

JOHN 1:1 - 13 -- The Pre-existent Message

There are three great Christological passages in the New Testament, three sections of Scripture that are like concentrated sources of information about who Jesus was. These are John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1. It is helpful to compare these chapters with each other. They contain some similar themes, which become visibly significant when we compare the three passages. Their different approaches provide unique perspectives. When examined together, they paint a more clear and accurate understanding than would be obtainable from any one passage taken by itself. Look each passage up and make a list of the things said about Jesus there. Watch carefully the language used, sometimes it is very specific. Once you have made your lists, identify common themes by circling them, or by color-coding them. Note similarities and differences.

John 1:1-18

Colossians 1:13-20

Hebrews 1:1-4

NOTES:

Vs. 1 -- *In the beginning* -- The apostle John does not begin His Gospel with a birth account. He starts long before, even before the beginning of creation itself, to help us understand who Jesus really was. *was* -- The Greek verb tense communicates the idea of ongoing action in the past, i.e., "was (being)", or, "was (existing)". *Word* -- The Greek is logos, meaning "word, message, reason, thought, or idea". *with* -- There are several Greek words that are translated as "with" in English, each with its different word picture. John did not choose a word meaning "alongside of" or "together with", which would emphasize separate individuality of the Word and God. He chose a word (pros) which means "with" in the sense of being "towards, or pertaining to". The flavor is that they were so near to each other that they were in fact not separable. Our word "prosthetic", referring to an artificial limb, is derived from this Greek word and still carries some of the same flavor. *the Word was God* -- The structure of the Greek in this verse is amazingly precise, yet incredibly simple. There can be no room for error. The word for "God" is the same throughout, so the reader cannot switch meanings in this last phrase to mean "divine", or, "a god". In this single, simply-worded verse, John was able to communicate that "the Message", or "the Thought": (1.) had existed before time; (2.) was somehow inseparably associated with God; (3.) yet, God was *more than* just the Message; and, (4.) yet still, the Message *was* God. Analogies almost always have limitations, especially when trying to communicate about the nature of God. I have been able to understand, however, what this verse seems to be stating by thinking of the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The Chesapeake Bay is "with" the Atlantic Ocean. They are connected, and their waters are even intermingled. In a sense, they are inseparable, yet at the same time, the Atlantic is much more than just the Chesapeake Bay. The Chesapeake Bay *is* the Atlantic Ocean, and yet, it does not equal *all* of the Atlantic Ocean. I think that there are helpful parallels in this illustration, though again I hasten to say that the reality of the Message's relation to God is much more dynamic and deep than this image would be able to portray.

Vs. 3 - *All things* -- If Jesus was Himself a created thing, John would have had to say "all *other* things". By stating it so inclusively, as the class consisting of "all created things", the language plainly implies that the Word is *not* a created being. *by* -- This word conveys the idea of agency. Other definitions of the word are "through, by means of". Jesus is the *agent* through which God created the world. You will notice that this language is consistent throughout all three Christological passages when they describe Christ as creator. If you

look at I Corinthians 8:4-6, you will see the relationship of the Father to the work of creation. He seems to be the *source* or *originator* of creation, while the Lord Jesus was more the *channel* by which it was done. It is also significant that John introduces Jesus to us as the Word by means of which every thing was created. This would have brought the minds of the Jews back to the Genesis story (chapter one) where God created by speaking or commanding things to be ("Let there be..." And there was...). Hebrews 11:3 and II Pet. 3:5 also remind us that the world was created by the word or utterance of God. In Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; and Psalms 104:30 we are told of the Spirit's participation in the work of creating. All in all, this gives us an insight into the interplay and union of the Trinity, somehow three separate aspects of the one God yet moving together in one coordinated effort.

Vs. 4 - *In Him was life* -- He is more than life, but He is the source of life, both physical and spiritual. *And the life was the light of men* -- Further explanation is found in vss. 7-9. Spiritual awareness and insight come from the life in Him.

Vs. 5 - *The light shines in the darkness* -- The verb is present tense, "it does shine". *the darkness did not comprehend it* -- Cf. vss. 10,11.

Vss. 6-8 - *John* -- This is referring to John the Baptist. His story is found in Luke 1:1-24,57-80; 3:1-22; John 1:19-37; 3:22-36; Matthew 11:2-19; 14:1-12.

Vs. 12 -- *received* -- Our word "receive" has come to have kind of a passive connotation in our common usage. This word is meant to be active and would be more accurately rendered as "took" in modern speech. *right* -- The Greek noun behind this translation means both the legal right (authority), as well as the power (ability-to-act) to accomplish what is under the authorization. It is like a check drawn on a bank account with sufficient funds. It gives the recipient the authority to receive the designated amount of the check from the bank. Others might attempt to lay claim to the money in the account, but without the proper legal authorization, the bank will not release the funds. *believe* -- Literally the Greek says, "to the (ones) believing into His name". "Believe" has come to be a watered-down word in our English language in the past few centuries. It has come to mean to "mentally agree with an idea", or "intellectual assent". The Greek word is stronger, meaning "to trust in", "to have confidence in", "to have as a conviction", "to entrust oneself to". Furthermore, the particular form of this word here emphasizes ongoing action, believing-and-continuing-to-believe. *name* -- The name implies the sum total of all the characteristics of the person, i.e., all He is and stands for. Thus, to believe into the name of Him would be to commit or entrust oneself to Him, His character, His promises, and to His cause and service.

Vs. 13. -- *born* -- Cf. John 3:1-17; James 1:18; I Peter 1:3,22-25. *of* -- The English here translates a Greek preposition (ek) which indicates source or origin, literally translated as "out from". Thus, John is saying that their birth as children of God did not originate from human genetics, self-will, or self-striving. Instead, it comes "out from" God.

