

Logos & Preexistence of Messiah in Ancient Judaism

By Tim Warner © www.4windsfellowships.net

1 In the beginning was Logos, and Logos was with God, and Logos was God. 2 This one was in the beginning with God. 3 Everything originated through Him, and without Him nothing originated. (John 1:1-3 LGV)

The meaning of “Logos” (Word) in John 1:1 is one of the most hotly disputed points of Christian theology. Entire theological systems hinge on this, including both Trinitarianism and Unitarianism. Most Christians believe that the Apostle John’s use of “Logos” as a name for the Son of God was first introduced in the above passage, and that it was unique to him. That “Logos” is a personal name for Jesus Christ is clearly stated by John in Revelation: “*And His name is called Logos of God.*”¹ But Paul, just before his execution in Rome about AD 66, employed this idea before John wrote his Gospel.

Paul’s use of “Logos” as a name for Jesus Christ appears in the book of Hebrews² which was addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience. Paul expected his audience to grasp his meaning based on what they already knew about this term from their Jewish background and synagogue culture.

Hebrews 4:12-14 LGV

*12 For **Logos of God** is alive³ and active, sharper than any double-edged sword,⁴ penetrating until⁵ the distribution of both life and breath, of both joints and sinews,⁶ and is **the Judge** of inner sentiments and thoughts of the heart.⁷*

*13 And nothing created is imperceptible in **His** sight, but everything is naked and exposed to **the eyes**⁸ of **Him, the one** unto whom we report.*

*14 Having then **a great High Priest** who has passed through the heavens – **Jesus the Son of God** – we should cling to the Profession.*

¹ Rev. 19:13

² While Paul’s authorship of Hebrews is sometimes disputed by modern writers, the consensus in early Christianity was that it was Paul’s work written using a Gentile scribe, most likely Luke.

³ Rev. 1:18

⁴ Rev. 1:16

⁵ ἄχρι “until” refers to time, not merely extent, which would be εἰς

⁶ The resurrection as described in Ezekiel 37:1-14

⁷ John’s Revelation even supports the concept that Jesus is observing the assemblies. Each of the seven letters begins with “I have observed your deeds...”. Jesus’ critique of them includes even motives of the heart, such as “you have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4).

⁸ The Lamb who is about to open the seven seals is portrayed as having “seven eyes” (Rev. 5:6).

This title “Logos of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) first applied in the New Testament by Paul to Jesus is exactly the same as John’s much later statement in Revelation 19:13, “And His name is called Logos of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). Notice that the masculine personal pronouns underlined above all have as their antecedent “Logos of God.”⁹ They are therefore referring to Logos as a Person. And this Person is then identified as the “Great High Priest” and “Jesus the Son of God.” It is therefore clear that Paul expected his Jewish-Christian audience to already understand the connection between the name “Logos” and Jesus Christ our High Priest.

After Paul’s martyrdom, and after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and scattering of the Jerusalem church, John relocated to Ephesus which became the new central location of Christianity. From there he took over the care of all the assemblies that were the result of Paul’s missionary travels in Asia. John, as the last remaining Apostle of Jesus (at least within the Middle East) took up this mission from Ephesus of defending the mature teachings of Paul in order to prove Paul’s harmony with what Jesus Himself taught. John was uniquely qualified to do so, because he was an eyewitness to all of Jesus’ teaching. He was personally appointed by Jesus as one of the Twelve, and thus could recall and bring to bear many things he heard from the lips of Jesus and even from John the Baptist in the war against Christological heresies. And he could speak with the authority of Jesus Himself. There was no one else equipped to do so.

At Ephesus, John sought to do two critical things, to bridge the apparent gap between Jesus and Paul (since Paul was not one of the original Apostles of Jesus and thus his credibility was challenged by the Judaizers), and to validate Paul’s own teaching about who Jesus is. This included and stressed Jesus’ origin as the “only begotten Son,” begotten out of the Father Himself, His subsequent role in creation, and His role as Mediator between God and Israel in the Old Testament, and then His coming down from heaven to become “Son of Man.”

John’s writings cannot be properly understood apart from being an appendix to Paul’s works. They must be understood as reinforcing Paul’s teaching. John’s Gospel, his three epistles, and even Revelation gave further apostolic authority and eyewitness testimony concerning Jesus’ own teaching to support what Paul had taught about Jesus. Thus, John’s role of reinforcing Paul after his death must be accounted for in any accurate understanding of John’s Gospel, including his prologue and use of the term “Logos.”

⁹ “Logos of God” is also the “Judge” (v. 12), and has “eyes” (cf. Rev. 5:6), and is “the one to whom we report,” He is our “great High Priest,” and is finally identified as “Jesus the Son of God.”

Philo of Alexandria

Philo was a Jewish writer from Alexandria which had a large Jewish population, but also was a center of Greek philosophical thought. Philo was well educated in both the thought-currents within Judaism and in Greek philosophy. He was born in 20 BC, about 16 years before Jesus was born. He died about AD 40, four years before Paul’s first missionary journey. Philo’s writings provide absolute proof that certain language and concepts concerning the preexistence of the Messiah were already in circulation among the synagogues, especially where the Messianic expectations were very strong. Philo attempted to find commonality between current Jewish ideas and current Greek concepts. These Messianic ideas were not original to Philo.

*“And even if there be not as yet anyone who is worthy to be called a **Son of God**,¹⁰ nevertheless let him labour earnestly to be adorned according to His **first-begotten Word, the eldest of His Angels, as the great Archangel of many names**; for he is called, the authority, **and the name of God, and the Word, and man according to God’s image**, and He who sees Israel. For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, ‘We are all one man’s Sons.’ For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the sons of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of **His eternal image**, of His most sacred **Word**; for **the image of God** is His **most ancient Word**.”¹¹*

*“And the Father who created the universe has given to His **Archangelic and most ancient Word** a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and separated that which had been created from the Creator. And this same **Word** is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; **and is also the Ambassador, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race**. And the **Word** rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, ‘And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you;’¹² **neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you**, but being in the midst between these two extremities...”¹³*

Philo also appealed to a Jewish understanding of Genesis 31:13 as it appears in the LXX.

*“But it is not right for the man who anchors on the hope of the alliance of God to crouch and tremble, to whom God says, **I am the God who was seen by thee in the place of***

¹⁰ Note the Messianic expectation

¹¹ Philo, “On the Confusion of Tongues,” XXVIII, 146-147

¹² Deut. 5:5 LXX This statement is usually applied to Moses. Yet Philo applied it to the Messenger of the LORD, who Steven also said was the one who spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Acts 7:30,38).

¹³ Philo, “Who Is the Heir of Divine Things,” XLII, 205-206

***God.** 'A very glorious boast for the soul, that God should think fit to appear to and to converse with it. And do not pass by what is here said, but examine it accurately, and see whether **there are really two Gods**. For it is said: 'I am the God who was seen by thee;' not in my place, but 'in the place of God,' as if he meant of some other God. What then ought we to say? There is one true God only: but they who are called Gods, by an abuse of language, are numerous; on which account the Holy Scripture on the present occasion indicates that it is the true God that is meant by the use of the article, the expression being, 'I am **the** God (ὁ θεός),' but when the word is used incorrectly, it is put without the article, the expression being, 'He who was seen by thee in the place,' not of the God (τοῦ θεοῦ), but simply 'of God (θεοῦ)'; **and what he here calls God is his most ancient Word**, not having any superstitious regard to the position of the names, but only proposing one end to himself, namely, to give a true account of the matter.'"¹⁴*

In these three quotes alone we have all the following terms and concepts about the preexistence and activity of Messiah in ancient times, all of which find their counterparts in the later writings of Paul and John:

- Messiah was the Messenger (Angel) of the LORD (cf. Exod. 3:2).
- Messiah was called by the Name of YHVH (cf. Exod. 23:20-23).
- Messiah was the “Logos” (Word).
- Messiah was God’s Ambassador (Mediator) between God and man.
- Messiah was the “First-begotten” (Wisdom of Proverbs 8:23-31).
- Messiah was the “Son of God” (Proverbs 30:4, Daniel 4:25,28).
- Messiah was neither eternal nor created, but begotten.
- Messiah was the “image of God.”
- Messiah, Logos (the Word), was called “God” in Exod. 31:13, just as in John 1:1.

As a Jew, Philo did not write for Jewish consumption. He was seeking to make the Judaism of the Diaspora synagogues respected in the culture of Greek philosophy. Thus he frequently drew on current Jewish concepts and interpreted them in light of Greek concepts that would certainly be repulsive both to Jews of the synagogues and to the early Christians. Philo’s syncretism of Jewish and Greek ideas is often used by Unitarians to discredit him as a witness to the above Jewish concepts, as though all of the above concepts themselves originated as the result of Philo’s Greek syncretism. However, the concepts and language quoted above from Philo’s earlier works are such mirror images of Scripture written by both Paul and John, it is impossible to reasonably deny a common source. There are only two reasonable explanations for the commonality between Philo and the later Pauline-Johannine Christology:

¹⁴ Philo, On Dreams, xxxix

1. Paul and John borrowed these ideas and language from Philo, which necessarily casts serious doubt upon the New Testament as being God-breathed.
2. The ideas and language common between Philo, Paul, and John were already current in Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament before any of these men wrote. While Philo took these concepts in one direction (syncretism with Greek thought), Paul and John took them in a completely different direction as confirmed by Jesus and led by the Spirit of Truth.

Liberal Unitarian scholars, such as Adolf Von Harnack and Levi L. Paine, insist on the first option and cast doubt upon the authority of Scripture. Conservative scholarship that is committed to the authority of the New Testament must stand upon the second option. Biblical Unitarians have taken a third untenable position, simply denying any connection between the terminology and concepts in Philo about the Messiah and the writings of Paul and John. But even their own scholarly sources reject that view, and instead take the first view which destroys inerrancy of Scripture.¹⁵

This is the kind of monotheism that was common among Jews of the diaspora at the time of Christ. Jesus' claims of being the Son of God, having come down from heaven, having seen Abraham, having actually seen God, etc., were not of themselves shocking to the Jewish sense of monotheism, if He was indeed the Messiah. What was shocking was that this humble Man would apply such claims to Himself! Had Jesus affirmed the current Temple leadership instead of condemned them, and had led them in a revolt against Rome, they would have had absolutely no problem with these claims.

The most common and older viewpoint among scholars has been that Philo was a Jew who sought to reinterpret Judaism in the mold of Platonism. Philo simply adopted Plato's ideas, merged them with Judaism, thus inventing all of the ideas and terms concerning the Messiah outlined above. Such scholarship then claims that Paul and John blended Philo's original ideas with an earlier purer form of Christianity in which Jesus was a mere man. It is to these very scholars that so-called "Biblical Unitarians" appeal in order to validate their claim that all of Philo's Messianic concepts and language have a purely Greek-pagan origin. But they are strangely silent when the very same scholarship follows this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, that Paul and John were heavily influenced by Philo's alleged Platonism, and much of the New Testament is of human and not divine origin.¹⁶

¹⁵ See the following article: https://4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Unitarian_Scholarship.pdf

¹⁶ This earlier scholarship can be seen at the following website in the intro to Philo's works.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/>

However, much more recent and thorough scholarship characterizes Philo as a practicing Alexandrian Jew, living according to Jewish Law. Yet, having been educated in both Jewish and Greek thought, he attempted to bring Jewish concepts into the philosophical arena to be respected by Greek intelligentsia. This is the more accurate interpretation. The Encyclopedia Britannica offers the following assessment of Philo’s statements concerning the Logos, showing that he was not parroting concepts from Plato, but was putting forward something unknown to his Greek audience. For the Greeks, Philo brought new and distinct Jewish concepts to the philosophical table. He was not seen as a stooge of Plato, as both Liberal and “Biblical” Unitarians claim.

“In the past, scholars attempted to diminish Philo’s importance as a theological thinker and to present him merely as a preacher, but in the mid-20th century H.A. Wolfson, an American scholar, demonstrated Philo’s originality as a thinker. In particular, Philo was the first to show the difference between the knowability of God’s existence and the unknowability of his essence. Again, in his view of God, Philo was original in insisting on an individual Providence able to suspend the laws of nature in contrast to the prevailing Greek philosophical view of a universal Providence who is himself subject to the unchanging laws of nature. As a Creator, God made use of assistants: hence the plural “Let us make man” in Genesis, chapter 1. Philo did not reject the Platonic view of a preexistent matter but insisted that this matter too was created. Similarly, Philo reconciled his Jewish theology with Plato’s theory of Ideas in an original way: he posited the Ideas as God’s eternal thoughts, which God then created as real beings before he created the world.

*Philo saw the cosmos as a great chain of being presided over by the Logos, a term going back to pre-Socratic philosophy, which is the mediator between God and the world, though at one point **he identifies the Logos as a second God**. Philo departed from Plato principally in using the term Logos for the Idea of Ideas and for the Ideas as a whole and in his statement that the Logos is the place of the intelligible world. **In anticipation of Christian doctrine he called the Logos the first-begotten Son of God, the man of God, the image of God, and second to God.**”¹⁷*

Note that Philo departed significantly from Plato’s concept of Logos. In Plato’s works, Logos was abstract, first being right reason, and then the right communication of that reason. Plato never viewed Logos as a person. But in Philo’s works, Logos was a real divine Person, the Agent of the one true God, the “Angel of the LORD.”

¹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philo-Judaeus>

Unitarians attempt to flip the script, claiming that early Christian belief in the preexistence of Logos as a real person was due to Platonic influence via Philo. But it is their view of Logos – as God’s abstract “Plan” – that is much closer to Plato than was the view articulated by Philo. Unitarians claim an abstract concept of Logos in order to remove the obvious personal characterization of Logos in John 1:1-3, as God’s personal agent in creation. But this interpretation of John’s prologue cannot survive a careful analysis of the grammar. If we take the words of Paul and John as God-breathed, and handle the text using sound hermeneutics, the Unitarian exegetical liberties become embarrassingly obvious.¹⁸

The fact is, Philo’s personal Logos, who was the Agent of God since creation, was neither unique nor original to him. It was a much older Jewish tradition which is testified in the Jewish Targums. These are Aramaic paraphrases and commentaries of Old Testament Scriptures that were used in the synagogues of the eastern diaspora. The written forms¹⁹ were preceded by oral tradition that is much older. The Targums are important to our quest because they provide insight into the early synagogues of the east, synagogues that were not influenced by western Greek language, culture, or philosophy. The Targums, in quoting Scripture, frequently replaced God’s name YHVH with the Aramaic term “Memra” (“Word,” the equivalent to the Greek, “Logos”), when the text indicated God’s direct contact with mankind. The Jewish Encyclopedia states:

*“The [Shekinah is the] majestic presence or manifestation of God which has descended to “dwell” among men... Maimonides regarded the Shekinah, like the Memra, the Yekara, and the Logos, as a distinct entity, and as a light created to be an intermediary between God and the world; while Nahmanides, on the other hand, considered [the Shekinah] the essence of God as manifested in a distinct form. So in more modern times Gfrörer saw in “Shekinah,” “Memra,” and “Yekara” independent entities which, in that they were mediators, were the origin of the Logos idea...”*²⁰

“Like the Shekinah (comp. Targ. Num. xxiii. 21), the Memra is accordingly the manifestation of God. “The Memra brings Israel nigh unto God and sits on His throne receiving the prayers of Israel” (Targ. Yer. to Deut. iv. 7). It shielded Noah from the flood (Targ. Yer. to Gen. vii. 16) and brought about the dispersion of the seventy nations (l.c. xi. 8); it is the guardian of Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 20-21, xxxv. 3) and of Israel (Targ. Yer. to Ex. xii. 23, 29); it works all the wonders in Egypt (l.c. xiii. 8, xiv. 25); hardens the heart of Pharaoh (l.c. xiii. 15); goes before Israel in the wilderness (Targ. Yer. to Ex. xx. 1); blesses Israel (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxiii. 8); battles for the people (Targ. Josh. iii. 7, x. 14,

¹⁸ See our article, “‘Logos’ in John’s Prologue?” <http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/Logos.pdf>

¹⁹ First century

²⁰ Jewish Encyclopedia, “Shekinah”

xxiii. 3). As in ruling over the destiny of man the Memra is the agent of God (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxvii. 16), so also is it in the creation of the earth (Isa. xlv. 12) and in the execution of justice (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxxiii. 4). So, in the future, shall the Memra be the comforter (Targ. Isa. lxvi. 13): “My Shekinah I shall put among you, My Memra shall be unto you for a redeeming deity, and you shall be unto My Name a holy people” (Targ. Yer. to Lev. xxii. 12). “My Memra shall be unto you like a good plowman who takes off the yoke from the shoulder of the oxen”; “the Memra will roar to gather the exiled” (Targ. Hos. xi. 5, 10). The Memra is “the witness” (Targ. Yer. xxix. 23); it will be to Israel like a father (l.c. xxxi. 9) and “will rejoice over them to do them good” (l.c. xxxii. 41). “In the Memra the redemption will be found” (Targ. Zech. xii. 5). “The holy Word” was the subject of the hymns of Job (Test. of Job, xii. 3, ed. Kohler).²¹

Dr. Michael Heiser, late Old Testament scholar, former professor at Liberty University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, made the following assessment of all the above evidence:

“I suggest that the “original model” for the two powers idea was the role of the vice-regent of the divine council. The paradigm of a high sovereign God (El)²² who rules heaven and earth through the agency of a second, appointed god (Baal)²³ became part of Israelite religion, albeit with some modification. For the orthodox Israelite, Yahweh was both sovereign and vice regent—occupying both “slots” as it were at the head of the divine council. The binitarian portrayal of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible was motivated by this belief. The ancient Israelite knew two Yahwehs—one invisible, a spirit, the other visible, often in human form. The two Yahwehs at times appear together in the text, at times being distinguished, at other times not.

“Early Judaism understood this portrayal and its rationale. There was no sense of a violation of monotheism since either figure was indeed Yahweh. There was no second distinct god running the affairs of the cosmos. During the Second Temple period, Jewish theologians and writers speculated on an identity for the second Yahweh. Guesses ranged from divinized humans from the stories of the Hebrew Bible to exalted angels. These speculations were not considered unorthodox. That acceptance changed when certain Jews, the early Christians, connected Jesus with this orthodox Jewish idea. This explains why these Jews, the first converts to following Jesus the Christ, could simultaneously worship the God of Israel and Jesus, and yet refuse to acknowledge any other god. Jesus was the incarnate second Yahweh. In response, as Segal’s work demonstrated, Judaism pronounced the two powers teaching a heresy sometime in the second century A.D.”²⁴

²¹ Jewish Encyclopedia, “Memra,” <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10618-memra>

²² “El” means Sovereign

²³ The Hebrew word “baal” means owner. Compare to Psalm 2:7 and John 1:11

²⁴ Dr. Michael Heiser <https://twopowersinheaven.com/>

What Dr. Heiser referred to above as “two Yahwehs” is not two co-equal Gods, but rather the fact that there were two Persons distinguished in the Old Testament who used the personal name Yahweh (YHWH). The first was Yahweh himself and the second was the “Messenger of Yahweh” (the Angel of the LORD) upon whom God placed His personal name so that He could act in the name of Yahweh as a Mediator with mankind.²⁵ “The ancient Israelite knew two Yahwehs—**one invisible**, a spirit, **the other visible**, often in human form.” Compare this statement by Dr. Heiser with Paul’s statement about God’s Son. “He is **the image of the God who is unseen**, first-produced of all creation.”²⁶ To a Jew in the first century, this statement necessarily meant that Jesus was the second Person called Yahweh in the Old Testament, the “Messenger of Yahweh” who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and who led Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

It is important to understand that the theology expressed by the Jewish Targums did not contain the Greek philosophical concepts found in Philo’s syncretism between Jewish and Greek thought. The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

*“In Palestinian Rabbinism the Word (Memra [Aramaic equivalent to the Greek “Logos”]) is very often mentioned, at least in the Targums: it is the Memra of Jahveh which lives, speaks, and acts, but, if one endeavour to determine precisely the meaning of the expression, it appears very often to be only a paraphrase substituted by the Targumist for the name of Jahveh. **The Memra resembles the Logos of Philo as little as the workings of the rabbinical mind in Palestine resembled the speculations of Alexandria**: the rabbis are chiefly concerned about ritual and observances; from religious scruples they dare not attribute to Jahveh actions such as the Sacred Books attribute to Him; it is enough for them to veil the Divine Majesty under an abstract paraphrase, **the Word**, the Glory, the Abode, and others.”²⁷*

The Jewish Encyclopedia also plainly states that Philo borrowed his ideas regarding the personhood of Logos (Word) from earlier Jewish sources, and then mingled them with Greek philosophical concepts.

“The Memra as a cosmic power furnished Philo the corner-stone upon which he built his peculiar semi-Jewish philosophy.”²⁸

Consequently, the Memra/Logos Christology found in Paul and John did not come from Philo, but only shared some things in common with Philo because both derived the

²⁵ Exod. 23:20-23; Judges 2:1-4

²⁶ Col. 1:15 (LGV)

²⁷ The Catholic Encyclopedia, “The Logos,” <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>

²⁸ Jewish Encyclopedia, “Memra” <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10618-memra>

basic ideas of a second divine Person (Logos) from earlier Judaism as reflected in the Targums.

Biblical Unitarians follow liberal Unitarian scholars in their historical claims that the “one Mediator” doctrine of Paul and “Logos” doctrine of John were based on syncretism between Jewish and Greek philosophical concepts. Yet more recent research by Jewish sources (found in the Jewish Encyclopedia) and by certain Christian scholars have proven those liberal Unitarians (Harnack, Paine, etc.) to have been in error.

Below are a few of many examples showing how the pre-Christian Jewish Targums (commentaries) interpreted important verses, implying that “Memra” (Logos) was a second divine person, the agent of YHVH, whenever a mediatorial role between God and man was indicated. This way, Yahweh Himself never personally interacted with humans, only His Messenger, “Memra / Logos,” did this.

Gen. 3:8 NKJV

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Gen. 3:8 (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, translated by J. W. Etheridge)

*8 "And they heard the voice of **THE WORD** of the Lord God walking in the garden in the repose of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from before the Lord God among the trees of the garden"*

Genesis 19:24 NKJV

24 Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens.

Genesis 19:24 (Jerusalem Targum, translated by J. W. Etheridge)

*24 "And **THE WORD of the Lord Himself** had made to descend upon the people of Sedom and Amorah showers of favour, that they might work repentance from their wicked works. But when they saw the showers of favour, they said, So, our wicked works are not manifest before Him. He turned (then), and caused to descend upon them bitumen and fire from before the Lord from the heavens."*

This passage was used in exactly the same way by Justin Martyr, a second century Christian apologist. He proved to Trypho, a Jewish theological student of the rabbis, that a second God is clearly portrayed in this passage and several others. And Trypho did not object to the concept, but eventually acknowledged that Justin had proved his

point.²⁹ Justin did not invent this, and neither did Philo. It was taught in both the Greek and Aramaic-speaking synagogues before the time of Christ because it is taught in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Exodus 20:1 NKJV

1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

Exodus 20:1 (Jerusalem Targum)

*1 "And **THE WORD** of the Lord spake all the excellency of these words, saying."*

Exodus 29:42-43 NKJV

42 "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. 43 "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory.

Exodus 29:42-43 (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan)

*42 "A perpetual holocaust for your generations at the door of the tabernacle of ordinance before the Lord; where **I will appoint MY WORD to (meet) thee there, to speak with thee there.** 43 And there **I will appoint MY WORD (to meet) with the sons of Israel,** and I will be sacrificed in their rulers for My glory"*

Deut. 4:20 NKJV

20 "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.

Deut. 4:20 (Jerusalem Targum)

*20 "For you hath **THE WORD** of the Lord taken for His portion, and hath brought you out from the iron furnace of Mizraim to be unto Him a people of inheritance as at this day."*

Deut. 4:24 NKJV

24 "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

Deut. 4:24 (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan)

*24 "For **THE WORD** of the Lord your God is a consuming fire; the jealous God is a fire, and He avengeth Himself in jealousy."*

²⁹ See my article for a series of quotes:

http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Evolution_004.pdf

Deut. 6:20-22 NKJV

20 "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?' 21 "then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 'and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household.

Deut. 6:20-22 (Targum, Pseudo-Jonathan)

20 "When thy son, in time to come, shall ask thee, saying, What are the testimonies, statutes, and judgments which the Lord our God hath commanded you? 21 Then shall you say to your sons, We were servants to Pharaoh in Mizraim, and **THE WORD of the Lord brought us out of Mizraim with a mighty hand**; 22 and **THE WORD of the Lord wrought signs**, great wonders, and sore plagues on Mizraim and on Pharaoh and all the men of his house, which our eyes beheld;

It is not difficult to see that “Memra” (Word) was indeed seen as a personal being among the Aramaic-speaking synagogues of the east long before Philo of Alexandria attempted his syncretism with Greek thought in the west. For those wishing to pursue this line of thinking further, please refer to Adam Joseph Howell’s 2015 doctoral dissertation on this topic presented to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.³⁰

Wisdom as God’s Agent

Also, the Jewish Wisdom literature of the intertestamental period shows the same divine Person who was called Logos (Word) was also known by the name Sophia (Wisdom).³¹

“God of our fathers, Lord of all mercy, thou by thy Word hast made all things, and thou in thy Wisdom hast contrived man to rule thy creation,…”³²

“There was a hush of silence all around, and night had but finished half her swift journey, when from thy heavenly throne, Lord, down leaped thy Word omnipotent. Never lighted sterner warrior on a doomed land; 16 never was sword so sharp, errand so

³⁰ [Howell, Adam Joseph, Finding Christ in the Old Testament through the Aramaic Memra, Shekinah, and Yeqara of the Targums, 2015 \(sbts.edu\)](https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/4948/Howell_sbts_0207D_10242.pdf)

https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/4948/Howell_sbts_0207D_10242.pdf

³¹ See our article, “The Son of God as ‘The Beginning’ in Proverbs 8,”

http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/Proverbs_8.pdf

³² Wisdom, 9:1-2 <https://www.newadvent.org/bible/wis009.htm>

*unmistakable; thy Word that could spread death everywhere, that trod earth, yet reached up to heaven.*³³

Thus, in both the east and west, in both Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking synagogues, “WORD” and “WISDOM” were already understood to be proper names referring to a second divine figure who was the agent of God in creation, and who interacted with Israel directly as Mediator, being the Son of God. This was the situation into which both Paul’s and John’s words were introduced.

Various Views regarding Messiah in ancient Judaism:

There was a variety of opinions within ancient Judaism regarding the nature of the Messiah. Some thought that He would be entirely human, simply chosen and adopted by God at the proper time because of His good character. Yet while this was probably the majority opinion, it was clearly not the only opinion. Some thought He would be a divine being who would come down from heaven. This view was largely dependent on Micah 5:2 which claimed preexistence for Messiah before His connection to the Davidic Covenant, and Daniel 7:13-14 which described the Messiah as coming down from heaven when He would finally appear, rather than being merely a man chosen by God.

The most problematic passage for the Jews, however, was Psalm 110:1 where God says to the Messiah, *“Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies your footstool.”* Since the Jews envisioned only one coming of Messiah, this passage meant that Messiah was in heaven at the right hand of God before His appearance on earth when He would come to restore Israel, His enemies being made His footstool. That means when Messiah would appear, He would have to come down from heaven, from the Father’s side. Thus, there would be no escaping the preexistence of Messiah in heaven prior to His appearing to save Israel in the Jewish world-view. Psalm 110:1 is referenced in the New Testament more than any other passage. It completely overthrew the expectation of a purely human Messiah.

Furthermore, reconciling this passage with prophecies that refer to Him as the *“seed of David”* proved to be an insurmountable problem for the Jewish teachers. It was this very conundrum which Jesus Himself used to silence the Jewish teachers. They simply could not answer Jesus’ riddle based on Psalm 110:1.³⁴

³³ Wisdom, 18:14-16 <https://www.newadvent.org/bible/wis018.htm>

³⁴ Matt. 22:41-46. The solution to the riddle is given by Jesus Himself in Rev. 22:16.

Matt. 22:41-46

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.” 43 He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: 44 ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’? 45 If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” 46 And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

There is no question that Messiah was to be the son of David. That is precisely what God’s covenant with David said,³⁵ what Isaiah also prophesied,³⁶ and what Gabriel announced to Mary.³⁷ Some might suppose that David called Him “Lord” merely because Messiah was to be his master or superior, one greater than David. If that was a possible interpretation, Jesus’ riddle would not have stumped the Jewish scholars. The reason they could not answer is because in Jewish understanding, **a father always outranks his offspring**, because he is the source of their very life. So, David would always be superior to the Messiah if he was merely David’s descendant. The Messiah should call David “Lord” or “Master.” The reason Jesus put this riddle to the scholars who were expecting a merely human Messiah was because the only solution would be to acknowledge that the Messiah predated David. And that creates a problem for how Messiah can be David’s son.

Much later, in the book of Revelation, Jesus Himself provided the solution to His original riddle from Psalm 110:1. *“I am the **root** and the **offspring** of David.”*³⁸ This statement references Isaiah’s prophecy which refers to the Messiah as a “Branch” from the genealogical tree of Jesse, David’s father. Jesse was the “root” of that genealogical tree. But just a few verses later, the Messiah is portrayed as the “root” of David’s father Jesse. That is, Messiah is Jesse’s ancestor! Thus in the following passage, Jesus claimed to be both the “Branch” coming out of Jesse’s root, and the “root” that produced Jesse! This well-known Messianic prophecy was a complete mystery to the Jewish scholars, and it completely solves riddle about Psalm 110:1.

Isaiah 11:1-4

*1 There shall come forth **a Rod** [Messiah] from the **stem of Jesse**, And **a Branch** [Messiah] shall grow out of **his roots**. 2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of*

³⁵ 1 Chron. 17:1-14; Psalm 132:11

³⁶ Isaiah 9:6-7

³⁷ Luke 1:32

³⁸ Rev. 22:16

*knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. 3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. ... 10 "And in that day **there shall be a Root of Jesse** [Messiah], Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him,³⁹ And His resting place shall be glorious."*

Verse 10 proves Messiah's preexistence before Jesse. Jesus highlighted the difficulty in their understanding of how Messiah could be David's son and still reconcile Psalm 110:1. The solution was right there in Isaiah 11. But they would have to understand that Messiah was the source of Jesse and his son David (as a divine Person), and that He had to become human in order to become the son of David. What is striking about this situation is that the solution provided by Philo was already current among many of the Jews before Jesus posed His riddle. It just was not the view of the Temple scholars.

The Melchizedek Scroll⁴⁰

Another important evidence for the Jewish understanding of the Messiah as preexisting as a divine figure comes from one of the Dead Sea scrolls 11Q13, called the "Melchizedek Scroll," written in Hebrew about a hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. In this scroll, the coming Messiah is portrayed as the same Melchizedek who met Abraham,⁴¹ who was still alive and thus a divine figure. (Hebrews 7 actually confirms this expectation).⁴² According to this pre-Christian Jewish scroll, Melchizedek would return as the Messiah according to Psalm 110:1-4. The "Lord" seated at God's right hand was Melchizedek having ascended into heaven after encountering Abraham.

Thus the preexistence of the Messiah as a divine figure was not uncommon in Judaism at the time of Christ. The proof comes from Philo in the far west, the Aramaic Targums in the east, and in Judea from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Jewish Encyclopedia summarizes some of the views current within Judaism concerning the preexistence of Messiah as follows:

"Preexistence of the Messiah:

*"This includes his existence before Creation; the existence of his name; his existence after the creation of the world. **Two Biblical passages favor the view of the preexistence of the Messiah: Micah v. 1 (A. V. 2), speaking of the Bethlehemite ruler, says that***

³⁹ Paul quoted this passage in Rom. 15:12

⁴⁰ See article: "Melchizedek is the Messiah" www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Melchizedek.pdf

⁴¹ Gen. 14:18-20

⁴² See footnotes for [Heb. 7:8 LGV](#)

*his 'goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting'; Dan. vii. 13 speaks of 'one like the Son of man,' who 'came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days.' In the Messianic similitudes of Enoch (xxxvii.-lxxi.) the three preexistences are spoken of: 'The Messiah was chosen of God before the creation of the world, and he shall be before Him to eternity' (xlvi. 6). Before the sun and the signs of the zodiac were created, or ever the stars of heaven were formed his name was uttered in the presence of the Lord of Spirits (= God; xlvi. 3). Apart from these passages, there are only general statements that **the Messiah was hidden and preserved by God** (lxii. 6-7, xlvi. 1-3), without any declaration as to when he began to be. His preexistence is affirmed also in II Esdras (about 90 C.E.), according to which he has been **preserved and hidden by God 'a great season'**; nor shall mankind see him save at the hour of his appointed day (xii. 32; xiii. 26, 52; xiv. 9), although no mention is made of the antemundane existence either of his person or of his name (comp. Syriac Apoc. Baruch, xxix. 3). ... **"The 'Spirit of God' which 'moved upon the face of the waters' (Gen. i. 2) is the spirit of the Messiah** (Gen. R. viii. 1; comp. Pesik. R. 152b, which reads as follows, alluding to Isa. xi. 2: **'The Messiah was born [created] when the world was made, although his existence had been contemplated before the Creation'**). Referring to Ps. xxxvi. 10 and Gen. i. 4, Pesikta Rabba declares (161b): **'God beheld the Messiah and his deeds before the Creation, but He hid him and his generation under His throne of glory.'** Seeing him, Satan said, 'That is the Messiah who will dethrone me.' God said to the Messiah, 'Ephraim, anointed of My righteousness, thou hast taken upon thee the sufferings of the six days of Creation' (162a; comp. Yalk., Isa. 499). **The preexistence of the Messiah in heaven and his high station there are often mentioned.** Akiba interprets Dan. vii. 9 as referring to two heavenly thrones—the one occupied by God and the other by the Messiah (Hag. 14a; comp. Enoch, lv. 4, lxix. 29), with whom God converses (Pes. 118b; Suk. 52a)."⁴³*

Finally, one passage in John's Gospel shows that a significant number of Jews who encountered Jesus in person believed in Messiah's preexistence. First, note the first and strongest evidence given in the Jewish Encyclopedia article: "Two Biblical passages favor the view of the preexistence of the Messiah: Micah v. 1 (A.V. 2), speaking of the Bethlehemite ruler, says that his 'goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting'." Actually, the word translated "everlasting" literally means "ancient times."⁴⁴

⁴³ Jewish Encyclopedia, Article: "Preexistence"

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12339-preexistence>

⁴⁴ NIV, NRSV. The LXX has ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος (out of days of the age). Since "Day one" begins the creation account, there were no "days" before it. This puts the terminus a quo for Messiah's "goings forth" from God after Day one of creation.

Micah 5:2 JPS⁴⁵

2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from ancient days.

Messiah’s “goings forth”⁴⁶ refers to His repeated descending and ascending from heaven as the Messenger of YHVH as He interacted with the patriarchs and with Israel. This One is specifically called the “Son” of God by Solomon in Prov. 30:4 which was applied to Jesus in John 3:13.

Note that Micah’s prophecy does not say that the Messiah would be born in Israel, but only that He would emerge as Messiah out of Bethlehem. This could easily refer to Messiah as a divine figure since He is portrayed by Micah as coming and going (or descending and ascending)⁴⁷ since ancient days, but coming forth from Bethlehem as Messiah. This is apparently how this prophecy was understood by a significant segment of the Jewish population according to John.

John 7:25 LGV

25 Then some of the Jerusalemites said, “Is this not the one whom they are seeking to kill? 26 And look! He is speaking boldly and no one is saying anything. Do the rulers know that this is truly the Anointed one? 27 But we have perceived where this one is [from]. Yet the Anointed one, whenever He may come, no one knows where He is from.”

This idea that no one knows where the Messiah is from is based on one of two Jewish interpretations Micah 5:2 which says that Messiah has been “going forth” since ancient days. The Jews who made the above statement did not think the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but rather thought that He would become a public figure out from Bethlehem, with His origin going all the way back to “ancient times.” Consider what is stated a few verses later which shows that the same crowd was fully aware of Micah 5:2, yet some apparently understood it to refer to His birth from the seed of David.

40 Therefore many from the crowd hearing the word were saying, “This is truly the Prophet.” 41 Others were saying, “This is the Anointed one.” But others were saying, “The Anointed one is not coming out of Galilee! 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Anointed one is coming out of the seed of David and from Bethlehem,

⁴⁵ Jewish Publication Society Translation

⁴⁶ “goings forth” is plural in both the Hebrew and LXX

⁴⁷ Prov. 30:4

the village where David was?”⁴³ Therefore a schism in the crowd occurred because of Him.

All of the Jews in this crowd were aware of Micah’s prophecy. The schism between them concerned differing interpretations of the prophecy. The Temple scholars however, who viewed the Messiah as merely a human born of the line of David, held the latter interpretation of Micah 5:2, believing that He would indeed be born in Bethlehem, not merely come out of Bethlehem to take His role as Messiah.

Matthew 2:1-8 NKJV

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

*3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered **all the chief priests and scribes** of the people together, **he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.** 5 **So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,** for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.’” 7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”*

There was a difference of opinion among the Jews in Jesus’ day concerning Micah’s prophecy. Many of the common people understood that Messiah had been “going forth” from ancient days, before His arrival in Bethlehem, thus having preexisted much longer than any mere human lifespan. But the Temple scholars did not agree, and viewed Him as a mere man originating in Bethlehem (as do modern Unitarians). It was this latter group to which Jesus posed the riddle from Psalm 110:1 which pointed out their fallacy.

The bottom line is this: A preexistent Messiah of divine origin, having come down from heaven, was in no sense a completely foreign idea in the culture of Judea and Galilee where Jesus walked. While this concept was blended with Greek philosophy by Philo in Egypt, it predated Philo and was common or at least known among Jews who were not heavily influenced by Greek thought. Jewish monotheism was perfectly capable of absorbing this concept.