LOGOS WAS THE TRUE LIGHT*

Contributions to the Interpretation of the Prologue of John.

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RESEARCH STANDPOINTS

Analyses of the Prologue of John in recent years have concentrated particularly on the question of poetic and prose stylistic forms, and on the question of unity and unevenness in thought, both within the Prologue itself, and the Prologue in relation to the rest of the gospel. As far as form is concerned, several scholars, such as R. BULTMANN, E. KÄSEMANN, R. SCHNACKENBURG and R. E. BROWN, have suggested that the evangelist has used and supplemented a hymn 1).

BULTMANN’s analysis of the Prologue has resulted, amongst other things, in the direct reference to John the Baptist, John i 6 ff. and v. 15, being considered a secondary addition, as it is prose, thus not belonging to the original poetic hymn. According to BULTMANN, the evangelist as a former disciple of the Baptist, added these words about him as a testimony to Jesus, to resolve his problem in leaving the Baptist’s sect and becoming a Christian.

Other scholars who interpret John’s Prologue as a hymn seem to disagree with several aspects of BULTMANN’s interpretation of the thoughts piecemeal. Nevertheless, they are in agreement with


him in regarding the references to John the Baptist as a secondary addition.

E. Haenchen’s study of John i 1-18 is of particular interest. He believes that the editor who added ch. 21, also added the saying about John the Baptist, i 6-8, 15. This editor thought that John had to be mentioned first, and then Jesus, and thus undertook the necessary revisions of John’s Prologue. Haenchen’s study, however, shows that an essential criterion for eliminating vv. 6-8, 15 has been discarded. In fact, he indicates that the difference in style between poetry and prose cannot be utilised with regard to the Prologue, and thereby this criterion is also weakened with regard to vv. 6-8, 15 1).

With this in mind, it is understandable that W. Eltester completely rejects the hypothesis of a reworked hymn. Eltester maintains that John i 1-18 is a single entity, and that the gospel narrative begins with v. 1. In fact, each section tells of an epoch in salvation history:

i 1-5 Das „Wort“ als Schöpfungsmittler und als Offenbarer.
i 6-8 Johannes als Gottesgesandter und als Zeuge des Offenbarers.
i 9-II Der Offenbarer und seine Ablehnung durch Heiden und Juden.
i 12-13 Die alttestamentlichen Gotteskinder.
i 14-17 Die Fleischwerdung des „Wortes“ und der Lobpreis seiner Gemeinde, mit Johannes als Zeugen seiner Pre-existenz und seiner Gnaden in Alten Testament und in Jesus.
i 18 Der eingeborene Sohn als alleiner Künders Gottes 2).

For Eltester, the statements about John have a central function, but his treatment seems rather schematic and strained. He does not give a satisfactory explanation as to why the statements about John appear as early as vv. 6-8, and not just before the verses on the Incarnation, vv. 14 ff. Another objection to Eltester is that it is difficult not to interpret vv. 9 and ii as referring to the Incarnation, as much as v. 14.

At the same time, there are two points of Eltester’s which seem to be value. When the distinction between poetry and prose is

2) W. Eltester, “Der Logos und sein Prophet”, Apophoreta (Haenchen Festschrift), Berlin 1964, 109-34, especially 124.
dismissed, it is natural to consider John 1:1-18 as a unity 1). And even if Eltester’s salvation history epochs are over-schematically presented, but nonetheless one ought to investigate whether or not the salvation history motif is present in the passage. Various studies (among others A. Fridrichsen’s and N. A. Dahl’s) show that there are, in fact, elements of salvation history within the gospel 2). Therefore one can expect to find such elements in the opening of the gospel as well.

Thus there is a need to investigate John 1:1-18 anew, with regard to both form and content.

THE EVANGELIST AND JEWISH EXEGESIS OF GENESIS

In the study “Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John”, (published in “New Testament Studies”) I have attempted to show that the Prologue’s basic structure is not primarily dependent on whether the style is prose or poetry, but that this portion is an exposition of Gen. 1:1 ff. 3). This exposition follows the pattern a), b), c)/ c), b), a), which becomes apparent when one identifies the words and phrases based on Gen. 1:1 ff., which are used repeatedly in the passage.

vv. 1-2.  
1. ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος. v. 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

vv. 14-18.  
14. καὶ ὁ λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσχήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενεύς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.  
18. θεόν οὐδεὶς ἐώρακεν πῶς αὐτὸν ὁ ὅν εἶς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρός, ἐκείνος ἐξηγήσατο.

vv. 3.  
3. πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς

b) vv. 10-13.

1. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν ὤχθε.

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1) Cf. that the theory of an Aramaic hymn has not had convincing force. See R. E. Brown, John, CXXIX f., 22 f.
PEDER BORGEN

In the aforementioned study in NTS (where the details of form-analysis can also be found) it was suggested that a parallel to this pattern is found in the Jerusalem Targum of Gen. iii 24, and similar patterns are found in other Jewish writings.

It would be possible to relate this pattern in the Prologue of John to a source analysis. On this basis one could advance the hypothesis that a source has been reworked and supplemented by the evangelist. In this study, however, we shall put the question: can John i 1-18 be considered a unit, composed by the evangelist? The question could be formulated in another way: does the exegesis compel us to reckon with a reworked and supplemented source?

If we regard John i 1-18 as a unit, composed by the evangelist, its arrangement can be presented thus:

(a) vv. 1-2 and vv. 14-18 Logos and God before the creation, and the Epiphany with the coming of Jesus.
(b) v. 3 and vv. 10-13: Logos which creates in primordial time, and which claims its possession by the coming of Jesus.
(c) vv. 4-5 and vv. 6-9: Light and nightfall in primordial time, and the coming of Light with Jesus’ coming, with the Baptist as a witness.

On the basis of this structure it is clear, therefore, that vv. 1-2 must be interpreted first and foremost together with vv. 14-18; likewise v. 3 with vv. 10-13; and particularly vv. 4-5 together with vv. 6-9. In the most essential points in this study we shall concentrate the discussion of vv. 4-5 and vv. 6-9 on Light. We shall see if these verses can be understood as a unity, or if their exegesis leads
us to consider vv. 6-8 as a secondary supplement. These interests coincide particularly on the issue of how far Jewish traditions of interpreting Gen. i, and other Jewish traditions, illuminate the train of thought, and partially the terminology, of John i 4-9.

It can be considered very probable that the evangelist has not only reproduced words from Gen. i such as ἐν ἀρχῇ/אַרְבֶּשֶת, (ὁ) θεός/אֱלֹהִים and τὸ φῶς - מֹרֶשׁ - אֱלֹהִים, and substituted the words עַמָּה in Gen. i with a creation formula δὲ οὕτως ἐγένετο (vv. 3 and 11), but that he has also drawn on learned Jewish exegesis.

The term ὁ λόγος is particularly interesting in this connection. It occurs explicitly in vv. 1 and 14, and is referred to in many other verses in the passage. Vv. 4-9 contain important factors towards an understanding of the background to the phrase. This becomes clear when one considers more closely the suggestion that Gen. i 3 forms the background for the term: ό λόγος ἡ αἰώνιος ὁ ἀριστερός, LXX καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Γέννηθη συνεσχεμασμένος. HAENCHEN raised this objection to interpreting ὁ λόγος so: „Aber Judentum hat jenes ‘und Gott sprach’ von Gen. i eben gerade nicht zu einer von Gott unterschiedenen Person hypostasiert” 2).

There are several points immediately contradicting HAENCHEN’S rejection of this interpretation. For example, it can be asserted that since Logos seems to be identified with light in John i 9 3), Gen. i 3 provides the natural basis, since εἶπεν there can be understood as light. This occurs in Jewish exegesis, in Gen. R. III: 3, for example, where is interpreted as light. In a quotation from Proverbs xv 23, “A man hath joy in the answer of His mouth; a word in season, how good it is”, the expression “the answer of His mouth” מָכַנה is understood as God’s creative word in Gen. i 3. Thus it is explicit that “the reply of His mouth” is מָכַנה, and מָכַנה is, as in John i 9, identified with light: “and a word מָכַנה in season, how good it is; And God saw light, that it was good” (Gen. i 4) 4).

HAENCHEN’S objection has some validity all the same, for in Gen. R. III מָכַנה is in fact not personified, and is not a greatness

1) See E. HAENCHEN, op. cit., 305, note 3.

2) ibid.


independent of God, but is God’s spoken word. At the same time. HÄNCHEN’S objection here overlooks the fact that Philo in Somn, I 75 interprets Gen. i 3, and moves from the spoken word, to Logos as the model behind the work of creation: τὸ μὲν γὰρ παράδειγμα ὁ πληρέστατος ἤν οὐτοῦ λόγος, φῶς—ἐπιγράφες γὰρ φησίν ὁ θεὸς γενέσθω φῶς’, “for the model was the Word of His (God’s) fullness, namely light, for He says “God said, ‘Let there be light’”. Philo can then on other places add the personal aspect of Logos as a hypostasis, precisely with reference to Gen. i. Thus in Conf. 148, of “God’s first-born”, “Logos”; He is called “The Beginning”, “Logos”, “the Man after His (God’s) image”. For additional support from Philo it can be mentioned that in Opif. 31 Logos is also characterised as light, against a background of the creation account, that is, the background of Gen. i 3. In the study “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel”, (in the memorial volume to E. R. GOODENOUGH) I have attempted to show that Philo, in “De Confusione Linguarum” and in other places, reworks common Jewish traditions, amongst other ways, within Jewish mysticism 1). In the light of all this, it must be concluded that HÄNCHEN’S objection is untenable. Gen. i 3, therefore, presents the most probable foundation for the term Logos in the Prologue of John.

For further support in thus understanding Logos, one can refer to the fact that John builds upon and expands Jewish exegesis also in other places, for example in John v. Against the background of Jesus healing a lame man on the sabbath, and the Jewish sabbath rule against work, John v 17 expresses God’s attitude to the sabbath: ὁ πατὴρ μου ἔως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται.

The evangelist here presupposes the exegetical traditions, which, based on Gen. ii 2-3 raised the question of whether or not God could rest on the sabbath. The conclusion was that God is always active, at least with regard to certain definite functions 2). There are also other places in John where it is plain that learned exegesis is either taken up or presupposed by the evangelist 3). Therefore we have reached the probable conclusion, that the term ὁ λόγος in John i 1 ff. builds upon an exegesis of Gen. i 3 such as we find in Gen. R. III: 1-3 and in Philo in Somn. I 75.

3) See P. BORGEN, Bread from Heaven, especially 59-98.
Thus the question is, can Jewish traditions in connection with Gen. i 3 and other traditions, throw light upon John i 4-9 as an entity? Of interest here are the traditions which depict primordial light and dark in primordial time, and thereafter a later revelation of light again. There are several examples of such a tradition. In Chag. 12a are the following points: (a) Primordial light (Gen. i 3) which gave Adam universal sight and the removal of light because of the sin of the generation in primordial time; (b) light’s coming in the next age 1).

This conception can be given various formulation. The coming of light can be directly connected with the Messiah’s coming, or it can be connected with events which have already occured in Israel’s history, particularly Abraham and Moses’ lawgiving 2).

Against this background, the theme for i 4-9 can be presented thus: primordial light and nightfall in primordial time, vv. 4-5, and light’s entry into history, prepared by the coming of John. It would be practical to begin with vv. 6-9 the coming of light into history, prepared by the coming of John.

VV. 6-9: THE ENTRY OF LIGHT INTO HISTORY, PREPARED BY THE COMING OF JOHN

V 6 'Εγένετο ἄνθρωπος, ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης has a style characteristic of historical narrative in the O.T., for example Judges xiii 2, (ῬΩΡΙ ἌΘΡΟΙ ΜΕΤΡΙΕΣ ΜΙΣΘΑΦΕΤΗ ΜΩΣΗ ΡΩΜΙΟΝ) xix i, i Sam i i 3). BULTMANN underlines the fact that it is the O.T. prose style which is used and therefore he reckons vv. 6-8 as an interpolation in a Logos-hymn, as stated 4). In addition to the objections already expressed to this conclusion, we are now in a position to see that the Jewish traditions of primordial light can readily be connected with the advent of light in history, and more particularly, in Israel’s history.

In accordance with the expression of John’s appearance in history

3) See R. BULTMANN, Johannes, 29, note 1 and references.
4) ibid., 3 f., 29-31.
in v. 6, a statement follows in v. 7 of his task, to witness to the light. Our hypothesis of a Jewish background is borne out by the fact that John here has expressions characteristic of Rabbinical usage, as ἠλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν/ταχὺν ἀπο

Then, vv. 8-9 characterizes John in relation to Jesus: v. 8, οὖν ἦν ἐκεῖνος τὸ φῶς which states that John was not the primordial light of Gen. i 3, whereas v. 9 ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν states that Logos was.

V. 9 needs closer consideration. As for the question of the subject of ὅν, it could be understood in the verb: he, namely Logos; or it could be τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν, the true light was . . . . BULTMANN asserts, rightly, that it is ὁ λόγος, mentioned in vv. I-4. In support of this interpretation he cites vv. io and ii where the verbs ἦν and ἠλθεν also have Logos as the subject, due to the fact that the pronoun αὐτόν in v. iob is masculine and must refer back to ὁ λόγος 2).

The term τὸ φῶς connects v. 9 to the preceding, where the same term is used. This fact counts against taking v. 9 together with the following verse, even though the term ὁ κόσμος provides a link with v. 10 3).

In v. 9, light is identified as the true Light, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν. There is a sharp contrast between this genuine, actual light, and John as the supposed light, v. 8. Again, an observation which speaks for the idea that vv. 6-9 belong together. If vv. 6-8 are removed as an interpolation, it is in fact not so clear what it is that provides the contrast to the true light, despite the fact that the true light may be understood as a more exact precision of Light in v. 4 4). The most difficult grammatical problem remains in vv. 6-9, that is the participle ἐρχόμενον in v. 9. The seemingly obvious is to take the participle in connection with the preceding πάντα ἀνθρωπον. Even though a Rabbinical formula about becoming man seems to lend support to this approach, it is not satisfactory. The

1) ibid., 29, note 1.
2) ibid., 31, note 6.
4) R. BULTMANN, Johannes, 32, maintains that in the original hymn the true light was contrasted with the earthly light. Against this point of view it can be said that vv. 1-5,9 which belonged to the hymn, does not make this contrast clear. R. SCHNACKENBURG, Johannevesevangelium, 229, gives a more precise characterization of the light in v. 4 by saying that it is of unique kind. Again it can be stated that the most obvious contrast found in the context is that between the preparatory light of John and the true light of Jesus.
context, and John iii 19 and xii 46, show that it concerns the coming of light, and not the birth of every man 1).

This problem disappears if ἐρχόμενον is taken as a periphrastic form together with ἦν: “the true light was about to come into the world”. Otherwise, ἐρχόμενον can be understood as a loosely connected participle construction to τὸ φῶς “he was the true light which enlightens and which is coming”. But even these interpretations are not without difficulties. It is rather unusual that a whole relative clause separates ἦν from the participle in its periphrastic form, and in the case of a loosely connected participle construction, one would have expected the article to have been positioned before the participle 2).

On the other hand, there is another alternative which is grammatically defensible and which renders good sense. The participle ἐρχόμενον can refer back to the subject of φωτίζει, i.e. to τὸ φῶς represented by the relative pronoun ὅ. The participle without the article thus expresses what happens simultaneously with the action of the verb, and how the action occurs. In Blass-Debrunner this is called an adverbial use of the participle 3), and the translation is thus: “He (i.e. Logos) was the true light, which enlightens every man when it (light) enters the world”. Freely rendered the verse goes thus: Logos was the true light, which enlightens every man by coming into the world.

This grammatical interpretation of v. 9 has significance in determining the thought content. Thus it is impossible here to separate light’s enlightening work from its coming 4). In other words, both φωτίζει and ἐρχόμενον characterize the coming of Jesus 5).

What provides the thought-model for this coming of light? It would be natural to interpret light against the background of ideas of Messiah’s light 6). Since Logos in John is the light, it is more

1) Thus R. E. Brown, John, 9-10, with criticism of Burney, Schlatter, Bultmann, Wikenhauser.
3) F. Blass and A. Debrunner, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch, II. Aufl., Göttingen 1961, 260, especially 418,5.
4) Cf. that C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation, 201 f., thinks that φωτίζει refers to the general revelation as background for the special revelation in the coming of Christ.
6) See p. 121, note 1.
probable that the thought-model behind v. 9 is the coming of the primordial light, with the lawgiving of Moses.

Several references in John support this view. In John x 35 f. the term δ λόγος του θεον seems to be used of the Torah given at Sinai, and this idea provide the background for the saying regarding Jesus' being sent into the world 1). And in John xii 46 ff. it is stated that Jesus' coming as light brings δ λόγος and ἐντολή from God. These expressions are also understood easiest in the light of Torah 2). And in several other places, John transfers the Torah's function to Jesus, and uses terminology which usually belongs together with the Torah. For example, it is stated in Jewish sources that the Torah gives life to the world, and thus in John vi 33 that Jesus as the bread from heaven gives life to the world 3). On this basis it is sensible to understand Logos' and light's coming in v. 9 against the background of the lawgiving of Moses as a thought-model.

In addition, there are several likenesses between the ideas bound up in the Torah in Judaism and ideas in John i 4-9. It has already been shown that Jewish texts where primordial light from the creation (Gen. i 3) came into appearance at the lawgiving, are a thought-parallel to primordial light in John i 4-5, which appeared with the coming of Jesus v. 9. Also, as stated, the word ἔμμα is identified with the light and the Torah in Jewish texts, and even with the Torah as a creative instrument 4). Thus in John, Logos is identified with light, and Logos is the creative instrument, John i 3 ff. Furthermore, the Torah is life 5) and accordingly in John i 4, life is in Logos. Further, ideas directly connected with the lawgiving at Sinai illuminate John i 9. At the lawgiving, Moses brought the primordial light down from heaven 6), and according to John i 9 primordial light makes its appearance at the coming of Jesus. As

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the lawgiving of Moses was for all men 1), so in John i 9 the light shines for every man when it comes. Of particular note here is Sap. Sal. 18:4, where it says that the law’s light will be given to the world: το...νόμου φῶς τῷ ἀλῶνι διδοσθαι 2). It is also noteworthy that according to Jewish thought, the coming of the Torah made possible walking in the light 3). In a similar way we find that Jesus’ coming as the light makes it possible for men to walk in the light, John viii 12 f., xii 35 ff., cf. xii 46 ff.

Thus there are very good grounds for concluding that the conception of logos-light’s coming in John i 9 has as a model the conception of Torah-light’s coming with Moses.

However, in John i 6-9 weight is laid on John’s coming. Thus we find the aorist forms ἐγένετο and ἔθεν referring to John in vv. 6-7, whereas the present φωτίζει is used of light’s enlightening function. Since φωτίζει and the participle ἐφόμενον both refer to the incarnation, it is therefore the actual enlightening function which the incarnation effects that is in mind, and not the punctual aspect of the event in itself.

John’s appearance signified a marked event in salvation-history. Thus it is understandable that it must be made clear that he is not the light itself. It is therefore possible, but unnecessary, to see any polemic against a baptism-sect in v. 8 4). In contrast to the fact that John was not the light, the true light’s singularity stands out: it was Logos-light of Gen. i 3, “and God said, ‘Let there be light’ ”.

Jewish source-material is also of interest with regard to John’s function. In John v 33 ff., it is John’s service as a witness which is more closely defined. He was the kindled lamp which burnt and lit up. As background one can refer to the idea that Moses lit a lamp for Israel and took light from the law’s light, Syr. Baruch 17:1-

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1) S. Aalen, op. cit., 295 f.
2) S. Aalen, ibid., 194. One version of Test. Levi 14:4 has even a close phraseological parallel to the words of John i 9.
And without actually referring to the creation account, in 
Midr. Ps. 36 § 6 it is stated that the many men from Moses down to 
the sons of the Hasmoneans who saved Israel, were as lamps which 
had been extinguished again. Therefore one ought to pray that God 
Himself would give light ²). Seen against this background, it is 
understandable that John’s witness to the light had a significance 
in salvation history: he was the lamp, not the light itself.

PRIMORDIAL LIGHT AND NIGHTFALL IN PRIMORDIAL TIME: JOHN I 4-5.

Having considered John’s and primordial light’s entry into histo-
ry, John i 6-9, we can turn to primordial light and nightfall in 
primordial time, vv. 4-5. Once again we are up against grammati-
cal problems. This time it is the sentence division between vv. 3-4. 
Here we shall follow Nestle’s text which begins a new sentence with 
ἐν ἀντί in v. 4. Among the many considerations of this problem, 
we can rely upon that of K. HAACKER. He demonstrates that crea-
tion formulas of a similar type to that in John i 3 emerge, if the full 
stop is placed before ἐν ἀντί, v. 4 ³). Verse 4 therefore deals with 
the ideas of Life and light in relation to Logos and mankind from 
the creation onwards (v. 3). Verse 5a gives a general depiction in 
the present of the relation between light and darkness, and there-
after in v. 5b, a description of an event in the past in aorist form, 
that is the assault of darkness against light.

Verse 5b καὶ ἡ σκοτία ἄντο ὦ κατέλαβεν provides a good point 
of departure for a consideration of the thoughts contained in the 
verses. The debate among scholars has centered around the term 
κατάλαμβάνειν, “grasp”, either (a) to accept or (b) to seize with power 
and overcome in an undesir able or hostile manner. Scholars such 
as BULTMANN, WIKENHAUSER and HAENCHEN think that κατάλαμβά-
νειν here means to grasp in the sense of receiving and accepting: 
“and the darkness did not receive it (light)”. They stress particu-
larly that the thought here is parallel to that expressed in the phrase 
οὐχ ἔγνω, v. 10, and οὐ παρέλαβον in v. 11. All these give expression to

1) See also 3 Petirat Mosheh, 71 ff.
2) See S. AALEN, op. cit., 186-87 and reference to John v 35 on page 187, 
note 1. Such a subordinate lamp is John also according to F. NEUGEBAUER, 
“Miszelle zu Joh v. 35”, Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 
LII, 1961, 130, who interprets John v 35 against the background of LXX 
Ps. cxxxii 17, as the lamp of Messiah.
3) See survey of research in R. SCHNACKENBURG, Johannesevangelium, 
215-17; K. HAACKER, “Eine formgeschichtliche Beobachtung zu Joh i 3 fin”, 
the idea that wisdom is not accepted by men 1). On the other hand, scholars have argued that the verb \( \kappa \alpha \tau \lambda \alpha \mu \beta \alpha \nu \varepsilon \) in i 5 must be understood in the same sense as in xii 35 2). In xii 35 it is clear that the term is taken from daily life and describe as nightfall which comes upon man by surprise. The verb therefore means to seize or surprise one in an undesirable or hostile manner. In support of this interpretation it could also be noted that the expression in John i 5 and xii 35 presents a common formula for an unexpected and undesired nightfall, a formula which is well attested outside the N.T. 3).

In the light of our analysis of John i 1-18 an additional factor can be used to strengthen this interpretation. The structure used for John i 1-18 makes it natural to divide vv. 4-9 into two parts: vv. 4-5, light in primordial time, and vv. 6-9, what happened at John’s and light’s entries into history. Thus, the phrases used in connection with the coming of Jesus \( \alpha \nu \varepsilon \varphi \nu \varphi \iota \alpha \varepsilon \nu \varepsilon \nu \iota \), v. 11, are not parallels to v. 5b, which refers to primordial time, not the later entry of light in history.

The event to which v. 5b refers, seems to be the Fall, either connected with Adam, or with Adam and the sin of the first generations. In Jewish sources there are three particular lines of thought on the Fall which are of interest in understanding John i.

The first line of thought maintains that primordial light became removed, concealed or weakened, because of sin. So it is stated in Chag. 12a that God let primordial light shine in Adam but then concealed it (\( \tau \omicron \alpha \nu \omicron \nu \tau \omicron \omicron \), reserve, conceal) because of the sinful Flood and Babel-building generations 4). Also in place here is the idea that sunshine and length of days were lessened because of Adam's Fall.

The second line of thought, in a similar way maintains that the sins of Adam and the first generations led directly to darkness and night. The idea here can be developed to the extent that darkness and night grew, but the eventuality of complete darkness was averted by God’s goodness and Adam’s repentance 5).

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2) A. Schlatter, Johannes, 9; M.-E. Boismard, Le Prologue de Saint Jean, Lectio Divina II, 33-38; C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation, 36. 107; R. E. Brown, John, 8.
3) See especially A. Schlatter, Johannes, 9.
5) Gen. R. XI:2 and XII:6. Abodah Zarah 8a. E. Preuschen, Die apo-
Generally speaking, these two lines of thought see the darkness as a consequence of sin and thereby a punishment 1).

The third line of thought does not regard the darkness only as a punishment, but identifies sin and darkness. This identification is found particularly in the Dead Sea Scrolls where the spirits of light and darkness, and the children of light and darkness are mentioned. The idea is also found without this mythological dualism in Syr. Baruch 17-18, where Adam’s darkness is contrasted to the light of the law 2).

In John there are places where darkness can be understood as a result of disbelief and sin, for example in xii 35, but there are also places where sin and darkness are closely connected or identified, John iii 19 ff. In John i 5b it is stated that nightfall seeks to overcome the light of day, and darkness here seems to be identified with man’s sin 3). Jewish texts support the hypothesis that John here is referring to Adam’s Fall, and eventually the first generation’s Fall as well, particularly as we find sin and darkness identified in Syr. Baruch 17-18, where Adam’s darkness is mentioned.

According to John i 5b light was not overcome by darkness—but nightfall must have led to a new situation. Since John i 9 and xii 46 talk about the coming of light with the coming of Jesus, it follows by virtue of the fact, that primordial light, which mankind had according to John i 4, was removed from them. And since light’s coming brought back life, viii 12, it follows that the original light, mentioned in John i 4, was lost. Thereby the train of thought in John follows precisely that of Jewish interpretative traditions, which consider light and life among the things lost at the Fall, brought back at a later moment of time in history, or in the coming aeon 4).

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1) Gen. R. II:3 identifies the sinful generations with the primordial chaos in Gen i 2. Cf. Apocryphon Johannis 73:16-18, where the Deluge is depicted as darkness. See O. Betz, “Was am Anfang geschah”, Abraham unser Vater (Otto Michel Festschrift), Leiden 1963, 38.


3) Concerning light and darkness in John, see for example R. Schnackenburg, Johanneusevangelium, 223 ff.

Thus we have already touched on the interpretation of John i 4 and 5a, but some points must be added. One could attempt an understanding of the general saying in v. 5a, καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, against the background of ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls: how God created man, and the spirits of light and darkness are depicted there ¹). In John, however, light and darkness are not two equal religious-ethical powers. In fact, in John i 4 it is said only of light that it was with men in the beginning ²). On this essential point, John follows the traditions which let Adam, and thereby mankind, have light as their original possession, with the ensuing Fall and darkness. The general saying in v. 5a, that light shines in the darkness, tells thereby of the possibility of the Fall in primordial time as well as in the later coming of light, but does not state that light and darkness are equal powers in men.

CONCLUSION

(1) We have attempted to show that the structure of the Prologue of John must primarily be understood on the basis that it is meant to be an exposition of Gen. i 1 ff. The question of poetry or prose is therefore of subordinate significance.

(2) John i 1-8 seems to draw on learned Jewish exegesis, wherein Logos, רַבּ and light, יִשָּׂא are connected on the basis of Gen. i 3.

(3) John i 4-9 should be understood against the background of Jewish traditions of primordial light which was followed by darkness in primordial time, thus to reappear later in history, or in the coming aeon.

(4) The participle ἔρχομενον in John i 9 seems to refer back to the subject for φωτιζει, and both words depict light’s, i.e. Jesus’ coming.

(5) Since Logos in John is the light, the lawgiving at Sinai seems to provide a thought-model behind the coming of light in John i 9. With the lawgiving, the light of the Law shone upon all men, just as light in John i 9 enlightens every man.

(6) Therefore it is possible to understand vv. 6 ff. in terms of John, as a witness and lamp, introducing the salvation-history situation which prepared the coming of light in history.

¹) I QS 3.
(7) καταλαμβάνειν in John i 5b means "seize", "overcome", in an undesirable or hostile manner. The conception of nightfall in this verse can be understood against the background of Jewish conceptions of the removal of light, and the coming of the darkness of night with Adam's and the first generation's sin. John seems to say implicitly that light and life were removed at the Fall, in order to be brought back into the world by the coming of Jesus.

(8) Even though an understanding of the Targum schema a), b), c) / c), b), a) in John i 1-18 can be attempted on the basis of theories of a source reworked and supplemented by the evangelist, we have tried to show that Jewish traditions and a closer analysis of the Prologue of John make such analysis unnecessary, at least in verses 4-9. Therefore it would seem to be a viable hypothesis that John i 1-18 in entirety can be treated as a composition of the evangelist himself, wherein elements from different traditions are woven together.

This study is a partial study of John i 1-18 and will naturally lead to corresponding investigations of the ideas in vv. 3 and 10-13, respectively, of Logos' creation of the world, and coming to its work of creation with the coming of Jesus; and in vv. 1-2 and 14-18, respectively, of the existence of Logos and God before the creation, and the epiphany at the coming of Jesus, when Logos became flesh. As soon as these enquiries have been carried out, the relation between John i 1-18 and the gospel as a whole can be taken up in entirety. Meanwhile, this study concludes with the more limited field indicated by the title, "Logos was the true Light."