

THE WORD MADE FLESH

- A. Introduction: We are talking about who Jesus is according to the Bible, as part of a larger discussion on the importance of becoming a regular Bible reader. My goal in this series is to help you see the importance of regular reading, motivate you to read, and give you instruction on how to read effectively.
1. Recently, we've been focusing on the fact that Jesus said that in the years leading up to His return to earth false christs and prophets will arise and deceive many people. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24
 - a. Our protection again such deception is getting to know Jesus as He truly is through the pages of the Bible. The New Testament documents were all written, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by eyewitnesses of Jesus (or close associates of eyewitnesses). II Tim 3:16
 - b. These men walked and talked with Jesus. They saw Him die and then saw Him alive again. They wrote the New Testament documents as part of their effort to tell the world what they saw and heard. Their writings give us an accurate picture of Jesus—who He is, what He taught, and what He did.
 2. These authors echoed Jesus' warning about religious deception. Peter, Paul, and Jude wrote that before the Lord returns, many will be influenced by seducing spirits and doctrines of devils taught by false teachers who introduce destructive heresies. I Tim 4:1; II Pet 2:1; Jude 4
 - a. Heresy is religious opinion that is contrary to established doctrine or teaching. Orthodox (true) Christian doctrine is the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament by eyewitnesses.
 - b. We noted in a previous lesson that as the New Testament documents began to circulate, the various documents were accepted by the first generation of Christians because it was well known that they came from the original eyewitnesses of Jesus—His first apostles who saw Him and heard Him.
 1. Matt 28:19-20—Before Jesus returned to Heaven He commissioned them to teach all nations everything He commanded them. The term “commandments” is frequently used in the New Testament for Jesus' teachings and preaching. They were to teach what Jesus taught them.
 2. John 14:21—Jesus promised His followers that, even though He was leaving this world for a time, He would continue to make Himself know to His followers through His commandments. In other words, Jesus reveals Himself to us through His written Word. The New Testament is an eyewitness account of what Jesus did and said. It shows us the real Jesus.
 3. Last week we talked about the first four books of the New Testament, the gospels (biographies of Jesus). They all cover the same basic information, but each was written for a different audience and emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus' person and work.
 - a. We spent most of the lesson on John's gospel, written by John, one of Jesus' twelve apostles. John wrote his work 20-30 years after the other three were written (AD 80-90).
 - b. By that time, false teachers had begun to deny Jesus' deity. So John wrote to clearly demonstrate that Jesus is God. The other gospels present Jesus as God, but John's gospel is the most direct.
- B. John 1:1-18—John opened his book with what is known as the prologue. It is an introduction to his account of Jesus. In the prologue John makes his intention clear—to show that Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. John refers to Jesus as the Word made flesh.
1. John 1:1-3—John opened his gospel with the same phrase that opens the Old Testament: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). John informs his readers that the Word (Jesus) was in the beginning with God, the Word was God, and the Word created all things.
 - a. According to John (an eyewitness of Jesus) the Word is a pre-existent eternal Being and the Creator of the universe. John further stated that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. John 1:14
 - b. Two thousand years ago, the Creator of the universe entered time and space and took on a human nature in the womb of a virgin named Mary. Luke 1:31-35
 2. To make his point, in the first six verses of the prologue, John used two different Greek words for “was”

—*en* (was) which denotes continuous action in the past (i.e. no point of origin), and *egeneto* (was) which denotes a time when something came into existence.

a. John uses *en* for the Word (v1-2) and uses *egeneto* for created things and John the Baptist (v3; v6). But then, John changes words when he tells that the Word (Jesus) was (*egeneto*) made flesh (v14).

At a specific point in time, the Word was (*egeneto*) made flesh or took on a human nature.

b. Theologians refer to this event as the Incarnation. To incarnate means to invest with human nature (*Webster's Dictionary*). At the Incarnation, the Word was made (became) fully man without ceasing to be fully God. At that time He was given the name Jesus, which means Savior. Luke 1:31

1. We live two thousand years after Jesus incarnated, and there have been and are countless debates about Jesus' nature. Is He God? Is He man? Note that John does not attempt to explain how the Incarnation was possible or how it happened.

2. The eyewitnesses didn't get caught up in all that. Jesus' original followers knew that He was and is the God-man (fully God, fully man). What they saw and heard satisfied them that He is the fulfillment of what the Old Testament promised, Emmanuel, God with us. Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23

c. John refers to the Word made flesh as the Only Begotten of the Father. Use of the word begotten has led some to mistakenly claim that Jesus is a created being and therefore lesser than the Father.

1. The Greek word John used is *monogenes*. It doesn't refer to begetting (i.e. to father children). It refers to uniqueness or one of a kind. The original hearers understood it to mean unique.

2. Jesus is unique because He is the God-man, fully God and fully man, one Person, two natures. Jesus is unique because He is the only Man whose birth did not mark His beginning. He has no beginning because He is God.

3. The Word took on human nature so that He could die as the final sacrifice for sin and open the way for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.

A. Heb 2:14-15—We are people of flesh and blood. That is why Jesus became one of us.

He died to destroy the devil, who had power over death. But he also died to rescue all of us who live each day in fear of dying (CEV).

B. I John 4:9-10—God has sent His only begotten (*monogenes*) Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (NASB),

d. John 1:18—John began his prologue with a clear statement that Jesus is God and he ends it with another such statement. John once again refers to the Word as the Only Begotten (*monogenes*). However, John follows with another Greek word, *theos* which is the Greek word for God.

1. The King James Bible (KJV) translates the wording as the Only Begotten Son. However, a number of translations translate John's statement as Only Begotten God: the only begotten God (NASB), God the One and Only (NIV), God the only Son (NRSV).

2. Why the difference? The KJV was translated from later manuscripts, and the others from earlier manuscripts produced closer to the time of the originals. This is a textual variant, a natural mistake made by copyists who were used to saying and writing the Only Begotten Son.

3. As John closed his prologue he stated that, up to that time, no man had seen God. The Greek word translated seen means more than see physically. It emphasizes to discern clearly or to know.

a. We'll say more about this in a moment. The point for now is that Jesus is God's clearest revelation or expression of Himself to mankind.

1. Col 1:15—(Jesus) is a derived reproduction and manifestation of absolute deity, the invisible deity (Wuest); the exact likeness...the visible representation of the invisible (Amp).

2. Col 2:9—In Him there is continuously and permanently at home all the fullness of absolute deity in bodily fashion (Wuest).

b. This is beyond our comprehension. However, the eyewitnesses weren't bothered by that. None of them tried to explain it. They accepted what they saw and heard. And Jesus authenticated all that He claimed to be by rising from the dead. Rom 1:4

- C. John stated in his prologue that no man has seen God at any time. Yet a number of people saw the Lord in the Old Testament before Jesus was born (Isa 6:1). In fact, the Lord appeared to both Abraham and Moses. The question is: Who did they see?
1. About 1921 BC God spoke to a man named Abraham and promised that he would become the father of a great nation (Israel) and that all families of the earth would be blessed through him (Gen 12:1-3). Jesus, in His humanity, was a descendant of Abraham, and through Jesus salvation from sin is available to all.
 - a. The Hebrew word translated Lord (v1) is *Yehovah* which means the Self-Existent or eternal. The root idea is: He is and causes to be—He is the Creator. *Yehovah* was the Jewish national name for God, the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses at the Exodus. Ex 6:2-3
 1. At some point in their history, the Jewish people ceased pronouncing the name of God out of respect for its sacredness (Ex 20:7). Until the Renaissance Period (14th to 17th century AD) the name was written without vowels in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament—*yhw* (*Yahweh*).
 2. The Jews developed a practice of using other terms for the Lord's name such as the Holy One, the Name, or the Word. So, when John chose the term Word for Jesus, his Jewish readers had some familiarity with the term Word being used for God.
 - b. Gen 15:1-5—The first time the word “word” appears in the Bible (in its most common form), it is in connection with Abraham. The Word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.
 1. Note, Abraham not only heard something, he saw something. Note also that the Word spoke to Abraham and is referred to as I and he—a person.
 2. Note also that the Word brought Abraham out to look at the stars, and then restated His promise that Abraham would have many descendants. The Word is identified as the one who led Abraham from the city of Ur (in Mesopotamia, present day Iraq) to the land of Canaan (Israel).
 2. In the ensuing years, the Lord appeared to Abraham a number of times. Abraham saw and heard the Lord repeatedly (many lessons for another day). Right now, let's consider just a few examples.
 - a. Gen 18—The Lord appeared as a man at the plains of Mamre. The Hebrew word translated Lord is *Yehovah*. It used a number of times in this encounter, including v1,13,14,17,20,22.
 1. Note, this “man” displayed qualities of God—He promised a son to an old barren woman; He knew that Sarah (Abraham's wife) laughed; He said He would cause her to bear a child. v10-12
 2. This is what is called a theophany, or an appearance or manifestation of God, usually in visible, bodily form. The term comes from two Greek words, *theos* (God) and *phaino* (to appear).
 - A. There a number of such appearances recorded in the Old Testament. These appearances are actually Jesus, the Word, before He took on flesh—Preincarnate Jesus. Jesus existed before He incarnated, and was very interactive with His people in the Old Testament.
 - B. In many of these theophanies (appearances), He is referred to as the Angel of the Lord (literally, the Angel of Yahweh or Jehovah). The Hebrew word for angel means one who is sent or messenger. This is not a created being (an angel). This being claims deity.
 - b. When God first called Abraham and told him that his descendants would become a great nation that would bless the world, he and his wife were too old to have children. But, God promised them a son, and eventually, Isaac was born. Gen 21:1-6
 1. Gen 22:10-18—Later, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son at God's request (lessons for another day), but the Angel of the Lord (Preincarnate Jesus, the Word) stopped him. The Angel restated His promise to Abraham that through his seed all the earth will be blessed.
 2. Paul (an eyewitness of Jesus) identified this promise to Abraham as a reference to Jesus. Jesus

(before He incarnated) told Abraham that through his offspring the Seed (Incarnate Jesus) would come. Gal 3:16

A. John (also an eyewitness) removed all doubt as to the identity of the One who interacted with Abraham. In his gospel, John recorded an incident between Jesus and the Pharisees where Jesus told them that Abraham rejoiced to see His day and saw it. John 8:56-59.

B. They responded: That's not possible. You're not old enough to have seen Abraham.

Jesus replied: Before Abraham was: I Am.

C. And they took up stones to stone Him to death because, by calling Himself I Am, He was claiming to be God. I Am was the name that God gave to Moses when the Lord commissioned him to lead Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Let's examine what happened.

c. Ex 3:1-6—The angel of the Lord (Preincarnate Jesus) appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of a bush. Notice, the angel is identified as the Lord, as God. This Being told Moses: I am the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. v7-12—The Lord told Moses that he was to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses asked the Lord: When I tell my people that you have sent me to them, they will ask your name. What shall I say?

A. Ex 3:13-15—God answered: Tell them I Am that I Am has sent you. This is my name forever. I Am is from a Hebrew word that means to exist or to be. (The name Yahweh or Jehovah comes from this verb. Many lessons for another day.)

B. I Am means the Self-Existent One or Eternal. It has the idea of underived existence. The idea is that He is because He is. He is the Self-Existent One who reveals Himself.

C. The same God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush spoke to the Pharisees on that day in Jerusalem when Jesus applied the name I Am to Himself.

2. Paul the apostle (who was personally taught the message that he proclaimed by the resurrected Lord Jesus, Gal 1:11-12) wrote to Jewish believers in Jesus that Moses knew Jesus: (Moses) considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt (Heb 11:26, ESV).

3. Jesus first followers didn't accept a new or a different God. They realized that Jesus is the God of the Old Testament more clearly revealed. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God, Old Testament and New Testament.

D. Conclusion: We have more to see next week, but consider these thoughts as we close. God desires a family with whom He can live in loving relationship. He created men and women to become His sons and daughters. But sin (beginning with Adam in Eden) seemed to thwart God's plan for a family.

1. God, motivated by love, devised a way to deal with sin and still have His family. He took on flesh and came into this world to die as a redeeming sacrifice. All who accept Him and sacrifice become sons and daughters of God.

2. Then, He inspired eyewitnesses who interacted with Jesus to write what they saw and heard in the New Testament documents. These writings help the rest of us who were not and aren't eyewitnesses. We can get to know Jesus—our Lord and Savior—through the pages of these eyewitness accounts.

a. If ever there was a time to know Jesus as He truly is, it's now. The world is entering the darkest period ever in the history of mankind. We need the light and truth revealed in and through Jesus.

b. Begin to read the New Testament as it was written to be read—each book and letter from start to finish. The Bible is a book from God and He will work by His Spirit through His written Word to change and strengthen you. Through His Word He will impart wisdom, peace, joy, and hope to you that will enable you to deal with the days, months, and years ahead of us. Lots more next week!