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Introduction

Assumptions

In the present phase of biblical interpretation, it is no longer possible to conduct Old and New Testament exegesis in isolation from one another. There are areas, of course, in which this continues to be possible, if not indeed called for, but we can no longer rule out the question of their reciprocal relationship. This question is not only posed from the perspective of the Christian tradition, in which the Old and the New Testaments are *one* book. Add to this the new situation in which, on the one hand, Jewish exegesis interprets the writings of the Torah without any regard for the writings of the New Testament and, on the other hand, Christian exegetes frequently understand the New Testament entirely from the vantage point of the Jewish tradition. It is equally significant that advancing secularization means that the books of both the Old and the New Testaments have long been read and interpreted outside the confines of ecclesiastical-religious commitment.

I want to demonstrate from the Gospel of John how close to one another agreement and sharp contrast can be if John's Gospel is read from the perspective of the Old Testament. It becomes evident that there are con-

texts in which critical questions pertaining to the Old Testament must be addressed to the texts of the New Testament as well.

The Gospel of John is an account. The Old Testament, too, contains many accounts, in differing forms and not just in the historical books. Many of these accounts include God speaking or acting. Accounts of God sending someone with a mission are told in the prophetic books as well as in the Gospel of John. Jesus is sent by God, just as the prophets were God's envoys. Jesus is sent to the same people. He speaks the same language. Those to whom he is sent live and think within the traditions and atmosphere that shape the Old Testament; they live within the history that began with their forefathers. When Jesus took on humanity among humans, he addressed *these* humans and ministered among them. He spoke their language and shared their thinking. Only in this way was he able to gain their confidence. The history of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be understood except against the backdrop of the Old Testament.

The Prologue: John 1:1–18

A considerable amount of gnostic elements is ascribed to the Gospel of John. It certainly does contain gnostic motifs and gnostic terms, as well as gnostic thought. But the example of the prologue illustrates that they are limited to a minor segment:

	<i>Prologue of the Gospel</i>	<i>Gnostic Revision</i>	<i>Additions</i>
1	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,		
2		and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God;	
3	all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.		

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.
6-8		John
9		The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.
10	He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.	
11	He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.	
12a	But to all who received him,	
12b	he gave power to become children of God;	who believed in his name,
13		who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
14	And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father	
15		John
16	And from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace.	
17		For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
18	No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.	

The Compositional Nature of 1:1–18

The account of Jesus of Nazareth begins in 1:19, written in prose. The preceding prologue probably was a *poem*. It is a *prologue* to the extent that it summarizes the Gospel as a whole (except for the passion narrative); this is especially true of vv. 11–12. This formerly independent poem has been reworked subsequently, as the additions of vv. 6–8, 15 (John), and 17 (law) indicate.

Even without these additions, the prologue still is not a smooth text; the rhythm of the poem is disturbed at several points. It has undergone gnostic reworking, as indicated by the gnostic language in the additions. Furthermore, there are awkward repetitions.

Verse 5 represents an addition (light and darkness, anticipating v. 14), as does v. 9 (intensification of the gift of salvation through the word “true”; cf. ch. 6: “the true bread,” “that which comes down from heaven”). Together vv. 5 and 9 form one addition (interrupted by vv. 6–8, dealing with John). At the end of the first part (vv. 1–13) there is a further gnostic addition in vv. 12b, 13, which attempts to provide a more specific explanation for the expression “to all” in v. 12a, that is, “to all” who were not born of humanity but of God. The contrast between heavenly and earthly is a recurring one in Gnosticism.

In gnostic thought, the separation into a heavenly and an earthly realm is assumed from the start. Creation and redemption coincide, as the additions in vv. 1–13 demonstrate; this might also explain the otherwise obscure additions about John in 1:6–8, 15: John is to be part even of the beginning.

It is important to add here that the distinction between the prologue and its additions can at best be assumed, because it offers a more plausible understanding of the text. It is not possible to be absolutely certain about this matter. The transmitted text retains its own

meaning, all the same. *Without* the additions, it gains the structure indicated above.

1:1–13: The Word in the Beginning

Like the whole Bible, the Gospel of John begins with creation. Genesis 1 presents it as a creation by the Word. From Gen 1 the prologue has taken up the concept that everything in creation was made by the Word. It is the creative Word that has become flesh (human) in Jesus.

The transition from the first to the second part, in vv. 11, 12, speaks of the incarnation of the Word and as such constitutes a brief summary of the Gospel:

“He came to his own home” (— chs. 1–6).
“His own people received him not” (— chs. 7–12).
“To all who received him, . . . he gave power
to become children of God” (— chs. 13–17:
farewell discourses).

1:14–18: The Word Became Flesh

The second part (vv. 14–18) begins with the elemental statement, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The event of the Word becoming flesh, the incarnation, is contained within this statement. Encompassing the entire Gospel, this sentence (v. 14a) is followed by a confession in vv. 14b and 16 (v. 15 is a supplement about John)—a joyous confession by those who through Jesus’ coming have experienced grace upon grace, an abundance of acts of grace. If the first phrase, “The Word became flesh,” is followed by a second one, “and dwelt among us,” the latter signifies, with regard to the Old Testament, that it was not merely a momentary vision of God (as, e.g., in Gen 28) but that in his Son, God remained present among people from the beginning to the end of his ministry, as a human among humans, within the boundaries of human existence.

The purpose of the prologue is the confession of those who shared this experience; they are able to speak

as eye- and earwitnesses. What they saw they express in the clause “we have beheld his glory.” These words can only mean: What we saw was his glory concealed in human form. What they experienced through this is expressed as a glory of the Son of God in the lowliness of his incarnation, which for them meant an abundance of favor, a wealth of salvific acts. This is then addressed in the three parts of the Gospel that were foreshadowed in vv. 11–12.

The final statement, v. 18, sounds like a postscript to the prologue: The Son has made the invisible God known to us. Even though the Old Testament speaks of many theophanies, what has taken place now is unique and amazing: God became human in Jesus and dwelt among people.

Listening to the prologue, one is reminded of the calling of the prophet Isaiah, who in his vision saw God enthroned in his glory but then received a mission and was given a task that he was to carry out in his lowliness, exposed to every hostility without power and without protection. Here, too, the glory of God was concealed in the lowliness in which the one sent from God was to walk. It is this hidden glory to which the Gospel will witness on Jesus’ journey and in his ministry, with which God has commissioned him. The disciples found this glory in Jesus’ ministry and proclamation.