

“The Word” (John 1:1)

Companion Paper to the Sermon by Pastor James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket RI, 12/12/2021

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

John Chapter One deals with the Divinity and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. He who is fully God also took upon Himself full humanity. **“And the Word became 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 1:14). As Isaiah says, **“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given”** (Isaiah 9:6).

Many have undertaken to study the meaning of **“the Word.”** Some have looked at the Greek word for “Word”—“logos”—which denotes the Greek philosophical concepts of reason and speech. But the Apostle John was a Jew and not a Greek, and he was not writing a treatise on Greek philosophy. There is debate among scholars whether John originally wrote his gospel in Aramaic or Greek, but whatever the case, John’s concept of **“the Word”** came from the Hebrew word concept “davar” and the Aramaic word concept of “memra.” Today we will look at the second of these, and we will all walk away with a greater understanding of Jesus **“the Word.”**

In Jesus’ day, and in John’s day, the Hebrew Scriptures were available. But for the common people, for the Jews in the land, and of the diaspora, Aramaic was the common language. The rabbis taught from the Targums, which were Aramaic interpretations of the Hebrews Scriptures. Perhaps the closest thing that we have today to these would be the “Amplified Bible.” For John the Apostle, a first century Jew, the Targums were very familiar, and he and his readers quickly understood from his gospel that Jesus is the “Memra” of Jewish theology, a concept derived from Scripture. Thus concludes our technical explanation. If you like technicalities, however, you are welcome to refer to “The Jewish Encyclopedia” and the extended commentary of Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum on the subject in “Yeshua: The Life of the Messiah, Volume 1.”

Two Bible applications that come from the “Memra” understanding of “the Word” are that **1. The Word is the Agent of Creation**, and that **2. The Word is the Agent of Salvation**.

First, The Word is the Agent of Creation. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light”* (Genesis 1:1-3). *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”* (John 1:1-3). *“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him”* (Colossians 1:16). *“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast”* (Psalm 33:6-9). *“He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like morsels; Who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow. He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!”* (Psalm 147:15-20). Now we have presented undeniable evidence that Jesus Christ is the Word, God, the Memra—the Agent of Creation with regard to all things. But He is more than this! This same Jesus can make a new creation out of you! Has He already done this work in any of you? *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). This leads us to our second point of application.

The Word is the Agent of Salvation. In John Chapter Three, the Apostle John records the words of Jesus where His creation and salvation works intersect. *“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he*

enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3-6). Peter tells us that the believer has "been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Consider how the "word of the LORD" has come not only in writing, but by vision of faith. "The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:1,6). "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:11-12). Those who believe upon the Word have salvation. But just as there was no deliverance for national Israel in unbelief, we can be sure that deliverance shall not come to those who prefer the wilderness of sin to the Living Word of Salvation. "Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word, But complained in their tents, And did not heed the voice of the LORD. Therefore He raised His hand in an oath against them, To overthrow them in the wilderness" (Psalm 106:24-26). God's Agent of Salvation was the same then as He is now. He is Jesus the Son! "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The same Word who entered into His own creation at conception and the cradle, and became the Agent of Salvation for all who believe, is able to keep you in his everlasting arms forever! "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness

of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:7-13). One day the Word, the Memra, the Savior, shall return. Is this good news or bad news for you? *“He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God”* (Revelation 19:13). Who is Jesus to you? Is He the Word in the Bible sense to you? Is He your Agent of Creation and your Agent of Salvation? And if so, will you consider that as you worship, and as you pray, today, and in the days to come?

“And the Word became 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 1:14, NKJV)

The concept of Jesus as “*the Word*”, the fulfillment of the Hebraic concept of “the Memra”, goes further in this verse. Jesus the Christ, “*the Word*”, is not only the Agent of Creation, the Agent of Salvation, and the Agent of Revelation. He is also the visible manifestation of the glory of God. The connection can be made by looking at the Scriptures in light of our text—“*dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.*” The word translated “dwelt” is “skeinei”, which is Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “mishkan”, meaning, “tabernacled.” From this is derived the Hebrew concept of the Shechinah Glory of God, the visible manifestation of God Himself, associated with light. In John’s prologue, the connection is clearly made (John 1:4-9). In all of this, John the Apostle sees the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures—Law, Writings, and Prophets.

“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:34-38).

“But it happened that night that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, “Go and tell My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: “You shall not build Me a house to dwell in. For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought up Israel, even to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another” (1 Chronicles 17:3-5).

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the LORD. “Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you” (Zechariah 2:10-11).