

THE STRUCTURE OF THE JOHANNINE PROLOGUE AND GENESIS 1

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Preamble

The Fourth Gospel arises out of the first century conflict between a community of Christian believers, some of whom would have been Jewish, and their opponents, characterized in the Gospel story as “the Jews”. Both claimed to be true recipients of Divine Revelation. J. Ashton evokes the pain of this struggle most poignantly, when he describes it as a *family quarrel*, “in which the participants face one another across the room of a house in which all have shared and all call home”.¹ Within the first eighteen verses of this Gospel, the reader is drawn into the tension between Jesus and the Law. The Prologue not only identifies two different Divine gifts—the Law, and Jesus Christ (v. 17), but makes the claim that it is the Christian community which now possesses the fullness of God’s revelation, because of its relationship with Jesus and his unique relationship with God.

In this article, I will briefly examine various approaches to the structure of the Prologue and then present a new structure which closely resembles the structure of the first creation account in Genesis. I will then argue that this structure can help our understanding of two major motifs in the Fourth Gospel—Revelation and Creation.

The Structure of the Prologue

In looking at how the Prologue is structured there are basically two approaches. One approach shows the Prologue developing as a succession of ideas in a linear or chronological manner. The following chart shows the way three commentators structure the Prologue along these lines.

¹J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 151.

Brown (1966) ²	Barrett (1978) ³	Beasley-Murray (1987) ⁴
1-2 Word with God 3-5 Word & Creation * 6-9 addition 10-12b The Word in the World *12c-13 added 14 &16 Community's share in the Word * 15 added * 17-18 added	1-5 Cosmological 6-8 John's witness 9-13 Coming of Light & failure to accept it 14-18 Economy of Salvation	1-5 Word & creation 6-8 Witness to Word 9-13 Reactions to the Word in the World 14-18 Confession of the Word by the Church

The major problem which this type of structure must address is the double presentation of John's witness. For Brown, these Baptist verses are later additions into a Johannine hymn, written in for polemical reasons.⁵ But this still leaves unanswered, why place these additions where they are and draw attention to the Baptist twice?

The second method is to structure the Prologue using literary models such as chiasms or parallelisms. This method examines the repetition of themes and words and shows the relationship between various parts of the Prologue. The chiasmic structure is represented in the writing of Culpepper (among others) who presents the following schema:⁶

A vv. 1-2	Word with God	A' v. 18
B v. 3	Creation through Word	<i>Grace & truth</i> B' v. 17
C vv. 4-5	Received life	Received Grace C' v. 16
D vv. 6-8	Baptist	D' v. 15
E . vv. 9-10	Incarnation & response	E' v. 14
F v. 11		F' v. 13
His own—Israel		his own—believers
G v. 12a		G' v. 12c
accept the Word		believe the Word
H v. 12b		
to become Children of God		

²R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29-29a; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966 & 1970) vol. 1, p. 22.

³C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1978) 149-50.

⁴G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word Books, 1987) 5.

⁵Brown, *Gospel*, vol. 1, 22.

⁶R. A. Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1980-81) 16. See also M.-É. Boismard, *St. John's Prologue* (London: Blackfriars, 1957) 80.

This structure sees built into the Prologue a descent-ascent Christology —“The return of the Word to the presence of God”⁷—and presents the central theme of the Prologue in verse 12b: to become Children of God.⁸

While this structure offers one solution to the various repetitions in the Prologue, it is not entirely satisfactory. Beasley-Murray argues correctly that v. 18 is not an ascent, but a statement of the authority that lies behind the revelation offered by the Son.⁹ He argues that v. 14 is the pivot by virtue of its theological significance.¹⁰ In agreement with Beasley-Murray, there is also the fact that v.18 does not use the relational words *logos*—*theos* that were used in v. 1. Verse 18 uses *Son -Father*, which are the terms used to describe the relationship between the *logos* and God once the *logos* enters history. Verse 14c shows this shift in terminology—*glory as of the only son of the Father*. By describing the relationship using the terms *Son-Father*, the Prologue ends focussing the reader’s attention on the historical person who manifested in time the eternal relationship between *logos-theos*—“that one has made him known” (v.18).

Another literary model shows the Prologue as a series of parallel themes. This was proposed by de la Potterie, drawing on the work of P. Lacan, and taken up by F. Moloney.¹¹ De la Potterie describes the structure as a spiral, or as a succession of ideas developing upon each other in the manner of waves on the rising tide. Where Lacan proposed three waves, each containing three movements, de la Potterie describes three waves with varying movements as follows:¹²

Wave 1 (1-5)	Wave 2 (6-14)	Wave 3 (15-18)
A. The Beginning		
A. vv. 1-2 The Word	A' vv. 6-8 John	A'' v. 15 John
B. The Word The Light Of Men		
B. vv. 3-5a	B' v. 9	

⁷Culpepper, “Pivot”, 10.

⁸Culpepper, “Pivot”, 17-31.

⁹Beasley-Murray, *John*, 4.

¹⁰Beasley-Murray, *John*, 4.

¹¹I. de la Potterie, “Structure du Prologue de saint Jean,” *NTS* 30 (1984) 354-81.

F. J. Moloney, *The Word Became Flesh* (Theology Today Series 14: Dublin/Cork: Mercier, 1977) 35-39.

F. J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 25-27.

¹²De la Potterie, “Structure”, 358.

C. The Responses		
C. v. 5c darkness could not overcome	C' v. 10-12 those not accepting those who accept be- come children of God	C'' v. 16 we receive “ <i>une grâce à la place d'une grâce</i> ” ¹³
D. The Object Of Faith: The Unique Son Of God		
	D' vv. 13-14 <i>gloire du Fils unique ... plein de la grâce de la vérité</i>	D'' vv. 17-18 <i>la grâce de la vérité ... le Fils unique</i>

Moloney follows this “three wave” structure with some modifications.¹⁴

vv. 1-5 <i>Introduction</i> The Word in God becomes the Light of the World	vv. 6-14 <i>Central Statement</i> The incarnation of the Word	vv. 15-18 <i>Conclusion</i> The Revealer: The Only Son turned towards the Father
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Within each of these three sections, Moloney sees four themes which are developed.¹⁵

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|--|-----|-------|-------|
| a) the Word announced and described. | 1-2 | 6-8 | 15 |
| b) the coming of the Word into the world | 3-4 | 9 | |
| c) the gift of the Word & the response | 5 | 10-13 | 16 |
| d) the nature of the gift: free gift which is true | | 14 | 17-18 |

One difficulty with this structure is that it forms a parallelism between verses 1-2, which refer to the *logos-theos* relationship, and verses 6-8, and 15 which refer to the God-John relationship. I find this parallelism forced. The power of the opening verse and the focus of its relationship are best paralleled to verse 18, not in the static sense of Culpepper's chiasm, but in a dynamic sense of describing a relationship at two levels. The relationship is first described in eternity (*logos-theos*), in verse 18 it is

¹³I am retaining the French in some verses to catch the subtle nuances of de la Potterie's approach.

¹⁴Moloney, *Belief*, 26.

¹⁵Moloney, *Word became Flesh*, 38.

then described in the form of a recapitulation, only now the relationship has entered time and the world of men and women. From verse 14 there is a shift of language from *logos* to Son which is maintained in verse 18 “the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father—**that one** has made him known”. The Prologue begins in eternity and concludes directing the reader to the Son, whose name in history has just been introduced—Jesus Christ (v. 17b).

A NEW PROPOSAL

A structure I propose follows the idea of parallel themes but has a bipartite form within an introduction (1-2) and a conclusion (18) where the conclusion recapitulates and develops the opening verses—the process of this development is shown in the intervening verses (3-17). Each of the two major sections tells the story of the Word’s coming into the world. Each part has three strophes that trace the historical development of the Word’s presence in the world (3-5; 14), the prior witness of John the Baptist (6-8; 15), then the arrival and responses to the Word (9-13; 16-17).

The first part **reports** the stages of this story in the third person, while the second part **announces** it as personal testimony, using first person verb forms and pronouns—us, (14b), we (14c, 16b), I (15c), me (15c, d, e).

This structure can be shown schematically :

Bipartite Structure

Introduction (vv. 1-2)

logos/theos in eternity

Strophe		
A (vv. 3-5)	have seen	A' (vv. 14)
B (vv. 6-8)	have heard	B' (vv. 15)
C (vv. 9-13)	have experienced	C' (vv. 16-17)

Conclusion (v. 18)

Son/Father in history

The Prologue

Introduction:

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

<p>Story of the Word in creation and coming into history</p>	<p>Testimony to the Word's presence and revelation in history</p>
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SEEN

<p>3. Everything became through him and without him became nothing 4. In him was life and the life was the light of men 5. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.</p>	<p>14. And the Word become flesh and dwelt among us and we saw his glory glory as of the only son of the Father the fullness of a gift which is true.</p>
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John the Baptist

HEARD

<p>6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7. He came as witness to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8. He was not the light but came to bear witness to the light.</p>	<p>15. John witnessed concerning him and cried out saying, "This man was the one of whom I said—He who comes after me came before me for he was before me."</p>
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Two Responses to the Word

EXPERIENCED

<p>9. The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world. 10. He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world knew him not. 11. He came to his own and his own did not receive him.</p>	<p>16. From his fullness</p>
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<p>12. But those who did receive him he gave them the power to become children of God.</p> <p>those believing in his name.</p> <p>13. Those born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of a man, but of God.</p>	<p>we have all received</p> <p>a gift in place of a gift.</p> <p>17. For the Law was given through Moses the true gift came through Jesus Christ.</p>
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Conclusion:

18. No-one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.

The three-fold development within each section has strong echoes with the introduction to the first Johannine Epistle where there is a similar emphasis on seeing, hearing and experiencing.

- 1:1 *That which was from the beginning which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our own eyes, which we have **looked upon and touched** with our hands ...*
- 1:2 *we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.*
- 1:3 *We proclaim to you what we have **seen and heard**.*

Both the Prologue and the introduction to the Epistle, emphasize the sensory nature of the community's experience. The pre-existent Word of God has become flesh and so is accessible to ordinary human experience; it has been seen, it has been heard, it has been touched.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction (1-2) establishes the relationship between the Word and God before moving to the relationship between the Word and the created world. These opening verses echo the description of Wisdom, with God from the beginning (Prov 8:22-26), the first of God's creative acts (Prov 8:22) and the artisan beside Him in the process of creation (Prov 8:30).¹⁶ A significant difference between Wisdom and Word is that there is no explanation for the existence of the *logos*. Unlike Wisdom, the *logos* is not created, the *logos* is simply described as *being* in the beginning with

¹⁶The exact meaning of the term *חָכָם* is unclear, it could mean craftsman or little child. See T. McCreesh, "Proverbs," in *NJBC* (1989) 457.

God. The imperfect ἦν and the preposition πρὸς establish a dynamic intimacy between the Word and God through all time.

STORY TOLD OF WHAT WAS SEEN

In the above structure the Word is within the world of history from v.3, from the very moment when all things came into being through him.¹⁷ Creation has its origin in the Word who is described as Life. In v. 4 there is a change of imagery from life to light. Light, with its association with visibility, makes explicit the revelatory nature of the Word's activity in creation. Creation can no longer be impersonal because the act of revelation requires the human presence, so life is called the "light of humankind". The juxtaposition of *life* and *light* continues to draw on traditions of both Wisdom and Word whereby creation is the first revelatory act.¹⁸

In verse 5 the verbs change tense from present—the light *shines*—to aorist—the darkness *did not overcome* it. The Christian would read in this verse an implicit statement of Jesus' story and the conflict between the powers of light and darkness that his life educed. These verses (3-5) not only narrate the story of the Word's presence in creation, but also indicate the Word's revelatory and salvific role as light and life for all people. As yet, the Christian story is implicit for the Word has not been identified with a historical figure. The Christian story becomes more explicit in the next strophe with the introduction of John.

WAS HEARD

The first part of the Prologue (3-13) tells the *story* of God's revelatory Word and as a story only gradually unfolds so the Prologue shows the gradual coming of the Word from the indefinite past of eternity (v. 1) to an identifiable moment in history when John bore witness to the light. As the first strophe focussed on light and seeing, the next strophe (6-8)

¹⁷The presence of the Word in history is a much debated issue. Commentators such as Lamarche and de la Potterie argue that the Prologue is concerned with revelation rather than cosmology and that the Incarnation of the Word announced explicitly in v. 14 is already implicit from v. 3. "D'après le vocabulaire johannique, le mot πάντα en 1,3 semble donc désigner, non pas toutes les choses créées, mais < tout > ce qu'a réalisé le Verbe, dans l'ordre de la *révélation* et du *salut*." I. de la Potterie, *La Vérité dans Saint Jean* (Analecta Biblica, 73. Rome: Biblical Institute, 1977) 163. P. Lamarche, "Le Prologue de Jean," *RSR* 52 (1964) 527. Moloney also supports the view that revelation is the central theme but allows the possibility of creation as a subordinate theme (Moloney, *Belief*, 31).

¹⁸"The experiences of the world were for her [Israel] always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world." G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972) 62. See also Brown, *Gospel*, vol. 1, p. 25.

focuses on what can be heard, for John bore witness to the Light primarily through his words (John 1:15, 19-34). The auditory nature of John's witness is so pronounced that in all the traditions he is described as "the Voice" (Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; Matt 3:3; John 1:23). In this first section the reader is told about this witness, in the second section (14-17), where story becomes first-person testimony, John's voice is heard in direct speech (John 1:15). Through John, the Word's coming was announced beforehand to those who would hear. John witnesses to the *logos* and portrays the correct response to the *logos*, as in the Gospel, John describes himself as one who could "hear" the bridegroom's voice (John 3:29). In emphasizing the audibility of revelation, the Prologue is faithful to the Deuteronomic and Wisdom traditions which also insists on the need to listen (Deut 6:3, 4; Prov 1:8, 33; 4:10; 12:15, etc.).¹⁹ God's revelation which is light to be seen and Word to be heard becomes even more accessible in the third strophe (9-13) which speaks of the experience of the Word in human history and the two responses to this experience.

WAS EXPERIENCED

Verses 9-13 continue to echo the motif of Divine Wisdom, making use of the two contradictory Wisdom myths; one in which Wisdom finds a dwelling within Israel and is identified with the Torah (Sir 24:23, Bar 4:1); in the other myth, Wisdom finds no home in the world and so returns to the heavens (1 Enoch 42: 1-2). The identification of Wisdom and Torah brings a particularly poignancy to the words "*he came to his own* (τὰ ἴδια) *and his own* (οἱ ἴδιοι) *received him not*" (1:11). Bultmann and Schnackenburg interpret τὰ ἴδια in terms of all people and reject the possibility that this expression could mean Israel.²⁰ Brown argues that τὰ ἴδια does mean Israel and contrasts the use of "his own" in 1:11 and 13:2. "... in place of the Jewish people who had been his own (i 11), he now has formed around himself a new "his own," the Christian believers (i 12)." ²¹ Against the background of the Wisdom tradition, and in the context of a conflict between "the Jews" and the Johannine community, τὰ ἴδια refers more precisely to Israel. Wisdom speaks as follows—"I took root in an honoured people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage"

¹⁹Solomon's great prayer for wisdom in governing Israel has this emphasis. "Give your servant a listening heart [לִבְךָ שֹׁמֵר]" (1 Kgs 3:9).

²⁰R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 56 n. 1. Schnackenburg notes the possibility that the evangelist had in mind the Jews of his time who rejected Jesus, but he adds—"However, since no such polemic is audible in the rest of the prologue ... there is no compelling reason to believe that he had Israel in mind." R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* (HTCNT; 3 vols; London: Burns & Oates, 1968-1982) vol. 1, p. 260.

²¹Brown, *Gospel*, 29. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 125.

(Sir 24: 12). The Lord's heritage, his own honoured people, who have embraced Wisdom now reject the *logos*. But there are some who do receive him, who believe in his name, and these are gifted with the power to become children of God (12).

STORY WITNESSED

The various themes outlined in the form of a story continue in the second section and are given further explanation. The section begins with the declaration that the Word of 1:1 became flesh and tabernacled among us. The use of the first person pronoun will continue in this section changing story to testimony. The light of part one is now expressed as glory in part two—the visible manifestation of God in the world. The relationship of the Word and God, when it takes flesh in human history, is described as a relationship of Son and Father (14 c), a relationship of filiation which is also described as the fullness of a true gift (14d). The gift of divine filiation had been promised to those believing in “his” name (12).

As yet the Word/Son has not been identified with a specific human person. Following the chronology of the synoptics, John announces his coming. In this part of the Prologue John's words are given direct speech as testimony to the Word. The narrative skill of the evangelist is shown by the steady build up of ideas and expectations while withholding the name of the central character until the very end of this section.

The final strophe brings the story and testimony to its tense climax in the naming of Jesus. Everything said of the *logos* in history, is now given a focus in the particular life of this man, and in the two responses to him. The contrast between those who did not receive him, and those who did, is made more explicit in these final verses (16-17), as is the contrast between two gifts. Those who did receive him, received from his fullness one gift in place of another (16).²² What this fullness is, has already been described as the relationship between Father and Son and as a gift that is true, “*glory as of the only son of the Father the fullness of a gift which is truth*” (14e).²³ The first gift was the Law given to Moses and expressed in the life of Israel. The gift of Divine filiation, a gift described as true, is

²²ἀντί is usually translated as “upon” or “in addition to” giving the sense “grace upon grace”. Such translations impose the Pauline sense of χάρις in the Johannine text. χάρις in ordinary Greek usage usually means *gift* and ἀντί means *instead of, in place of*. See R. Edwards, “XARIN ANTI XARITOS (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *JSNT* 32 (1988) 3-6; also Moloney, *Belief*, 46-47.

²³In this translation I am following the grammatical arguments of Bultmann (*Gospel*, 73-74) and Moloney, “The Fulness of a Gift which is Truth,” *Catholic Theological Review* 1 (1978) 31. For a fuller discussion on the Johannine use of the term χάρις in verse 14 and 17 see de la Potterie, *La Vérité*, 129-150.

now offered to Christian believers.²⁴ There is no sense that the former gift is devalued; on the contrary this Gospel will draw on some of the key symbols and rituals of Judaism even as it claims that Jesus now brings these symbols and rituals to fulfilment. Former gifts to Israel are now given a fullness of expression in the gift offered to believers, the possibility to become children of God. Judaism and Christianity are both at home in the traditions of Israel, but for Christians these traditions must now be reinterpreted in the light of God's new gift—Jesus Christ.

<p>9. The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world.</p> <p>10. He was in the world and the world was made through him and the world knew him not.</p> <p>11. He came to his own and his own did not receive him.</p> <p>12. But those who did receive him he gave them the power to become children of God.</p> <p>those believing in his name.</p> <p>13. Those born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of a man, but of God.</p>	<p>16. From his fullness</p> <p>we have all received</p> <p>a gift in place of a gift.</p> <p>17. For the Law was given through Moses; the true gift came through Jesus Christ.</p>
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Verse 18 brings the Prologue to its conclusion and continues the movement from statement to testimony, for testimony is only valid through the personal experience of seeing and hearing. What the Son makes known is valid because of his unique relationship with the Father. The final verse continues the polemical thrust of the Prologue by asserting that **no-one** has ever seen God. The claims of Judaism to possess the fullness of revelation are refuted. The only one who can reveal God is the Son, who was with God in the beginning and came to dwell among us.²⁵ The Prologue

²⁴Verse 17 has two nouns joined by the conjunction καὶ. Moloney argues that the second noun "truth" is used expegetically to explain and further identify the first noun "gift" (Moloney, *Belief*, 47).

²⁵Jewish apocalyptic literature described the ascent to the heavens of men such as Moses, Enoch, Abraham, who were then able to return to earth with unique revelations. Their Jewish model of revelation could therefore be described as ascent-descent. The Johannine model starts in heaven and this gospel describes only a descent. The Word entered human history and the gospel makes the promise of an

concludes with the definitive statement “**that one** has made him known”. The use of the aorist refers back from verse 18 into the historical past to the person of Jesus Christ (v. 17). Following the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish Rabbis sought God’s revelation in the Torah. Against the claims of “the Jews”, who have excluded Johannine believers from their synagogue, the Prologue emphatically asserts that Jesus is the definitive revealer and revelation of God within human history.²⁶ The narrative which begins in verse 19 will demonstrate the truth of this assertion.

THE PROLOGUE AND WISDOM.

According to Warren Carter, one of the issues facing both the Christian community and Post-70 Judaism was, where wisdom is to be found, “where God in God’s knowability, visibility and audibility was to be encountered.”²⁷ The Wisdom literature of Judaism had identified Wisdom and Torah. According to one tradition Wisdom found a dwelling place in Jerusalem and was embodied in the Mosaic Torah.²⁸

*Then the Creator of all things gave me a command ...
 Make your dwelling in Jacob ...
 Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place,
 and in Jerusalem was my domain ...
 All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,*

abiding presence among believers (14:23). For a fuller discussion of the Jewish ascent-descent models of heavenly revealers see F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (2nd ed.; Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose, 14; Rome: LAS, 1978) 54-55; W. Carter, “The Prologue and John’s Gospel: Function, Symbol and the Definitive Word,” *JSNT* 39 (1990) 43-46.

²⁶For a discussion of the Rabbinic texts and the Johannine response see F. Manns, *John and Jamnia: How the Break Occurred between Jews and Christians c. 80-100 A.D.* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1988) 11-74. An article by P. Van der Horst (“The Birkat ha-minim in Recent Research,” *ExpTim* 105 [1994] 363-68) surveys recent discussion on the Birkat ha-minim and concludes that this prayer was directed at *Jewish* heretics and was never intended as an instrument to expel Christians from the synagogues. Whatever its original intention, and whether this prayer provides the background for the Johannine conflicts, it is clear that in the Johannine community there is a rift between the synagogue and the Christian community. A move towards self definition within Judaism which is expressed in a curse against Jewish heretics, could equally be expressed by banning from the synagogue any non-pharisaic groups.

²⁷Carter, *Prologue*, 47.

²⁸John Ashton describes an alternative Wisdom tradition where Wisdom and Torah are rival claimants to revelation, and Wisdom does not find a home within human history. “Wisdom went out in order to dwell among the sons of men, but did not find a dwelling, wisdom returned to her place and took her seat in the midst of the angels” (1 Enoch 42:1-2). J. Ashton, “The Transformation of Wisdom: A Study of the Prologue of John’s Gospel,” *NTS* 32 (1986) 168-69.

*the law that Moses commanded us
as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob (Sir 24:8,11,23).*

*He found the whole way to knowledge,
and gave her to his servant Jacob
and to Israel whom he loved.*

*Afterward she appeared on earth and lived with humankind.
She is the book of the commandments of God,
the law that endures forever (Bar 3:36-4:1).*

The identification between Wisdom and Torah became crucial in the restructuring of Judaism following the destruction of the Temple. In discussing the various responses to the events of 70, Jacob Neusner identifies four different trajectories: an apocalyptic movement, the Qumran community, Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism.²⁹ Of these responses only Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism proved formative in history.

In answer to the questions—where can God be encountered, how can humans have access to the divine mysteries?—the Pharisees at Yavneh turned to the Torah while the Christian community looked to Jesus. Where Jewish texts, roughly contemporary with the Fourth Gospel, described visions, journeys and ascents as a means of acquiring true revelation,³⁰ the Johannine community proclaimed that in the life of Jesus, revelation is accessible to human sensory experience. The very structure of the Prologue with its emphasis on seeing, hearing and experiencing affirms the accessibility of the divine Word.

THE PROLOGUE AND CREATION

The bipartite form outlined above, framed by an introduction and conclusion, is found in the first creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:4a.

Johannine Prologue		Genesis	
<i>Introduction (vv. 1-2)</i>		<i>Introduction (vv. 1-2)</i>	
Strophe		Strophe	
A (3-5)	A' (14)	A (3-5)	A' (14-19)
have seen		light <=> darkness	
B (6-8)	B' (15)	B (6-8)	B' (20-23)
have heard		heaven <=> earth	
C (9-13)	C' (16-17)	C (9-13)	C' (24-31)
have experienced		land <=> waters	
		Climax: The Sabbath (2:1-3)	
<i>Conclusion (18)</i>		<i>Conclusion (v. 2:4a)</i>	

²⁹J. Neusner, "Judaism in a Time of Crisis: Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Judaism* 21 (1972) 313-27.

³⁰See for example, 1, 2, & 3 Enoch; book of Jubilees; Testament of Moses.

The Fourth Gospel begins with the first words of Genesis “*In the beginning*”, and follows a similar structure of three strophes set out in parallel between an introduction and a conclusion. The first of the three strophes in Genesis and in the Prologue develops the theme of light. Genesis has one significant difference in that the six days of creation in this narrative from the Priestly tradition, leads to the seventh day climax. This climax has no structural parallel with the Prologue for reasons I will take up later.

In the Targums there is further evidence for linking the Prologue with the Genesis creation story. In Targum Neofiti, God creates through His *Memra*—a term, usually translated as “word”. *Memra* is used in the Targums to represent God’s self-manifestation in the world. “*From the beginning with wisdom, the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1 Neofiti).*”³¹

The Targums, Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures used in the Liturgy, show significant differences to the Hebrew Text. The *Memra* or Word is added, as is wisdom. These additions reflect later wisdom theology already found in the books of Proverbs (8:22-30) and Sirach (22:1-12). In Neofiti, it is the *Memra*, not God who gives the command, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:3).

In the Targum to Exodus 12:42 we read

*The first night: when the Lord was revealed over the world to create it. The world was without form and void, and darkness was spread over the face of the abyss, and the Memra of the Lord was the Light, and it shone.(Neofiti).*³²

If these Targumic traditions were familiar to the Johannine community from their synagogue liturgy, then these Jewish liturgical texts provided a likely basis for the Johannine concept of the *Logos*, and the first creation account provided the Johannine author with the structure for his introduction to the Gospel of the *Logos* in creation.

In the new structure presented above, the Prologue has six strophes in parallel array, whereas the first creation account in Genesis has six strophes leading into a seventh day climax. The Prologue has no equivalent to the “seventh day climax” in its structure. The seventh day, in the

³¹For a brief summary of the finding and history of Neofiti 1 see M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 183-89. A more detailed introduction to the Palestinian Targums can be found in M. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Vol. 1A. The Aramaic Bible. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992) 1-46.

³²M. McNamara and M. Maher, *Targum Neofiti 1: Exodus; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus* (Vol. 2. The Aramaic Bible; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).

Genesis narrative, brings creation to its completion in the institution of the Sabbath. The Priestly authors saw in the institution of the Sabbath the fulfilment of God's creative activity, for creation had been finished.

*Thus the heavens and earth were finished and all their multitude.
And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done ...*

(Gen 1:1-2a)

Targum Neofiti draws on this theology when it adds the words "the Lord created *and perfected* the heavens and the earth".

The Fourth Gospel maintains that such fulfilment was not possible within Israel, that Israel's "seventh" day of perfection was illusory; the creative work of God had not been completed "*in the beginning*". Jesus was sent to finish the Father's work (John 4:34). In the conflict on the Sabbath Jesus states, "My Father is working still and I am working" (5:17). Real fulfilment only comes about through the life and death of Jesus. Jesus' dying word "It is finished" (ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ) announces the true completion of God's work (19:30) and echoes the use of the same verb (ΤΕΛΕΩ) used in the LXX version of Genesis to announce the finish of God's work in creation (Gen 2:1). In the death of Jesus, the Scriptures which opened with the words Ἐν ἀρχῇ (Gen 1:1; John 1:1) have been brought to fulfilment. "The work is now finished, and the Sabbath that begins after Jesus' death (xix 31) is the Sabbath of eternal rest".³³

The six strophe structure of the Prologue, like the six days of creation in Genesis 1, requires one final act to bring it to completion. This act begins in 1:19 as the Gospel narrative of God's final work, to be accomplished in the life and death of Jesus, now begins. Until the story of this final work has been told, there can be no "seventh day". By utilizing the structure of Genesis, but breaking from its pattern, the very structure of the Prologue asserts that something more is still to come. God's creative activity is still unfolding, and the final creative word has not yet been spoken. Israel's past history and traditions are part of this unfolding activity which is now being brought to fulfilment when the Word is spoken in a new way within human history. In its themes and in its structure the Prologue refutes the claims of Israel to already possess the fullness of revelation.

Conclusion

D. A. Carson calls the Prologue a "foyer", "simultaneously drawing the reader in and introducing the major themes".³⁴ As a foyer, the Prologue is incomplete in itself and requires the rest of the Gospel to

³³Brown, *Gospel*, vol. 2, p. 908; vol. 1, p. 217.

³⁴Carson, *Gospel*, 111.

explain the story it has sketched, and to resolve the questions it leaves unanswered. The Prologue is unfinished and requires the “seventh day” of the Gospel narrative to bring it to a conclusion.

In its structure the Prologue sets up a balance between the story told in verses 3-13, and then the story retold from the perspective of first person witness, a witness that has seen and heard and experienced the Word in the person of Jesus (vv. 14-17)—a witness therefore that is reliable. Since this story focuses on the *logos*, who entered history in the person of Jesus, the introduction and conclusion show that the revelation offered by the *logos* is true, because of the intimate relationship between *ὁ λόγος* and *ὁ θεός* in eternity, and the Son and Father in history. There is a progression of witnesses to the revelation of God, first—the *logos*/ Son/ Jesus, then the Baptist, followed by the Johannine community present in the use of the first person pronouns, and finally, as the author announces, *these things have been written* (20:31)—there is the witness of the Gospel itself.