

When God Became Man

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Scripture references are from the *King James Version Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *Feasting on the Word*,
Copyright 1992 by Thru the Bible Radio.)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:1-18)

Our little earth revolves in a vast, dark universe. And on its surface storms are blowing – storms of hate, of violence, of rebellion and unbelief. Today we hear voices of so-called theologians saying, “There is nobody out there in the dark; God is dead.” It reminds me of an old story concerning Mark Twain. A report went around that he had died. When someone asked him about it, he said, “Well, it is greatly exaggerated.” My friend, to say that God is dead is greatly exaggerated and actually is only wishful thinking. Those who are saying it are like little boys whistling in the dark, trying to say how brave they are. There *is* Someone out there, and He is undisturbed by the little storms blowing across this planet, unchanged by our atomic age and space age and the shifting philosophy of men’s minds. Over nineteen hundred years ago He came out of space, out of eternity to be identified with humanity. What relevance does His coming have to your life and to mine in this twentieth century? We still celebrate His birth at Christmastime, but actually who is He and why did He come?

Identification

The Gospel according to John introduces Him with three tremendous statements.

In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God

“The Word” is one of the highest and most profound titles of the Lord Jesus Christ. To determine the exact meaning is not easy. Obviously the Lord Jesus Christ is not the *logos* of Greek philosophy, rather He is the *memra* of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Notice how important the Word is in the Old Testament. For instance, the name for Jehovah was never pronounced. It was such a holy word that they never used it at all. But this is the One who is the Word; and gathering up everything that was said of Him in the Old Testament, He is now presented as the One “in the beginning.” This beginning antedates the very first words in the

Bible, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” That beginning can be dated, although I do not believe that anyone can date it accurately. It is nonsense to say that it is 4004 B.C., as Ussher’s dating has it. It probably goes back billions and billions of years. You see, you and I are dealing with the God of eternity. When you go back to creation He is already there, and that is exactly the way this is used – “in the beginning *was* the Word.” Notice it is not *is* the Word; it was not in the beginning that the Word started out or was begotten. *Was* (as Dr. Lenske points out) is known as a durative imperfect, meaning continued action. It means that the Word was in the beginning. What beginning? Just as far back as you want to go. The Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Does that begin God? No, just keep on going back billions and trillions and “squillions” of years. I can think back to billions of years before creation. Maybe you can go beyond that, but let’s put down a point there, billions of years prior to creation. He already was; He comes out of eternity to meet us. He did not begin. “In the beginning *was* the Word” – He was already there when the beginning was.

“Well,” somebody says, “there has to be a beginning somewhere.” All right, wherever you begin, He is there to meet you, He is already past tense. “In the beginning *was* the Word” – five words in the original language, and there is not a man on topside of this earth who can put a date on it or understand it or fathom it. This first tremendous statement starts us off in space, you see.

The second statement is this, “And the Word was with God.” This makes it abundantly clear that He is separate and distinct from God the Father. You cannot identify Him as God the Father because He is *with* God. “But,” someone says, “if He is with God, He is not God.” The third statement sets us straight, “And the Word was God.” This is a clear, emphatic declaration that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. In fact, the Greek is more specific than this, because in the Greek language the important word is placed at the beginning of the sentence and it reads, “God was the Word.” That is emphatic; you cannot get it more emphatic than that. Do you want to get rid of the deity of Christ? My friend, you cannot get rid of it. The first three statements in John’s Gospel tie the thing down.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

Interpretation

Let’s move on down to verse 14 and notice the three statements there:

And the Word was made flesh
And the Word dwelt among us
He was full of grace and truth

The Greek philosopher probably would have stayed with us through verse one, but he leaves us here. He would never agree that the Word was made flesh. The Greek language allows us to put it more specifically and, I think, more accurately, “The Word was *born* flesh.” Turn this over in your mind for a moment. Here comes God out of eternity, already the Ancient of days; but He also came to Bethlehem, a little baby thing that made a woman cry. And notice that John’s Gospel does not even mention His birth in Bethlehem. Do you know why? He is talking about One who is too big for Bethlehem. Out of eternity, the Word became flesh.

“And [the Word] dwelt among us” is the second statement in John 1:14. “Dwelt” is from *skenoo*; it means He pitched His tent among us. Our human bodies are merely little tents in which we live. The apostle Paul used the same imagery, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved...” (2 Corinthians 5:1). This house in which we live is a tabernacle, a tent, that can be blown over in a night; it can be snuffed out in an instant. Because you and I live in these little tents, the God of eternity took upon Himself a human body and thus pitched His tent down here among us. Such is the second tremendous statement.

Notice the third, “And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Now John is saying something else. The observation I would naturally make at this point is, “If He was made flesh, He certainly limited Himself.” John says, “Wait a minute. He was full of grace and truth.” The word *full* means that you just could not have any more. He brought all the deity with Him, and He was full of grace and full of truth when He came down here.

Illumination

Now we move to verse eighteen to find three statements again:

No man hath seen God at any time
The only begotten Son, which is
in the bosom of the Father
He hath declared him

Notice the first, “No man hath seen God at any time.” Why? He will explain it in this Gospel. The Lord Jesus will tell the woman at the well, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” – for God is spirit. No man has seen God at any time. What about the appearances in the Old Testament? God never revealed Himself in the Old Testament to the eyes of man. What, then, did they see? Well, go back and read the record. For instance, Jacob said that he saw God, but what he saw was the angel of the Lord who wrestled with him. That was a manifestation, but he did not see God, because God is a spirit. “No man hath seen God at any time.”

The second statement is, “The only begotten Son....” The best Greek text is that of Nestle, the German scholar. He has come to the definite conclusion that it is not the only begotten Son, but the only begotten *God*. I prefer that also. “... Which is in the bosom of the Father” tells us a great deal. He did not come from the head of God to reveal the wisdom of God; He did not come from the foot of God to be a servant of man. (Have you ever noticed this? Although we speak of the fact that He was a servant, whose shoes did He ever shine? Did He ever run an errand for anybody? He did not. He said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me.” He was God’s servant. He came to serve Him, and as He served the Father, He served men.) He did not come from the foot; He did not come from the head; it was from the bosom of the Father that He came. He came to reveal the heart of God. He was “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father.”

The third statement completes verse eighteen, “He hath declared him.” The Greek word here is *exegesato*. *Ago* is “to lead” and *ex* is “out.” It means that what Jesus Christ did was to lead God out into the open. Do you know anything bigger than that? A little trip to the moon is nothing in comparison. Here He comes out of eternity past, the God of this universe, the Creator

of everything, taking upon Himself human flesh and bringing God out into the open so that men can know Him. My friend, the only way in the world you can know God is through this One, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came to reveal God because He is God.

I am not through with these statements; there is something else here. Let's put together the first verse in each of these three groups and see what we come up with:

In the beginning was the Word (verse 1)
And the Word was made flesh (verse 14)
No man hath seen God at any time (verse 18)

You could not see God; God is spirit. He had to become flesh; He had to become one of us in order for us to know Him. We could not go up there to understand Him; He had to come down here and bring God down where we are.

Now let's put the second statements together from each of the three groups:

The Word was with God (verse 1)
And dwelt among us (verse 14)
The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father (verse 18)

Consider this One for a moment – the angels bowed before Him; He was with God, on an equality with God. The apostle Paul wrote of Him, that He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Philippians 2:6). That is, He did not go to school to become God, it was not something He worked overtime to attain. It was not a degree that He earned. He did not *try* to be God; He *was* God. I do not mean to be irreverent, but He did not say to the Father when He came to this earth, “Keep Your eye on Gabriel; he is after My job – watch him while I’m gone.” He did not have to do that; nobody could take His place. He was God. Here He comes, born in Bethlehem, a few little shepherds there, not many; He goes up to Nazareth; for thirty years He is hidden away in Nazareth. God, out of eternity, comes down and goes to Nazareth, working in a carpenter shop. Why? So you can know God. The only way you will ever know Him, my friend, is to know this One. “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father,” He is the only One who can reveal God to us.

Now notice the third statement in each group:

The Word was God
And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only
begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth
He hath declared him

When He was down here, He was still God, full of grace and truth. And He declared Him; He is the only One who can lead Him out in the open where we can get acquainted with Him.

We are not through with this. I want you to see something else. How do you divide up this universe? I sat with a man who designed the shield that has been on all these spacecrafts to make their re-entry. He is a scientist who is an authority on heat. As we had lunch together in New Jersey, he said, “You know, this universe is made up of just three things. I believe that God has put His fingerprints on everything – the Trinity is everywhere.” Then he explained what he meant. The universe is divided up into time, space, and matter. Can you think of a fourth? The

very interesting thing is that time, space, and matter include everything that is in this universe as you and I know it. Then time can be divided into just three parts: past, present, and future. Can you think of a fourth? And what about space? Length, breadth, and height. Is there another direction? Also in matter there is energy, motion, and phenomena. Those are the three divisions of the three divisions. The universe in which we live bears the mark of the Trinity.

Now notice the way in which the Incarnation is geared into this observation.

Time: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.”

Space: “The Word was made flesh” – became flesh, came down into space. Where? To Bethlehem, a little geographical spot – and even this earth was a pretty small spot for Him to come to – and He pitched His tent here among us, we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth.

Matter: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Because He became matter, became a man, took upon Himself humanity, men could see and know God. This is the time, space and matter of the Incarnation.

Let’s divide each of these into three. First, let’s look at time.

Past: “In the beginning *was* the Word.”

Present: “The Word became flesh” (in our day).

Future: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son ... hath declared him.” The apostle Paul, at the end of his life, said, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection...” (Philippians 3:10). That will be for the future – to really know Him; today we actually know so little because we are finite.

Then look at space, divided into length, breadth and height:

Length: “In the beginning was the Word.”

Breadth: He came down to this earth and was made flesh.

Height: No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has come from the heights to set Him before us.

Consider the divisions of matter: energy, motion and phenomena.

Energy: “In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God” – that’s energy. How did this universe come into existence? God spoke. Every rational person has to confront this problem of how the universe began. That is the reason evolution has been popular – it offers to the natural man an explanation for the origin of the universe. You must have an explanation for it, if you do any thinking at all. Where did it come from? Well, here is the answer, “In the beginning was the Word.” God spoke. That is the first thing that happened. When God speaks, when the Word speaks, energy is translated into matter. What is atomic fission? It is matter translated back into energy – poof! it disappears. Creation began with energy. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, the Word was God.

Motion: The Word was made flesh. He came out of heaven’s glory, and He came to this earth.

Phenomenon: The greatest phenomenon in this world is Jesus Christ. The wonders of the ancient world and the wonders we see in our day are nothing in comparison to the wonder of the Incarnation – God became man!

These statements are bigger than any of us, and yet they are so simple. We have read them, probably memorized them, yet no man can plumb the depths of them.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth....

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:1, 14, 18)

These three verses are the great building blocks. Now let us consider some of the cement that holds them together.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:3)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator. Not only did He exist before Bethlehem, but He created the vast universe, including the material out of which man constructed Bethlehem. All things were made by Him. He is the instrument of creation. Nothing came into existence without Him.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (John 1:4)

Now we are confronted with something else – two of the simplest things in the world: light and life. *Zoe* and *phos* are the two words in the original language. From *zoe* we get zoology, the study of life; and from *phos* we get photo or anything that is built on it, such as photograph – it is light. These two things are so common that we take them for granted. Life – we see it everywhere. There may be a great deal of life right where you are at this moment. You go out in the woods and you see the same thing – life. It greets you on every hand; but can you explain it? You see in the Sunday pictorials and the sensational magazines that men now have discovered the source of life. But if you read them, you find that they have not found the source at all, though they think they are close to it. They put the microscope down on a green leaf. One moment that little cell is arranged one way and is dead as a doornail. The next moment the thing is rearranged in another way and it is alive. And then the thing starts growing and doubling, dividing and multiplying itself. Why does it do that? Life.

The other common thing is light. What is light? I listened to Irwin Moon try to explain it (and Irwin gave the best explanation I have heard), but when he got through I was not sure if light is a real something or if it is just waves, because they can cut the thing off and still light will go through objects that would stop waves. What in the world is light?

You see, we are dealing with things that are fundamental, though men today, with all their scientific gadgets, know so little about them.

“In him was life” – all life is in Jesus Christ. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” You and I live in a universe that is spiritually dark. The fact of the matter is that it is physically dark to a certain degree. But God said, “Let there be light,” and these light holders are placed about throughout His universe like street lights in a big city. We are told that when a man gets away from this earth a short distance, he is in total, absolute darkness, and it is frightening to be out where there is nothing from which the sun can be reflected. Our little globe is out in a dark universe, yet that is nothing compared to the spiritual darkness that envelops it. When the sun disappears, there is physical darkness over the land; but twenty-four hours a day there is spiritual darkness here, awful spiritual darkness. Man does not know God; man is in rebellion against God; man is in sin that blinds him to God. In the Lord Jesus Christ there is life, and the life that He gives is the *light* of men. In fact, His life is the only thing that can kindle light in the heart of an individual. An unregenerate man has no spiritual life within him. This is the reason that when you present to him Jesus Christ, he says, “I don’t get it. I don’t understand that at all.”

I used to go down to the jail in Cleburne, Texas, and speak to the men. It was not a large jail and I could talk to them in a conversational tone. I would start off talking about football (because in Texas football is a religion!) and those hardened men would get enthusiastic about it. I talked also of other things, and they were interested. Then I would turn the conversation to something spiritual, and I could see the darkness come over their faces. I might just as well have been talking to corpses. And that is what they were – men dead in trespasses and sins. This world today is in spiritual darkness, and the Lord Jesus Christ has brought the only light there is in the world. He is the light.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:4, 5)

Darkness of Doubt

The light shines in the darkness of this world at this moment. I have a notion that somebody reading these pages is saying, “Why is that preacher talking about being in spiritual darkness? I understand everything.” No, unless you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you do not understand. The Spirit of God has to open your heart and mind and enlighten you before you can ever see Him as your Savior and receive Him as your own. May I say to you, friend, this world is in spiritual darkness.

The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:5)

That word *comprehend* is an unfortunate translation. And a wiseacre did not help it by rendering it, “and the darkness was not able to put it out.” That is no translation at all. The word in the Greek is *katelaben*, meaning actually “to take down.” It is the picture of a secretary to whom the boss is giving dictation, and she stops and says, “I can’t take that down; I am not able to take it down.” The light shines in darkness, and the darkness is not able to take it in. That is it exactly. Someone said to me, “Boy, was I in darkness before I received Christ! And I don’t know why I didn’t see.” Well, that is it, you were in darkness and you did not see. The darkness just cannot take it in.

Now this is something quite interesting, and it is not true of physical light. You go into a dark room, and the minute you switch on the light, the darkness leaves, it disappears. Darkness and light cannot exist together physically. The moment you bring light in, darkness is gone. The minute light is taken out, darkness will come right back in. But *spiritual* light and darkness exist together. Sometimes here is a husband who is saved and a wife who is unsaved – or vice versa. Here is a man working next to another man. He says, “What do you mean when you talk about being a Christian? I do the best I can. Am I not a Christian?” There you have light and darkness side by side, and the darkness just cannot take it in. That is exactly what is said here, “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. (John 1:10)

That was the tragedy – the world was in darkness, spiritual darkness, and did not know Him. Even today we are seeing the rise of atheism and unbelief and will see it more and more in the

days ahead. A great many people do not seem to recognize that unbelief and atheism go naturally with the natural man. Somebody says to me, “Oh, did you read in the paper what Dr. So-and-so of a certain seminary wrote?” Yes, I read it. “Well, isn’t it awful?” No, I do not think so. He would upset my apple cart if he said that he believed the Bible, because he is an unbeliever by his own statement. He says that he does not believe in being born again, that he does not believe he has to receive Christ in order to be saved. Now I do not expect that man to say he believes the Bible. That would be absolutely contrary to his statements. The so-called theologians and theological professors who espouse the “God is dead movement” present us with the preposterous, untenable claim that they are Christian atheists! Obviously atheism precludes the possibility of being Christian, yet unbelief has moved into our seminaries and pulpits across the land. The world does not know Him.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own [his own things], and his own [people] received him not. (John 1:10, 11)

He came into His own universe, but His own people did not receive Him.

Deepest Need

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power...” The word “power” is not *dunamis* power like dynamite, physical power, but *exousian* power which is delegated power, authority.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the authority] to become the sons of God [children, tekna of God], even to them that believe on his name. (John 1:12)

This week I looked over the shoulder of a person who was reading an out-of-town paper (that’s a Scotchman’s way of reading newspapers) and I saw where an outstanding columnist, writing about this present-day spree of trying to get peace by going to a psychologist and by using tranquilizers, made the statement that until men find peace in God they will never know what real peace is.

Notice that this is for “them that *believe* on his name.” And always with the word “believe” there is a preposition. You see, faith, as the Bible uses it, is not just head knowledge. Many people ask, “You mean all that I have to do is to say I believe?” Yes, that is all you have to do, but let’s see what that implies. With the verb *to believe* there is always a preposition – sometimes *en* (in), sometimes *eis* (into) or sometimes *epi* (upon). You must believe into, in, or upon Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate with a chair. I am standing beside a chair and I believe it will hold me up, but it is not holding me up. Why? Because I have only a head knowledge. I just say, “Yes, it will hold me up.” Now suppose I believe into the chair by sitting in it. See what I mean? I am committing my entire weight to it, and it is holding me up. Is Christ holding you up? Is He your Savior? It is not a question of standing to the side and saying, “Oh, yes, I believe Jesus is the Son of God.” The question is, have you trusted Him, have you believed into Him, are you resting in Him? This chair is holding me up completely. And at this moment Christ is my complete Savior. I am depending on Him; I am resting in Him.

In the state of Mississippi, back in the antebellum days, a slave preacher was speaking to the other slaves at the close of the day. They were tired and weary and were reclining on their cotton sacks at the end of the cotton rows. He quoted to them, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will rest you." One of the men raised up from his cotton sack and said, "Preacher, them's good words, but who said them?"

That, my friend, is the most profound question that can be asked. "Who said them?" And that question, voiced long ago in a cotton field in the South, is the same question in the mind of modern man, weary of the pressures and frustrations of life.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)

"Them's good words, but who said them?" Who said them? Jesus, the Word, God become man.

I ask you the question: Who is Jesus? Do you have some question about Him? If you do, there is no peace in your heart. But if by faith you can accept God's record – the Word came out of eternity, was made flesh, walked these dusty roads down here, went to a cross, died as man's substitute, and arose from the dead to be an adequate Savior – if you can believe this, you not only will be God's child for eternity, but you will have rest, the peace of God in your heart right now. You will have a Savior who is too big for Bethlehem, who is bigger than this world, who is adequate to meet your need. I present Him to you today as Jesus, the Savior of the world.