

Logos (λόγος): the Word of God

Having briefly considered the Hebrew word *davar* (= word, message) and its list of meanings that are related to different forms of communication, let us have a look at a corresponding word found in the Christian Testament. The word is *logos*, from the Greek verb *legō*, which has two primary meanings as well as a variety of associated connotations:

1. to count or calculate + reckoning, accounts, measure, estimate;
 2. to speak or say + explanation, theory rule of law, definition, dialogue, conversation, saying, proverb.
- logos* also refers to the process of human reasoning by which we arrive at calculations and communication. It is hardly ever used of a single word as an item of grammar. (BAGD 477-79).

A Bible reader would first encounter the word *logos* in the Prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) and while there is a good deal of scholarly debate about the meaning of *logos*, it is clear that the closest parallels to *logos* are found in Jewish Wisdom writings (Proverbs, Sirach, Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon). All translations below are from the NRSV.

| Prologue of John | Jewish Wisdom |
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| In the beginning was the word (1:1) | The Lord created me (<i>sophia</i>) at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. (Prov 8:22) Before the ages, in the beginning he created me (wisdom), and for all ages I shall not cease to be. (Sir 24:9) |
| And the word was with God (1:1) | When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I (wisdom) was beside him. (Prov 8:29-30) |
| All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. (1:3) | With you (God) is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world. (Wis 9:9) |
| What has come into being in him was life (1:3-4) | For he who finds me (wisdom) finds life. (Prov 8:35) Because of her (wisdom) I shall have immortality. (Wis 8:13) |
| He was in the world (1:10) | And I (wisdom) was his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (Prov 8:30-31) |
| He came to what was his own (1:11) | Then the Creator of all things gave me (wisdom) a command... He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance. (Sir 24:8) |
| But to all who received him...he gave power to become children of God (1:12) | Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets. (Wis 7:27) |
| And the word became flesh and lived among us (1:14) | Afterward she (wisdom) appeared on earth and lived with humankind. (Baruch 3:37) |

This shows where the John writer got his inspiration from. But more than this, it shows a common motif or thread over the centuries of inspired Jewish thinking, namely, God seeks to communicate self to human beings and this communication process is done through *davar* or word in speech and action through the media of wisdom and prophecy. Wisdom was personified in the Wisdom books as a female entity (described as Lady Wisdom) present on earth and working through wise elders and prophets. Wisdom (Hebrew: *khokmah*. Greek: *sophia*) is feminine in both languages and is referred to as 'she'.

The unique thing about *logos* in John is that it is the only example of communication from God being identified with a particular human being – Jesus. So, how is Jesus the Word of God?

From a Jewish point of view everything about Jesus communicates something of God to us. Look at Jesus and you see something of the divine revealed to you. This is why Matthew calls him *Emmanuel* – God is with us. The words, actions, relationships – everything about Jesus is revealing something of the divine to us. Everything about him is an act of communication.

Peter gets it right when he says, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (Jn 6:68). Your words are life for us; your whole person is life for us.