

A Study on John 1:1

Response to Torah Resource - Pt. 4

Subtitle: *Yeshua in John 1*

Opening Text: **John 1:1** Moffat Translation

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Today we are going to answer one clip from Torah Resource Radio's "The Rob and Caleb Show" that focuses in on a concept in John chapter 1.

John chapter 1, sometimes called the "prologue to John's gospel" often comes up in discussions about who Yeshua is, and rightfully so. A popular verse in this prologue of John is John 1:14 where we read (HCSB): "The word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Verse 14 then is undeniably a reference to Yeshua, and notice it calls him the "one and only Son from the Father." Other translations read this as "only begotten of the Father." (KJV)

Thus, John 1, and really verses 1 through 18, is a text that needs to be discussed when we are discussing who Yeshua is.

Before we look at the video clip, I want to remind you of something I covered in part 2 of this series. Caleb Hegg read a portion of the book I co-authored where we briefly went over our understanding of portions of John 1. It was on page 42 of our book. We quoted John 1:1-5 from the KJV, and then stated the following:

Aside from the obvious problems of how to translate "God," we have a problem of how to understand "the Word." Since verse 14 says, "And the word was made flesh," and since Revelation 19:13 says Yeshua will be called "The Word of Yahweh," the translators imposed their own understanding into the translation. They understood the Word to refer to Yeshua therefore having to translate the Greek word *autou* into English as him. According to the Greek lexicon of SEC, "Word" is a translation of the Greek word "logos" meaning 'something said (including the thought).' It refers to Yahweh's spoken word, not to a person who is called "the Word." Yahweh's word is an "it," not a "him." Verse 3 should read, "All things were made through it; and without it was not anything made that was made." That is how it is translated in the Emphatic Diaglott as well as in several other English translations that preceded the King James Version.

How one interprets John 1:1-18 will depend largely on their understanding of the Greek "logos" translated as "word" in our English Bibles. "Word" is a legitimate translation of "logos" because logos often refers to speech, utterance, a message, etc. in Scripture. However, most translations capitalize the "W" in word in John 1:1. They do this because they believe that the logos here is the pre-existing Yeshua in heaven before he came down to earth. They view the "Word" as a person, not as the utterance of Yahweh. The capitalization of the "W" in "word" is a translation bias on the part of translators who believe this way.

What this then leads to is John 1:3 reading "All things were made by **him**; and without **him** was not any thing made that was made." If you believe the Word is a person, you will naturally translate verse 3 as "him." But is that the proper way to understand the verses?

Let's listen to Tim Hegg. Let's look at the video clip.

So, what's my comments on this? Have I committed what Hegg calls "exegetical suicide?"

I want to remind you also of something I mentioned in an earlier sermon. The section that they chose to deal with on John 1 from our book is on page 42. However, we have an entire chapter on John 1 (chapter 4 of the book) that is almost 8 1/2 pages long. They don't even mention it here, even though in that chapter, we go into much more detail. Detail that I will get into tonight.

Can we translate verse 14 of John 1 as "it?" Should we read "IT became flesh" rather than "the word became flesh?"

I have no problem with the reading "the word became flesh," but you must properly define the "word" (logos) here in order to understand what verse 14 is saying.

Interestingly enough, some English translations of the Bible, translated from the Greek NT, that preceded the 1611 KJV, read in John 1:3-4 "all things were made by it, and without it, was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men." That is actually a direct quote from the 1534 William Tyndale translation of John's gospel.

The same goes for the 1537 Matthew's Bible, the 1539 Great Bible, the 1560 Geneva Bible, and the 1568 Bishops Bible.

When you translate John 1:3 from the Greek as "it" rather than "he" as these early English Bibles did, it pushes you in the direction of the "word" in John 1:1 being just that, "the spoken word" rather than a separate person from God or Yahweh.

It is certainly acceptable to translate John 1:3 as "all things were made by it." We learn this from not only the English translations like Tyndale and Geneva, but also from the simple Greek word "autou." Even the KJV translates this same word as "it" in John 1:5, just 2 verses later.

John 1:5 (KJV) And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Translating "autou" as "him" is certainly not bad or wrong. Many times it is translated "him" in our English Bibles. It all depends on the subject. Here in John 1, it all depends on whether you view the "word" in John 1:1 as a person or as a spoken word.

So how did creation come into being? We know that Yahweh is the Creator. That's a fact that no one who believes the Bible will argue with. But how did Yahweh cause creation to come into existence. Look at Genesis 1:1-3.

1 In the beginning **God created** the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. 3 **Then God said**, "Let there be light," and there was light.

If you are reading your Bible beginning in Genesis, and you read these verses to start off, I think it's safe to say that you will see **one person creating and one person speaking**. This is not to say that as you continue reading your understanding will not grow fuller, but any later material you read will not contradict previous material you have read.

Here, God or Elohim SPOKE light into existence. If you keep reading through Genesis 1 you will see the phrase "Elohim said" about 8x in reference to Yahweh creating something.

As you continue on in your Bible reading you would eventually get to the book of Psalms. Notice how the Psalmist describes creation in Psalm 33:6-9.

6 The heavens were made by **the word of Yahweh** (ask yourself, "Is this a separate person from Yahweh?"), and all the stars, by **the breath of His mouth**. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into a heap; He puts the depths into storehouses. 8 Let the whole earth tremble before Yahweh ; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. 9 For **He spoke**, and it came into being; **He commanded**, and it came into existence.

Notice how the heavens, the stars, and everything else was made by the WORD of Yahweh. Verse 9 tells us how this happened. He SPOKE and it came about. He COMMANDED and existence took place. Psalm 33:6 even uses the Greek word logos in the Septuagint - the heavens were made by the LOGOS of Yahweh.

Yahweh's word was like a master-builder by His side, but not in the sense of a separate person. It was the word of Yahweh that was said to be "with God" in the beginning, in John 1:1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.

Today, WE don't normally speak of *our word* as something that is "with us," but the Hebrews did think in this way. Consider a couple texts from the Old Testament book of Job, as we continue our reading through the Bible.

Job 10:13 (KJV) And these *things* hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this *is with* thee. (Job here speaks of Yahweh as having plans hid in His heart, and then says that these things are "with" Yahweh.)

Job 23:14 For he performeth *the thing that is* appointed for me: and many such *things are with* him. (Job here speaks of Yahweh performing that which He has appointed [His plans]. Job then says these things are "with" Yahweh.)

In your studies you may also want to consider Genesis 17:4 and Job 12:12-13. These texts speak of concepts or plans being "with" people. Always remember, words that come out of a person or being's mouth always originated as a thought or concept prior to being a word. Words are a product of your thoughts or plans.

We should also note the personification of "wisdom" being with Yahweh in the beginning as well. Wisdom and understanding is where the logos begins, with Yahweh and with human beings. Once again: the words we speak begin in our mind. They are thought about before they ever actually come out of our mouth.

What do I mean when I say PERSONIFICATION? Personification is defined by Noah Webster (1828) as:

PERSONIFICATION, n. *from personify*. The giving to an inanimate being the figure or the sentiments and language of a rational being.

Some examples of this in Scripture are:

Ps 77:16 (KJV) The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. (*reference to the parting of the red sea in Exodus*)

Ps 85:10 (KJV) Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other*.

Notice how the wisdom of Yahweh is spoken about in Proverb 8:1.

Pr 8:1 Doth not **wisdom** cry? and **understanding** put forth her voice?

Wisdom is here portrayed as a "her." But, is wisdom a female standing there in front of the author of Proverbs? I don't think that's the case, I think Solomon is using the art of personification: he giving an inanimate thing the figure of a rational human being. Wisdom **cries out**. But why a she? Why feminine?

Here's my take on this. In the chapters before this, specifically Proverbs 5, 6, and 7, the author is warning men of seductive harlots or adulterous women. You should read Proverbs 5, 6, 7, and then 8. The author constantly says things like "her feet go down to death" and "don't go near the door of her house" and "and adulterous goes after your very life."

Here in Proverbs 8 the author contrasts the adulterous woman (in 5, 6, and 7) with the woman us men **are** to go after: **lady wisdom**. Not an actual lady per say, but wisdom personified. Let's continue reading some further verses in Proverbs 8.

Pr 8:22 ¶ Yahweh possessed me (*wisdom; vs. 1*) in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

Pr 8:23 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

Pr 8:24 When *there were* no depths, I was brought forth; when *there were* no fountains abounding with water.

Pr 8:25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

Pr 8:26 While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

Pr 8:27 When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

Pr 8:28 When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

Pr 8:29 When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:

Pr 8:30 Then I was by him, as one brought up *with him*: and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him.

So you should see here the deep personification of wisdom. Notice what Proverbs 8:12 says about this wisdom, same chapter.

Pr 8:12 (KJV) I **wisdom dwell with prudence**, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

Is wisdom a woman here that actually dwells or lives with another woman named prudence? Not at all. Here we have two attributes personified in one verse.

But this language in Proverbs 8 is so personal that it led many of the early church fathers to conclude that it was talking about Yeshua as a pre-existing spirit being that was with Father Yahweh. (8:30 NASB - "Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.")

Listen to me carefully here. I actually believe this in Proverbs 8 is in a way a reference to Yeshua, but not Yeshua as a person, rather it was the word, wisdom, plan, understanding, knowledge of Yahweh that would eventually become flesh in the person of Christ. Let me illustrate this in a way that may be easier to understand.

Suppose I tell my son David, "Do you see this Dodge caravan? At one time, this van existed in the mind of its designer." Now David might scratch his little head and think, "Daddy, how in the world did that van fit into a man's mind?" The problem would be that he is equating what the van is now with what the van was then, but they aren't one and the same. What the van was then, in the designers mind, was a plan that was WITH the designer. He thought it up, every button, every piece of the frame, every seat belt, every light. Then, the designer talked about it, and drew it out on paper. The intellect and wisdom of the designer developed the van into a blueprint. Eventually, that plan, that intellect, that wisdom in the designers mind took on the shape and actuality of a van to drive down the road.

What the plan became is not a one-to-one correspondence to what the plan once was. Just as the van existed in the mind of its designer, Yeshua existed in the mind of Yahweh, and thus was with Yahweh in the beginning, but in a different form than a person.

Yeshua of Nazareth is what the wisdom, understanding, plan, and word of Yahweh became. It wasn't Yeshua the person existing with Yahweh as a finished "product" (so to speak), but as a plan that would eventually take on reality.

This makes sense, and this is why John 1:1 says "In the beginning was... the logos." The word, the plan, the forethought, the mind, the wisdom, the understanding of Yahweh. Notice it does not say "In the beginning was the Son," or "In the beginning was Yeshua." No, Yeshua as a person does not arrive on the scene until verse 14 when the "logos" (which can accurately be understood as an "it") becomes flesh.

A professor of the exegesis of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford in England states in like this in his book titled "New Testament Theology."

"In the beginning was the purpose, the purpose in the mind of God, the purpose which was God's own being... this purpose took human form in Jesus of Nazareth." - GB Caird

I believe this is the best way to understand John 1 based upon the grammar that is used. God himself didn't become flesh. But what God said, or God's thoughts, plans, wisdom, and understanding did become flesh.

In other words, God the Father didn't become flesh. What God the Father planned and spoke became flesh.

So is it exegetical suicide to understand John 1:14 as an "it" becoming flesh. Not at all. The translation "the word became flesh" is perfect. But the word is not a person, but a plan, thought, wisdom, spoken word.

I believe John 1:1 is best understood thusly:

1. In the beginning was the plan/wisdom/word.
2. The plan/wisdom/word was with God (ton theon).
3. The plan/wisdom/word was divine (theos).

This is how James Moffat (1922) and also Smith & Goodspeed (1939) translate John 1:1. The word was divine.

As I close, let me briefly comment on the difference between John 1:1b and John 1:1c as it relates to the word "God."

Most translations will have "the word was with God and the word was God." From a strict Greek grammar point of view that is not the most accurate way to translate the verse. This is because in John 1:1b the Greek has "ton theon" which is literally "the God." John 1:1b's use of "ton theon" shows that a noun is in view: the Father. John 1:1c's use of theos - which is different than ton theon - shows that the Greek word (theos) is qualitative or used in a somewhat adjectival sense. Basically put, it is an adjective rather than a noun.

It's like me pointing out Brother Tim to you in two ways.

I can say: Brother Tim is the man I am talking about, identifying him as the subject/noun.

I can say: Brother Tim is man. This is explaining what Tim is. Man is the adjective.

John 1:1c's use of theos is indefinite or qualitative (an adjective). It does not have the force of a noun. John 1:1b's use of ton theon is most certainly definite (a noun).

Never let anyone just quote John 1:1 to you from the KJV English and make their point finishing there. The Greek just doesn't read the same in 1:1c as it does in 1:1b and there's a reason for that, we shouldn't just overlook it.

"The word was divine" (godlike, a god) best captures the intended meaning. Because the logos was Yahweh's plan, wisdom, understanding, and word, it was divine. It had the quality of divineness, thus the adjective theos in John 1:1c describes the logos beautifully.

If you'd like to study this further, I'd recommend reading chapter 11 in this book I have here titled Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament, by scholar Jason David BeDuhn. He is a Greek scholar who can explain in much more detail what I've briefly described here.

Hopefully you've learned some things tonight. I know I did putting this lesson together. Let's stand and pray.