come short, leaving the people of Israel disappointed and anxiously looking for the next candidate. When John the Baptist came on the scene, his powerful presence, message and impact (ref. Matthew 3:1-12) led many to wonder whether he was the Messiah. And if he wasn't, what was his relationship to the Messiah? These concerns are the reason for his insistence that he was not the Messiah. Indeed he could not be Him, for the Messiah would be greater than any man, even the greatest of Yahweh's prophets; He would be a man unlike any Israel had ever known (ref. 1:19-23; cf. also 3:22-36 with Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:15-17).

- d. John recognized Jesus as the embodiment and full realization of God's gracious design – the One in whom exists the fullness of grace and truth. But he also recognized that this fullness had a larger significance: God intended that it should overflow to the benefit of men: "*Out of His fullness we have all received, even grace upon grace*" (1:16). This declaration obviously hearkens back to verse 14 and some commentators have consequently viewed verse 15 as a sort of parenthesis. But it is better to view John's statement about the Baptist as his transition from verse 14 to verse 16. It forms the bridge between verses 14 and 16, specifically as they are concerned with the idea of fullness. That is, verse 15 clarifies the dynamic of the incarnate Logos' fullness becoming the fullness of His people. *And it does so by again highlighting the Baptist's work.* For John the Baptist heralded the only-begotten from Yahweh – the One in whom Yahweh's gracious purpose had become "yea and amen." But the Father's design was the restoration of His creation in His anointed One, so that *gracious purpose* was fulfilled in *gracious outcome*: the realization of the truth of a creation purged and reconciled to God in His Messiah-Son. In the Baptist, then, we discover how the fullness of grace and truth in the Son found its destiny in the fullness of men.