An Article On

"THE LOGOS"

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September 2005

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. General definition of Logos:

Logos (λογος) (log'-os) is a New Testament Greek word which carried within itself two meanings: it carried both concepts of thought and speech; both formulating the idea of Logos as an interconnected whole. In classical Greek it never simply meant a simple name of something, it defined the whole reality of the thing spoken of. Logos was an inward thought or reason of the mind that was expressed through speech. It literally meant to choose out or single out the right words for proper expression of the thoughts of the mind. The words articulated the concepts, and defined what the 'thing' was. Logos was used as a full expression in speech of what was already existent in the mind. That is how Logos differed from other Greek words used for speech in the New Testament such as: *rhema* (hray'-mah) and *epo* (ep'-o). These Greek words related to that which is or has been uttered by the living voice, something spoken, a word. Examples of this would be: a speech, a discourse, or what someone has said. *Rhema* and *epo* form a sequence of words establishing a sentence. Logos expressed a much deeper meaning, in that it uttered what was already in the mind or thoughts of the one speaking.

2. Historical summary of Logos:

The word Logos had a long history among the Jewish people. The word can be traced back to the creation in the Jewish Scriptures. It had a fairly long history among the Greeks as well. The Hebrews treated it more as the outward expression; while the Greeks treated it more as reason of the mind. The Logos played an integral part within human history in the development of man's understanding of God.

In the New Testament the doctrine of the Logos was not developed by the Apostle Paul, or Peter. The Apostle John alone articulated the doctrine of the New Testament Logos in relation to Jesus Christ; although Paul's and Peter's doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ was no different than John's.

II. OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF LOGOS

1. The Hebrew equivalent of Logos:

The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word Logos is *dabar* (daw-baw'). *Dabar* identified a 'thing' and made it known. To understand the words is to recognize the thoughts. *Dabar* was very active and understood in Hebrew life.

2. Hebrew development of the Logos:

The Hebrew Scripture spoke of the Word of God as the divine agent who executed God's various tasks. According to Psalms 33:6, it was active in creation. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made." It was God's spoken word that had accomplished this task in Genesis Chapter One. Eight times in this chapter during the creation process is the phrase "Then God said...," used. His word went forth and it was consummated. As time progressed, God revealed himself to mankind, and especially the Jewish people through his word. Examples of this are: Abraham in Genesis 15:1, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram…"; to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:21, "…For the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD"; to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:4, "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying…". God's word became so interconnected with his person and his will, that when God was despised, it was actually his word that was despised. Numbers 15:31, "Because he has despised the word of the LORD…". God's word was also God's agent of rebuke and judgment. Hosea 6:5 declares this: "Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth…" God's word was also a healing agent to man in Psalms 107:20, "He sent His word and healed them..." God's word also appeared to have personal qualities as stated Ps 147:15, "He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly."

Another word closely related to reason (Logos) is the word *wisdom.* In Proverbs chapter eight, wisdom is personified. This wisdom was revealed as one who was very active among men on the earth. It was also self existent with God, having assisted Him in creation. "When He prepared the heavens, I was there, When He drew a circle on the face of the deep. When He established the clouds above, When He strengthened the fountains of the deep…" (Proverbs 8:27, 28). It may be doubtful whether this language was describing a real person, but most likely it was a poetic personification. The concept of the personification of the Logos was there, lurking in the depths of the Jewish mind.

3. General ideas of the Hebrew Logos:

These concepts have led some scholars to believe that the Old Testament term 'the word of the Lord' referred to Jesus Christ in his preincarnate state (before he took on flesh). And that God himself is the *word of God* insofar as the *word* of God is the expression or revealer of his revelation. In Old Testament usage, the word of God formed the mediator between God and man.

In the Targums (popular Aramaic paraphrases, interpretations of the Hebrew Scripture) the writers expressed a felt need for a mediator, one to stand between them and God. One of the three mediators written of was defined as the 'word.' The 'word' seemed to be the most authoritative of the three. The writers expressed a desire for a salvation through the 'word of the Lord,' not by the means of a mere man. But the Targums never identified the 'word' as a person, nor related it to the Messiah.

For the Hebrew people, 'the word of the Lord' has a long history, and was very active in their lives. It was how God communicated to them, it was how he dealt with them, and it was how he rescued them. 'The word' was a mediator between them and their God.

III. GREEK BACKGROUND OF LOGOS

1. Introduction:

If there was a development of the word Logos within the Hebrew culture, there was a parallel movement among the Greeks also. The concept of Logos became important to the Greeks with the emergence of rationality around 600 BC. The Logos theory took a wide meaning among the Greeks. It became the content which was in a law, the thoughts of expression, it was details and it was definition. It also carried the idea of metaphysical reality.

2. Heraclitus:

The first Greek philosopher who developed a Logos theory was Heraclitus around 600 BC. This philosopher sought for a law, a rule, or a principle, to account for this world of order that was in perpetual change. Heraclitus sought out a single solution from which all things could arise from. His theory ultimately defined this primary component as "Logos" or "Reason". This Logos or Reason defined and designated the divine cause which harmonized a changing universe. It was the Logos which constituted the being of the heavenly and mankind. It was the connecting force or energy between the various spheres of life; that which is seen and that which is unseen. Logos kept all things in motion and in harmony. The Logos of Heraclitus was not before the world, nor was it above the world, it was inside of it.

3. Plato:

Plato was another key figure when it came to the Greek world of thought and expression. Plato did not necessarily define the Logos as a force as did Heraclitus, but he developed a theory upon which the Logos concept could easily fit. According to Plato the world had two spheres: the perfect unseen archetype (an original model or type after which other similar things are patterned), which was ultimate

reality; and secondly, the lower realm of the visible, which was the type (a figure, representation, symbol of, or the reflection of the archetype). In Plato's mind, the perfect unseen realm is where Deity dwelt. It was the world of ultimate thought or 'ideas.' Plato thought that these 'ideas' dwelt in the divine mind before creation. The 'ideas' were then expressed by deity and carried out in the creation of the type (the visible world). The 'idea' of Plato was similar to the concept of Logos as the agent of creation. The Jewish philosopher/theologian Philo of Alexandria picked up on this theory and used it as a guiding principle in his Logos theories.

4. Stoicism:

The Greeks that developed the Logos ideas more than any before them were the Stoics. They developed the first systematic description of the principles of the Logos. The Stoics sought some way to harmonize the duality between God and the cosmos. They sought to interpret life in the realms of both nature and man's responsibility. The Stoics focused more on the ethical than the physical. They found the solutions to their dilemmas in Heraclitus's Logos concept. The Stoic's believed that the whole universe was one living related whole. Therefore the Logos was that one power or authority which held within itself the laws of the universe; which in turn controlled and contained the universe and its environment, and kept it in motion. Philo further developed the Stoic Logos along with Plato's 'ideas'.

5. Philo:

Philo of Alexandria (20BC-30AD), who had been influenced by both Hebrew and Greek thought concerning the Logos, further developed a doctrine of the Logos perhaps more than any other philosopher. Philo was well studied and able to synthesize (harmonize differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion) various philosophies in regards to the Logos theories. He took the Logos term from the Stoics, and then synchronized it with Plato's *ideas*; then incorporated it into the Jewish God who had consistently acted through his word. The Logos became the means by which the transcendent God of the Jewish Scripture could have created and sustained the universe.

Philo did not believe that this unique God of Scripture could have anything to do with primordial (the earliest stage of development of an organism) matter, so He created order (Plato's type, the visible realm) out of the pre-existing chaotic matter by means of his Logos. (Logos in Philo's mind was the expansion of 'Plato's Ideas.') He believed that God created everything by the means of the Logos (his word); therefore God himself did not have to touch physical matter. This Logos therefore was the *ideas* or *forms* of Plato, the archetype which created the type. In simple words, the blueprint of creation according to Philo had been already set in the Logos.

Philo's Logos was not a concrete personality. Nor strictly impersonal either. The Logos to Philo was *not* God Himself, but the expression, or concept of who He was. It was then through this expression or Logos that He created. God thought, spoke, and the deed was accomplished through the Logos.

Although Philo's concept of the Logos is not always coherent, it was the most developed doctrine of all his writings. It was the fusion that helped link Greek and Hebrew thought in the realm of the Logos theories. Of all the pre-New Testament Logos theories, Philo's concept of the Logos is the most similar to that of the Apostle John's description of the true Logos. Philo's many descriptions of the Logos seem to be reiterated in John's gospel. (See the ISBE, under "Logos" for more detail in regards to the commonalities of Philo and the Apostle John).

IV. THE APOSTLE JOHN'S USE OF LOGOS

1. Introduction:

Both the Greek and Hebrew belief systems prepared the way for the coming of the Apostle John's Logos. The Logos had been in use among the Hebrews for hundreds of years in a Biblical way. The Logos had been in use among the Greeks for six hundred years in a speculative abstract way. The Greeks and Hebrews did emphasize their doctrine of Logos; both belief systems saw a world which was in need of a mediator; both systems had attributed the interaction between man and the divine through the means of the Logos. Both the Greek and Hebrew systems came together in the synchronized system of Philo. It was to this world of thought that the Apostle John introduced to the world the true Logos of God.

2. John 1:1:

The Apostle John, as no other writer in the New Testament, used the Greek word Logos to describe the person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the Apostle Paul described the person and character of Christ in the same manner as John, he did not describe Christ in terms of the Logos. The Apostle John most certainly reflected back on philosophical and Hebrew thought and declared, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). John clearly defined the Logos as the one who existed at the very beginning of all things, the one who had fellowship with God, and the one who was in every way God. John declared that this Logos, created all things, and nothing was created apart from him. This Logos was life; the Logos was also the light. The Logos was the ultimate expression of God, for he was God. The Logos was the ultimate light (revealer) for he was God.

All that was accomplished by mankind before Christ's incarnation, those ideas relating to Logos theology was a prelude to the one who would ultimately and beautifully fulfill in every way the complex theological concepts surrounding the Logos.

3. John 1:14:

John declared that this Logos became flesh and tabernacled among men, and man gazed upon his glory; the Son of God full of grace and truth. God had given his greatest revelation and expression of who he was. The Logos of God was in the fullest sense Jesus Christ. This revelation was final, unique, and superior to all other revelation that had ever been given. God no longer spoke in bits and pieces through prophets who themselves were sinful, but now spoke through Deity. God could in every way demonstrate to the world his greatness through the Logos. The Logos himself being God could perfectly communicate the father through perfect words and perfect deeds. That is why Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

4. Revelation 19:13:

The Apostle John also described a day in which the Lord Jesus would return. The apostle stated that Jesus was identified by the name, "The Word of God." It would be this Logos, who through his own word would smite the nations. The Apostle John declared that in all respects Jesus Christ was the Word of God. His own word carried the same authority as in the creative acts of Genesis chapter one.

V. CONCLUSION

Although mankind developed many Logos theories and tried with difficulty to define its nature and being, it fell quite short of the true or ultimate reality of the Logos. The Apostle John articulated its ultimate meaning when he personified Logos in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Logos was given as a title to

the savior of the world, for it expressed who he truly was in complete essence more than any other term. The Logos of John was the perfect and eternal Son of God; the creator, the mediator, the sustainer, and the fulfillment of all that the Logos was to both Jew and Greek alike. He was in every way the perfect and complete expression of the Father. He was more than any Jewish theologian or Greek philosopher ever imagined or comprehended the Logos to be.

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