

Notes on the Greek Text of 1 John 1:1-4

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Verses 1-4 relate to three periods of time: (1) the remote past when the Word was with the Father; (2) the period when the eyewitnesses were with the Word; and (3) John's and his readers' present time. When talking about these verses in your language, keep these periods distinct.

The main verb for verses 1-2 comes in verse 3, 'we proclaim', ἀπαγγέλλομεν. Many translations move this verb to verse 1.

1:1

By starting with long, nominal phrases, John focuses our attention on the One who came into the world, before he introduces his own action as a proclaimer.

'That which', ὃ, neuter relative pronoun: John begins by underscoring *what* Jesus was, before he deals with *who* he was.

Some take 'from the beginning,' ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, (1) to mean the beginning of Jesus life or ministry; others (2) to the start of the apostles' ministry; and most (3) to the creation of the world or (4) to eternity past, as in Is 43:13 LXX; Mt 19:4, 8; J 8:44.

The *perfect* tense verbs, 'we have heard', ἀκηκόαμεν, and 'we have seen', ἐώρακάμεν, emphasize the enduring quality of his visual and auditory experience, whereas the *aorist* tense verbs, 'looked upon' and 'touched' report past events as facts.

The term 'Word', λόγος, although a personification of the mind of God in Jewish philosophy and Wisdom literature, became early a title of Jesus, the one who was God and became human. John 1:1, 14.

1:2

The five occurrences of 'and', καὶ, lend to a sense of a tight connection between the incarnation, eyewitness experience, apostolic messaging, and on-going proclamation. John affirms a second time that which he has 'seen', ἐώρακάμεν, namely, τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον, 'the life, the eternal,' which stresses the enduring quality of this life.

This 'life', ζωή, is a living Person, he who was with (πρὸς) the Father, as in John 1:1. This life is 'eternal', αἰώνιος, that is, everlasting, "of unending duration, without end" (BAGD). God has promised this everlasting life to those who remain faithful to Jesus, 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20.

Distinguish this eternal life from one's personal life or self, ψυχή (3:16), and from one's worldly life or possessions, βίος (2:16).

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1:3

'Fellowship,' *κοινωνία*, involves "mutual interests and sharing, ... close relationship." John wants Christians to possess the same knowledge, promises, commands and experiences from God that the apostles had received by seeing and hearing Jesus. Compare John 15.1-8 and 1 Cor 12.12-31

Since *δὲ*, 'and', is the conjunction between the two sentences in verse 3, the *καὶ* and at the head of the second sentence, serves as an adverb such as 'indeed'. The unusual position of *δὲ* led scribes in different centuries to omit it, allow *καὶ* to serve as a conjunction, 'And'.

'So that', *ἵνα* with a verb 'have' in the subjunctive mood, expresses the purpose of John's witness and proclamation, and the present tense his expectation that his readers' fellowship will endure.

In the Hebrew Bible, God calls himself Father of nation and of the nation's kings, and a few passages call a future king God's son. Jesus employed the titles Father and Son for God and himself, saying that the two are 'one', and to this day, Christians do the same.

1:4

The subject pronoun 'we', *ἡμεῖς*, is not required in Greek, so emphasizes his, or the apostles, personal interest in maximizing their joy. 'We' refers mainly to John himself, as one of the apostles, and may be translated as 'I'.

Text experts remain undecided on whether John wrote 'our joy', *χαρὰ ἡμῶν*, or 'your joy', *χαρὰ ὑμῶν*. If *ὑμῶν*, then the entire clause, 'so that our joy may be complete', would be identical with Jesus' promise in John 16:24, *ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν ᾗ πεπληρωμένη*. Thus, in either case, it is the apostles' joy.

John's purpose in writing this epistle was that his joy 'may be complete' *ᾗ πεπληρωμένη*. This phrase consists of two verbs, 'be', *ᾗ*, a present tense verb, and 'complete', *πεπληρωμένη*, a participle in the passive voice and the perfect tense. He expected that his joy would become as full as possible and remain so.