

The Bible in Context Ep 13: Introduction of John

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Welcome back to the Bible in Context.

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Merry Christmas, Nate. Merry Christmas, Caleb. We're actually going to be taking a break since it's Christmas week from the book of Genesis because our church has been going through a mini-series on the first chapter of John. So today, I'm going to do less of the talking. Nate's going to do a lot more of the talking and going to lead us through some of his study, some of the things that he hasn't been able to bring out in the sermons on John 1. So...

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Yeah, that's a game plan and I figured it would be good for us just to start by reading the first 18 verses, which is what really, we're not covering the whole chapter of John, or John chapter 1. We're going to be looking at the first 18 verses, which is basically like the prologue to the Gospel of John. And within this prologue, you really see all the major...

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key points that get played out throughout the whole gospel then. So everything is introduced in these first 18 verses. And you're going to notice that John really jumps in to the deep end of the ocean right at the very beginning of his gospel and bringing Jesus into this cosmic realm, or showing that Jesus is part of this cosmic realm. So I'm going to jump in.

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Starting in verse one, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

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He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gave light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

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but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

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and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him and cried out, this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me.

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For from his fullness we all have received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side. He has made him known.

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So that's the prologue of John. So Caleb, I wanted to ask you, just as we've been studying and walking through this passage, what has really struck you? What things within this passage have really stood out to you?

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Yeah, I mean, there's a lot in there. But I guess on a high level, the things that stand out to me the most, in the first little bit there, you've got the kind of the callback to creation, just introducing the book in the same way as Genesis. Later in this section, we've got the kind of callback to the Exodus. And then you mentioned that this book sets up a lot of the themes that run throughout the book.

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and this motif has worked out, but that continual motif of receiving and believing in His name is just a motif that runs throughout the book. I don't know what all we're going to get into today, but those are a few things that just really stand out. Yeah, absolutely. You see the themes of light and darkness.

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the importance of receiving Christ and believing in his name so that you may have eternal life. That theme runs throughout the book of John. And so today this is what I want to do. I want to talk about the context of John and who John was writing to and the purpose of John and why John is so different from the other Gospels. And then I want to break down this...

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a prologue and kind of show you the literary structure of it and just...

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where you're absolutely right, you see references to Genesis, you see references to Exodus, and then we'll conclude by just kind of summarizing what we see here in the prologue, and then

focusing in on the invitation that's at the very end of the prologue, and we'll conclude with that. So let's talk about the context a little bit of John. So what do we know about John? We know that John is an apostle, that he was one of the first disciples of Jesus.

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never refers to himself as John in his gospel. He refers to himself as the one that Jesus loved. That's that's how he viewed himself. That his whole identity was wrapped up in the fact that Jesus loved him and I think that's significant. This gospel is really anchored on the fact that John was an eyewitness to Jesus and we see that over and over and that

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is reflected again in the first letter. The beginning of the Gospel of John and the beginning of First John really mirror one another. And you see this proclamation of John saying that, look, I witnessed these things. I saw these things with my own eyes. I touched Jesus with my own hands. I mean, I heard him with my own ears. And that's emphasized throughout this Gospel. We know that John

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was he wrote this gospel, he wrote the three letters, he also...

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wrote the book of Revelation and so he had a very intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. He was one of only three that got to experience the Mount of Transfiguration. He sat right next to Jesus at the Last Supper. And so, of all the disciples, it seems that John had a very intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. And so, of all the disciples,

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had a unique relationship with Jesus, a very intimate relationship with Jesus. And Jesus revealed more to John than I think any of the other disciples because of that, if you count the book of Revelation. And so he had a unique perspective that the other disciples maybe didn't quite have also, I think. There's a good chance that John was...

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church leader in Ephesus. And I'm getting some of this from, I've got a dictionary of the later New Testament that

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that talks about that. I'll read a little bit of that to you just to give you a little bit more background information. So early traditions indicate that John planted churches in Ephesus. Eusebus, the fourth century historian, quotes Irenaeus. This is 130 to 200 AD, the bishop of Lyons, who tells us that John was a leading ecclesiastical figure in Asia Minor. He goes on to say that clergy

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the area would travel to Ephesus just to learn from John and hear his stories about Jesus and how how did Aranius know all of this? Well Aranius says it was confirmed to him by Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who in his younger years was instructed by John himself. And so we've got this rich history of

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John being this figure who was really looked up to. The Gospel of John is really a collection of John's favorite stories about Jesus. These were meaningful stories. In fact, one of the differences between the other three Gospels and the Gospel of John is that

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John doesn't focus on miracles as much. Instead, he focuses on what he calls signs. That they are miracles, but there's a story inside.

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the story. It's thematic. Yeah, it's thematic. In fact, in the first half of the Gospel of John, there's seven signs, the first one being the miracle where Jesus changes water into wine and the seventh one being the resurrection of Lazarus, which kind of mirrors the end of the Gospel of John where you have the resurrection of Jesus, of course. And so...

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That gives you a little bit of the context of John. John was probably written later than the other Gospels. It's unique. The other Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they have a lot in common with each other.

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In fact, the Gospel of Mark, 90% of it is quoted in Luke and in Matthew. John, 90% of John is unique to John. There's a lot of differences between the Gospel of John and the other three Gospels. There's a great article on the Bible Project that really...

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shares a lot of the differences, the unique style and content. There's differences in the chronology and the geographical movement. So in the synoptic gospels, the first part of Jesus' public ministry occurs in Galilee where Jesus teaches and heals and he repeatedly comes into conflict with the religious leaders and Jesus eventually makes his path, makes his way south to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

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And we see in John's gospel though, that he actually makes repeated visits to Jerusalem for various festivals. There's actually three passovers mentioned in the gospel of John, and three other festivals that are mentioned there too. And so that means if you read the synoptic gospels, you might come to the conclusion that Jesus only had a ministry for about a year, where in John's gospel, it's evident that his ministry lasted to three to three and a half years

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There's also differences in the style and the literary form. So in the synoptic gospel, they tend to be made up of these short episodes, known as periscopes, which are strung together rather loosely in a narrative sequence. You come to John, though, and you find these very long narratives.

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and a lot of discourse, conversations between Jesus and individuals like Nicodemus in chapter 3. There are other stories followed by extended back and forth debate between Jesus and religious opponents. And so there's a lot more interaction between individuals and John's Gospels, or John's Gospel. There's also a difference in Jesus' message and his self-identification. It's more like...

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The Gospels are not different in the sense that John has a completely different message, but there's a difference in emphasis, though. So in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus' central message is concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God.

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You see Jesus healing and there's exorcisms that are meant to demonstrate his power and his authority. People are called to repentance and to believe in the good news of the kingdom. And so in this way they enter into the kingdom and they receive God's promise of salvation. Jesus tells parables of the kingdom to describe its nature.

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But then you come to John's Gospel and contrast, there's no parables at all in John's Gospel. There's no exorcisms in John's Gospel. Jesus' teaching focuses much more on his identity, his unique relationship with the Father, and the fact that Jesus is both the eternal Son.

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who has come to reveal the Father, and that salvation comes by knowing the Father through the Son. For example, John 14, six, he says, I am the way, the truth, and life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The synoptics.

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salvation is primarily described as entrance into the kingdom and in John's it's primarily no it's knowing God and eternal life with him and it's not that like like I said It's not a different message. It's just that's what John Emphasized he John actually does talk about the kingdom of God also, but just not nearly as much as the synoptics in the synoptic Gospels Jesus

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is identified as the Messiah, and that's put on center stage. The word Messiah means anointed one, and it refers to the promised king and savior from the line of David, who would save God's

people from their enemies and establish God's kingdom. John, he portrays Jesus more as, he doesn't focus so much on the Messiahship of Jesus, but he focuses more on the true.

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humanity of Jesus, but also the true deity of Jesus. That Jesus is both God and man. And you see that very much highlighted here in the prologue of John. Question so far. One thing I've wondered about the book of John, when you read it, there is this heavy theme of those who are...

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able to believe and then a majority of the Jews who just will not accept him. And then whenever they ask him questions and he explains himself, it's very much, it feels like Jesus is very much saying, you know, who's on first, what's on second, I don't care who's on third, you know. He's very like, I'm the father of the fathers and me, and it's just this very back and forth cryptic circular language that he uses. It seems like he is...

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In some sense, he's trying to reveal truth to his audience, but he's also trying to confuse some people too. So what's going on there? Yeah, there seems to be this way of speaking that John uses, and I think Jesus used, that was meant to help those who had come to the point where they have trusted...

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and who Christ is. They said, I wanna be on Team Jesus. Their allegiance was with Jesus. And so they're listening without this kind of critical mindset, and they could hear what Jesus was saying and understand it. While those who are still listening to Jesus with this much more critical mindset that really, were like, this guy's crazy.

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they would listen to what he was saying and it would just confirm that he was crazy. I think that may be what's going on. I don't know. Does that make sense? No, yeah, I think so. I mean, that sounds a lot like Isaiah's ministry where it's kind of like if they're not going to believe anyway, just solidify that. But those who are going to believe will hear your message and will. Yeah. I think it really helped kind of separate.

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those who believed and those that didn't believe. He talked in such a way that those who were bought in, it affirmed what they were believing, but those who were critical and really just refused to submit their lives to Jesus.

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really were probably put off by it. Those who were loyal to Yahweh heard what he was saying and believed it, but those who wanted to try and discredit him based on semantics and just his word choice had all the grounds to do so that they wanted. Yup. And he gave them that

ammunition. Yeah, for sure, for sure. And I know Jesus talked about, like the disciples of Jesus actually asked him why he spoke in parables and that was basically the response that he gave to them.

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refused to believe, would continue to refuse to believe, and that there would be certain things that were hidden from them until they were ready to fully commit and believe in him as the Messiah.

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Yeah, which I mean, it's just making the seed of the serpent continue down that path of the seed of the serpent, which we've talked about too in other sermons and I think other podcasts about how this isn't a wholesale rejection necessarily because there are times where the seed of the serpent turn and come to Yahweh. Prime example being Nebuchadnezzar. Yeah.

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Yeah, and it wasn't that, I mean, I think Jesus had a heart for the unbelievers and desired them to, and that's what you see in the Gospel of John over and over. I mean, he's pleading with the unbelievers to believe in Jesus, and that's really the purpose of this Gospel. And we might as well go there right now. So John chapter 20, so at the very end of the Gospel, he finally just plainly says what the purpose of his Gospel is.

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He says this in verse 30, he says, therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in the book. And then in verse 31, he says this, 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. That was the purpose of him writing this gospel, is that he would convince those who were not yet believers

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to believe and then because they believe they would have life in His name.

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Let me back up just one step and talk about the differences between the Gospel of John and the other Gospels and why there's these differences. I've already talked a lot about the differences already, but I want to talk about why this is and then I want to talk about the structure of the prologue, the literary structure of the prologue. And so this has been a question that I think people have debated.

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over the years. But the reason I believe that John is so much different than the synoptic Gospels is that John was more than likely writing in a different context and at a different time, and he's dealing with different issues and writing to a different people than those other...

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other Gospels. And so John is addressing issues of importance that are a concern for the Church of his day. One of those things be the word. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So in Greek philosophy, the word was a significant term. The Logos was a term that was used in Greek philosophy to describe

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impersonal force.

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much like if you're into Star Wars, right? The force is something that is talked about throughout the Star Wars movies as this impersonal. Life force, it holds all things together. It's in all things, it holds all things together and if you can connect to it, it'll kind of give you superpowers or super knowledge. I hate that I just called that quote to mind. Yeah, you didn't even have to think about it, did you? It was just right there.

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But yeah, so that was very much part of the Greek philosophy back then. And so John, in the very beginning of his gospel, is saying, yeah, let's talk about the logos. Let me tell you what the logos really is. It's not this impersonal force. The logos is a person, and his name is Jesus. And he is the creator of the universe. And everything was created by him and for him and through him.

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and he is worthy of our worship. And so, so yeah, that was a major emphasis at the beginning of this of this gospel that John is addressing something in his real, in the real world that he wants to correct. Yeah, and it's cool that in

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Genesis which we'll talk about this eventually to where the word is Something that is used to refer to Yahweh himself And so here John is taking this Old Testament image of the word as Yahweh and the Greek idea of the word is this You know force or whatever and saying look this force is actually a person and that person is the Old Testament Yahweh Yeah binding these two things together for the Greeks who are reading his language. Yeah, absolutely

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would have been a mixture of Jews who had been spread out and have been living in the Greek culture, but they knew some of the Old Testament. And then he's also talking to these Greeks who knew nothing of the Old Testament. And so that's a significant difference between the synoptic gospels, where the synoptic gospels

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convincing Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, where John has a much broader

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context that he's writing to. So that's one of the major differences in why his gospel is so much different. So the synoptic gospels were more than likely written in the 50s, between the 50s and the 70s, so earlier on in the burning issue for the church was showing that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. A fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and how...

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his kingdom has arrived, that God's kingdom has arrived and Jesus is the king who is ushering in this kingdom.

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where John is writing somewhat later, and the church is confronting different challenges. There's false teachers that have arisen within the church, and some of them are challenging the deity of Christ, and they're claiming that he is not fully God, and others are questioning his true humanity, denying that God could become a human being. And so from the very opening lines, John is confirming both the full deity and the true humanity of Jesus.

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And so we see right at the beginning of the Gospel, John 1, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And so this brings us to the literary design of the prologue.

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And what we see here is actually another chiasm. There's a sandwich here like I've talked about before. And the center, the meat of the sandwich, the center of the chiasm is in verse 11 and 12, where he says this, he says, "He came to his own, and his own people "did not receive him, but to all who did receive him "who believe in his name, "he gave the right to become children of God."

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And that goes back to what we talked about is the purpose of this gospel that those who are not yet believers would come to believe in the name of Jesus Christ and they would become children of God and they would have eternal life because of that. And so that structure is significant. You also see in the structure that you have some introductory statements.

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So you'll also see in this literary structure some introductory statements at the beginning, and then there's a mention of John the Baptist, and then there's an allusion to Genesis, and then there's another mention of John the Baptist, and then there's allusions to the Exodus. And so, of course, you've got at the very beginning...

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really a quote from Genesis 1, in the beginning, right, was the Word and the Word was with God. And so you got some references back to Genesis there. You also have the idea of the

Word that comes from Genesis where Yahweh spoke creation into existence. The idea of light comes straight from Genesis

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now he's saying that Jesus is the light. You also see the idea of life comes straight from Genesis also as God creates life for the first time.

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And then you got the mention of the witness, which is John the Baptist, and he was prophesied in the Old Testament, specifically in Isaiah and in Malachi. And he's a witness to the light. He is not the light, but he is a witness to the light. And then you've got the center of the chiasm talking about he gave the right to become children of God. And then you go back to the word

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dwelt among us and that word dwelt is a word that in the Greek, skeene, okay like the verbal form of it but yeah okay the word tent or tabernacle yeah and yeah and so in the Septuagint that's the word that's translated for tabernacle from the Old Testament and so it's this idea that the word became flesh and he tabernacled among us he he set up a tent and this is references back to Exodus

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set up a tent, the tabernacle, in the midst of their camp so he could dwell among his people. And the promise was that they would go into the promised land and he would dwell with them in the promised land. And so here we have Jesus coming as God in the flesh.

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dwelling among us. And I believe that in verse 14, the us there that John is talking about is the apostles, the original disciples that he walked with them. And again, it's this emphasis that John has that he was an eyewitness of Jesus. And he says there in verse 14, we have seen his glory, we have seen the glory of God.

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son from the father full of grace and truth and so that phrase grace and truth is probably a reference back to Exodus also and in Exodus 34 6 where Yahweh describes his character as

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one who is full of grace. And what are the Hebrew words? It's like Emmet. Yeah, yeah. So these – the words here, gracious and – grace and truth, they're partially – they're the pull from all over the Old Testament, but where they appear in reference to Yahweh's character, the most repeated verse in the Old Testament, Exodus 34.6, is he is gracious, he is chaim, and he is faithful or truth, Emmet, which comes into the –

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the New Testament often as *pistis* or faith or loyalty, reliability. Yeah, that's exactly right. And so there's just some rich references to Exodus here at the prologue, and John's very intentional about that. And so the last thing I want to just point out, there's a lot more that we could talk about. I mean, there's an ocean of...

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meaning in this passage, but the very end of the prologue in verse 18 he says, no one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the Father's side. He has made him known.

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So it's really interesting that at the very end of the prologue, in the Greek, this is actually an open-ended sentence. It's almost like the sentence has no ending to it. And John's intention was not that he forgot to put an ending onto the sentence. He leaves it open. And so I'm going to read from, this is from Francis J. Maloney in his book, *Belief in the Word*, reading the fourth gospel. And he says this, the use of the verb.

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explain slash make known in Greek it's *exo-gymii*.

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without an object as the very last word of the prologue has created considerable syntactic difficulty. The verb comes at the end of the sentence and thus at the end of the prologue, it leads the reader directly into the prose narrative of the life of Jesus through the *chi* or the word and that opens verse 19. So the object of the verb, him referring back to God, must be supplied by the reader from the context.

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there is that John intentionally left the sentence open-ended without an ending to encourage you. Like you want to know the answer to the question of about like, okay, how is he? What's made known? Well, let me tell you by sharing the rest of the gospel with you. And so that's how he ends the prologue with this kind of open-ended sentence that causes you to ask the question, okay, what is he made known?

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or who is he made known? And he spends the rest of the gospel explaining that.

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That's the conclusion of what I'm going to talk about also. And I enjoyed this excursion away from Genesis and looking forward to jumping back into Genesis next week. Awesome. Yeah, thanks for taking us through the book of John and just taking us through the study you've done. Yeah, just really bringing a lot of the finer points out of this text that we just don't have time to talk about in the sermon, but are so beneficial for us to know as we go into this book to learn about John's message about Jesus. So, yeah.

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Thanks for taking us through that.