

John's Prologue (1:1–18)

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class
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The first words of John's gospel, "In the beginning," forge a link with the beginning of the entire Bible. Compare the opening chapters of Genesis with the prologue in John, noting the parallels and similarities:

John 1:1–18	Genesis 1—3
<p>1 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.</p> <p>⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name <i>was</i> 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 <i>was sent</i> to bear witness of that Light. ⁹That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.'"</p> <p>¹⁶And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, <i>but</i> grace and 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 <i>Him</i>.</p>	

When John writes, “In the beginning,” his readers familiar with Gen 1:1 expect the next word to be “God.” But instead, John supplies, “the Word.” As the prologue unfolds, the reader discovers that the “Word” is none other than Jesus Christ, the subject of John’s gospel. In other words, John begins by putting Jesus Christ both historically and theologically in his proper place: Jesus is the eternal God. Historically, he was there at the beginning. In fact, John will go on to say that the world was made by him (v. 3). Theologically, since he was there at the beginning he existed before the beginning. When the beginning came, Jesus already was. Jesus will tell the multitudes in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was, *I am*.”

However, the traditional understanding that John 1:1–2 affirms the deity of Christ is sometimes challenged today. Therefore, we will take some time to understand the debate about this passage and to carefully explain the meaning of the text in its context.

The Deity of Christ in John 1:1–2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. (KJV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.* This one was in the beginning with God. (NWT) *Or, “was divine.”

Translation and Literal Rendering of the Greek Text

Ἐν ἀρχῇ	ἦν ὁ λόγος,	καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,	καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.
<i>En arché</i>	<i>én ho logos,</i>	<i>kai ho logos én pros ton theon</i>	<i>kai theos én ho logos.</i>
In beginning	was the word	and the word was with the god	and god was the word.

οὗτος	ἦν	ἐν ἀρχῇ	πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
<i>houtos</i>	<i>én</i>	<i>en arché</i>	<i>pros ton theon.</i>
same	was	in beginning	with the god

The phrase “and the Word was God” affirms the deity of Christ because of several contexts in which this statement is made:

Historical Context: Would John, a strict monotheist, really suggest more than one “God”?

Literary Context (rest of the Gospel): Jesus’ deity is affirmed in 5:18, 23; 8:58; 10:30–31; 20:28.

Grammatical Context: The grammatical structure of the Greek phrase in question is most naturally translated “the Word was God,” because “word” has the article, making it the subject. Second, in the Greek pattern “*noun* = the *noun*,” the first noun is rarely indefinite—something a Greek reader would not naturally expect. So the absence of the *article* (“the”) on “God,” is best interpreted as expressing *quality*: “The Word had the quality of Deity.” In other words, he was the same in essence as God.