

The Chiasm of John 1:1-18

Compared to the Synoptic Gospels, the apostle John presents Jesus as Lord and writes a gospel that is more theological in content. From the very beginning, the book of John presents the divinity of the historical Jesus Christ as the Incarnation – God manifest in the flesh. The words and deeds of Jesus Christ are the words and deeds of God manifest in human flesh.

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:24-25, NASB)

The book of John uses the term “believe” more than any other New Testament book, which places an emphasis on the historical reality of Jesus Christ and the historical event of His crucifixion and resurrection.

John 1:1-18 is a chiasm. If you took the time to discern, this is what it would look like:

1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2)** He was in the beginning with God.

3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. **5)** The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7)** He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. **8)** He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.

9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. **10)** He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

16) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. **17)** For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:1-18)

1. One method of analyzing a chiasm is to pair the first half of the chiasm with its corresponding inverted parallel so that you can make good and clear observations of each idea of the chiasm. Write down your observations. What do you learn about the chiasm? How do the two halves of the chiasm compare to each other?

Verses	Inverted Parallel Verses	Observations
1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God.	18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.	
3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.	16) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.	
6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7) He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8) He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.	15) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"	
9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.	14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.	
11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.	13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.	

2. What does the inflection point of the apostle John's chiasm emphasize?

12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

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Teacher Notes

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Despite the fact that the New Testament was written in Greek, explain to the student that this chiasm is a form of Hebrew poetry, which is a rhythmic interplay of ideas that adds depth and meaning through the structure of sentences. A chiasm, based on the Greek letter X (chi), describes an x-shaped literary structure. The ideas of this structure take the following sequential form A-B-C-X-C-B-A, where each idea has a parallel except at the inflection point. The “X” is the inflection point, which draws attention to and emphasizes the central idea.

- 1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God.**

- 3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**
- 4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**

- 6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7) He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8) He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.**

- 9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.**

- 11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.**

- 12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,**

- 13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

- 14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

- 15) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”**

- 16) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**

- 18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:1-18)**

1. One method of analyzing a chiasm is to pair the first half of the chiasm with its corresponding inverted parallel so that you can make good and clear observations of each idea of the chiasm. Write down your observations. What do you learn about the chiasm? How do the two halves of the chiasm compare to each other?

Take the time to explain to the student how this table was created so that he knows how to study a chiasm the next time he encounters one. While it seems like a lot of work, it is a worthwhile method of study and its benefits immeasurable.

The observations listed are examples of what one may see. Encourage students to share their findings with each other and explore their views.

Verses	Inverted Parallel Verses	Observations
1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God.	18) No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.	Jesus Christ, the One spoken of in God's word, is in union with His Father the invisible God.
3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.	16) For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17) For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.	Jesus Christ is figuratively portrayed as the light breaking in upon the moral darkness of the world and is the only means of grace for mankind who by nature are in darkness.
6) There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7) He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. 8) He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light.	15) John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'"	John the Baptist was sent by God to testify that Jesus was the Messiah.
9) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.	14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.	The true Light that enlightens every man came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.	13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.	The Jews, who did not believe in Jesus Christ were not born again; however, those who did, were born again.

One of the significant observations to be made is how the two halves of the chiasm compare:

The first half of the chiasm is speaking of non-Believers, specifically Jews.

The inverted parallel half of the chiasm speaks of Believers. Old Testament Believers, anticipating the Messiah, receive Jesus as the Promised One, and Gentile Believers, hearing the Good News, place their faith in Jesus Christ.

2. What does the inflection point of the apostle John's chiasm emphasize?

12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

The inflection point of the apostle John's chiasm emphasizes faith in Jesus Christ. This highlights the importance of Jesus Christ and completes the figurative picture of "light."