

The Chiasm of John 1:1-18

Known as the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John is believed to be the last Gospel to be written and circulated. Defending the claims that Jesus was the Messiah, it was not intended to validate the witnesses, but rather to proclaim that salvation was truly available for those who place their trust in Him.

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

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)

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.

In his introduction, the apostle John presents a chiasm that succinctly teaches the pre-eminence and purpose of Jesus Christ.

- 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.’”

The Chiasm of John 1:1-18 (page 2)

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)

Pairing the first half of the chiasm with its corresponding inverted parallel, one can gain a better understanding of each idea of the chiasm:

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.

The inflection point of the apostle John's chiasm emphasizes Jesus' preeminence and purpose:

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,

This highlights the importance of Jesus Christ and completes the figurative picture of the figure of speech "light." Old Testament Believers, anticipating the Messiah, received Jesus as the Promised One. Gentile Believers, hearing the Good News, placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).
2. Gaeblein FE ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House (1992).