

John 1:14a

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (NIV)

1. The “Word” is the wisdom, plan or purpose of God (see John 1:1) and the Word “became flesh” as Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ was “the Word in the flesh,” which is shortened to “the Word” for ease of speaking. Scripture is also the Word, but it is the Word in writing. Everyone agrees that the “Word” in writing had a beginning. So did the “Word” in the flesh. In fact, the Greek text of Matthew 1:18 says that very clearly: “Now the beginning of Jesus Christ was in this manner.” Some ancient scribes were so uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus having a “beginning” that they tried to alter the Greek text to read “birth” and not “beginning,” but they were unsuccessful. The modern Greek texts all read “beginning” (*genesis*) in Matthew 1:18. “Birth” is considered an acceptable translation of “*genesis*,” since the beginning of some things is birth, and so most translations read “birth” in Matthew 1:18. Nevertheless, the proper understanding of Matthew 1:18 is the “beginning” (*genesis*) of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, God had a plan, a purpose, which “became flesh” when Jesus was conceived. To make John 1:14 support the Trinity, there must first be proof that Jesus existed before he was born and was called “the Word.” We do not believe that such proof exists. There is a large body of evidence, however, that Jesus was foreknown by God, and that the “the Word” refers to God’s plan or purpose. We contend that the meaning of the verse is straightforward. God had a plan (the Word) and that plan became flesh when Jesus was conceived. Thus, Jesus became “the Word in the flesh.”

2. It is quite fair to ask why John would say, “the Word became flesh,” a statement that seems so obvious to us. Of course Jesus Christ was flesh. He was born, grew, ate and slept, and Scripture calls him a man. However, what is clear to us now was not at all clear in the early centuries of the Christian era. In our notes on John 1:1, we explain that the Bible must be understood in the context of the culture in which it was written. At the time of John’s writing, the “Docetic” movement was gaining disciples inside Christianity (“Docetic” comes from the Greek word for “to seem” or “to appear”). Docetic Christians believed Jesus was actually a spirit being, or god, who only “appeared” to be human. Some Docetists did not believe Jesus even actually ate or drank, but only pretended to do so. Furthermore, some Jews thought that Jesus was an angel. In theological literature, theologians today call this “angel-Christology.” John 1:14 was not written to show that Jesus was somehow pre-existent and then became flesh. It was to show that God’s plan for salvation “became *flesh*,” *i.e.*, Jesus was not a spirit, god or angelic being, but rather a flesh-and-blood man. A very similar thing is said in 1 John 4:2, that if you do not believe Jesus has come *in the flesh*, you are not of God.

Hyndman, p. 113

Racovian Catechism, pp. 117-119

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