

The Body Builder

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Ed's Editorial:

THE WORD BECAME MAN AT CHRISTMAS: A JEWISH ROOTS PERSPECTIVE

BY PASTOR ED VASICEK

Charles Wesley wrote my favorite Christmas carol, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." It is a theological masterpiece. One noteworthy phrase is "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity." Most of us would never join a church that denied that Christ is God in the flesh. Yet we may wonder about why John's Gospel first presents the Messiah as "the Word." The short answer is this: "The Jewish understanding of the living Word was that of one who was divine yet distinct from the Father." Let me elaborate.

A New Testament *midrash* is a Jewish explanation, teaching, interpretation, or application

of an Old Testament text. When Jesus talks about how He will be lifted just as the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up (John 3:13-17), I consider His words a *midrash* on Numbers 21:8-10. My book, [The Midrash Key](#), demonstrates how we can better understand New Testament texts when we couple them with their Old Testament source texts. This article about "the Word" could have been another chapter in its own right!

Sometimes a *midrash* is not merely based upon a single Old Testament text, but, rather, on a series of scattered verses. Such is the case with John's assertion about the pre-existence of the Messiah as the Eternal Word of God and as God Himself.

Note the background to the Concept of God's Creative Word in John 1:1-3. The ESV reads,

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 was not any thing made that was made.

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The Body Builder is published monthly by Highland Park Church, P.O. Box 11, Kokomo, IN 46903-0011. Submit articles or information to Janie Martin at janiemartinhpc@gmail.com or place in church mailbox "M".

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We can see that the Word was always with God (1). This takes us back to Genesis 1, where we repeatedly read, “And God said...” Most readers with any fluency in the Old Testament would make this connection.

In the very center of Genesis 1:1, (“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth”) is a word that is considered an object marker, a word particle that is not translated. Although not translated, this word helps us understand how to translate another word. This “hidden word” consists of the first and last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph and Tav. Is it possible that John the Apostle is playing on this hidden word? He might be.

In Revelation, Jesus refers to Himself as the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:13). If we go from Greek to the Hebrew alphabet, then we might conclude that God the Son is present (hidden) in the center of first verse of the Bible as Aleph Tav. This is an intriguing possibility, even if admittedly speculative.

Moving on to surer footing, observe that the Greek New Testament word for “word” is “*logos*,” the title used here for the Son of God. The Word (God the Son) has always existed. Although the Word is God, He is distinct from God the Father *because He is with Him*, face to face.

When speaking of myself, I refer to myself as “I” or “me,” not “he” or “him.” But God does both. In several places in the Old Testament, God refers to Himself in both the first and third persons (Zechariah 2:8-10 and 12:8-10 come to mind). *Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is laced throughout Scripture*, or at least room for that doctrine. God is one, yet He is more than one *person*. He is three distinct persons (Matthew 28:19-20). We will find that John’s

teaching about the Word (*logos*) is not unique to Christianity, but part of ancient Judaism.

I. The idea that the Word is God and yet distinct is seen in Judaism (John 1:1)

The Word is both deity and yet distinct from God (the Father). This is demonstrated in the fact that *it was appropriate for the Psalmist to direct praise to the Word*. In a religion whose pillar was worshiping God alone, David makes what could be considered a blasphemous statement if the Word were not God. In Psalm 56:4 he says, “*In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?*” David understood what later Jews understood, that the Word of God was personal, distinct from the Father, and yet God.

Let me share some quotations from the *Targums* (Jewish paraphrases and expansions of Scripture written in Aramaic; these were written by Jews for Jewish communities before, during, and after the time of Jesus). These *Targums* are not merely paraphrases (like *The Living Bible*), but include interpretational additions to help readers understand the meaning. Although these interpretations are debatable, *they show the thinking of the ancient Jewish community*, thinking that was part of the Jewish context during the New Testament era.

The *Targum* on Genesis 28:20-21 reads, “If the Word of the Lord will be with me...then the Word of the LORD will be my God...”

The *Targum* on Genesis 1:27, “The Word of the Lord created man...”

The *Targum* on Exodus 20:1, “And the Word of the Lord spoke all these words...”

The *Targum* on Deuteronomy 1:30, “The Lord your God who leads before you, his Word will fight for you...”

The *Targum* on Deuteronomy 4:7 places the Word on the throne of God, “The word of the Lord sits upon his throne high and lifted up and hears our prayer whenever we pray before him and make our petitions.” (Michael Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Vol. 2, pp. 19-22)

Michael Brown also quotes Larry Hurtado’s summary of the first century Jewish philosopher, Philo:

Philo calls the Logos (word) ‘the second god’...and states that the ‘God’ in whose image Adam was created in Genesis 1:27 is actually the Logos, which the rational part of the soul resembles (Brown, p. 22)

Although we rightly make a distinction between the eternal personal Word and the written Word (Scripture), the connection is also clear. This is why true Christianity is a religion of the Book, one in which Jesus’ disciples have their noses in their Bibles.

II. The idea that all things were made through the Word also exists in Judaism (John 1:2-4)

If all things are indeed created by the Word, then the Word must be uncreated. Psalm 33:6 asserts, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Thus all things were created by Him (the Word).

...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.... (1 Corinthians 8:6)

but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Hebrews 1:2)

The Word is not only the agent of creation, creation exists for Him and He holds creation together. Colossians 1:16-17 states, “For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

The first entity the Father made through the agency of the Word was light (Gen. 1:3). In John 1:4-13, John presents the Word as repeating the process, this time bringing spiritual light. As John puts it in verse 4, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

By the way, not only is the Word God and with God, but so is the Spirit. Genesis 1:2 reads, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” Here we have an uncreated entity (the Spirit) who exists during a time when only God existed, and yet He is presented as a distinct person.

The more I study the Bible, the more I see that most New Testament teaching finds its origin in the Hebrew Scriptures. And why should it not be so? The one God is the God of both Testaments. This Christmas, remember Who Jesus is: God in human flesh.

MISSIONARY LETTERS

Dawson Data: November 2011

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.” 1 Peter 4:10a

Dear Family and Friends,

We'll be celebrating Thanksgiving tonight, since tomorrow, I (Janet) will be heading out to man our mission's stand at the Annual Evangelical Convention just outside of Paris, then the morning after I return, Jessica leaves on a school trip.

As we look over our summer months, we see that we've been privileged to meet up with many of the French missionaries whom our work supports. So far, the fall has been filled with Wycliffe Associates and calls to the U.S. regarding our aging parents.

RE-DEPLOYMENTS: In our roles as Director and Personnel Coordinator of *Association Traduire la Bible*, we have the privilege of deploying French missionaries onto the mission field and helping them stay healthy enough to continue their ministries.

From training to administration, linguistics to literacy, consulting to recordings, the ATB missionaries are involved in an array of tasks associated with the translation and proclamation of the Good News among those who do not yet have it in their heart language. We hope you are as blessed as we are to be able to have a non-front-line role in the task of Bible translation. Please continue to pray for wisdom for us as we support the missionaries administratively, and to pray for them, especially those who face the physical and spiritual challenges of living in developing countries in Africa or Asia.

We've received *our* next deployment, as planned, described in the attached letter from the President of Wycliffe Global Alliance. Next summer, we'll move

out of our current assignments into assignments at the international level. The diagram shows where we'll fit in. We have chosen to be based in Dallas, Texas.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: Soon after we arrived at ATB in fall 2003, the old office building owned by ATB in the Paris area finally sold. Matt, as Assistant Director, was given the job of finding an office building to buy. (ATB was renting space back then.) He found one in 2004, helped with renovations on the ground floor, and directed the move in 2005. Since then, we have welcomed four teams of Wycliffe Associates to renovate the missionary apartment on the second floor and, this October, to transform the top floor into office space to rent out. It's good closure to know we'll be leaving the ATB staff in a nice facility.

In addition to leaving ATC in a good facility, we'll be leaving ATB in good hands. Karine Berndt has accepted to become the next Director, and the Lord has sent a capable Frenchman to be the Treasurer. **Please pray** with us for the right person to replace me as Personnel Coordinator and Communications Coordinator.

PARENTING & PARENTS:

Jessica and Valerie are doing fine. Our church's Scout troop had to take a break, but will be starting up again in January. Both our girls are patrol leaders of their respective patrol. The break has been good, since Jessica has had to spend time applying to U.S. colleges. Matt's mom and my parents are needing more help as they age. We know our return to the U.S. next is God's timing. Please pray for peace and wisdom for all.

We wish all of our American friends a HAPPY THANKSGIVING! We wish ALL of you GOD'S BEST: His peace and joy that come from having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus!

Love and blessings,
Janet, Matt, Jessica, and Valerie

The Christmas Star

By Pastor Brian Oberg

We are most familiar with the star from the arrival of the Magi who asked where the one born King of the Jews was since they had seen his star in the East. But that is not the first mention of the star in Scripture. In fact, the star theme runs like a thread from the Old Testament to the Gospels to the Epistles to finally the last chapter of Revelation. Along the way it moves from being a predicted person, to a marker that He has been born, to a promise that He will return. The star is really a fascinating part of the promise and hope of the Christ of Christmas. Let me just introduce you to our series in this article.

The first mention of the star is 1400 years before Christ in the era of Moses in Numbers 24:15-19. Balaam uttered the only Old Testament prophecy about the star when he prophesied, "A star will come out of Jacob." What is interesting is that Balaam was a pagan seer who practiced divination to make money. He was hired to curse Israel by the king of Moab but every time he opened his mouth God turned his curses into blessings to the great consternation of Balak, Moab's king.

What is astounding about the prophecy is not only that God used one of Israel's enemies to give it, but that it was so grandiose it was laughable. Israel was little more than a rag-tag group of ex-slaves, in the midst of the wilderness wanderings because of disobedience, with no country of their own, no potential for military prowess to conquer other nations, and no great future from anyone's perspective. Yet a star was predicted out of Israel who would rule and conquer. Only a supernatural God committed to a nation thru grace could bring such an unlikely event about. God likes great

odds so He can show it is of Him. Think about that the next time you are tempted to limit God to your bleak circumstances. Nothing is impossible for Him.

Fast forward to Matthew 2 where the star appears to Magi from the East who traveled to Jerusalem to worship the newborn king. Here we have Gentiles from afar off coming to worship a Jewish King when His own people didn't recognize He had been born. Not a single person in Jerusalem from Herod the Great, to Jewish religious leaders, to devout Templegoers bothered to travel the few miles to Bethlehem to worship the Son of God. Only the Magi made the final short leg of the trip bringing gifts worthy of God's King. Isn't this a foreshadowing of God's grace to us – Gentiles who were afar off who have been brought to worship Christ by God revealing the identity of the star to us?

Finally, 1 Peter and Revelation give the precise identity of the star and predict His glorious appearance once more. His return is as sure as the fulfillment of His first coming. But there is more. His coming will be personal for every believer. He is coming to fulfill His promises in the hearts of every believer. We don't wait for an event; we wait for a person who will fulfill all of our deepest hopes. Let's serve Him 'til He comes. Soon the Star will appear again.

Dr. Brian Oberg is the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Marquette, Michigan. Brian was Ed's roommate at Moody Bible Institute, best man at Pastor Ed and Marylu's wedding, and is one of his closest friends. Brian has given us blanket permission to reprint his columns in the Body Builder.



The Byrums sang together on November 13, 2011 at the 10:30 am service and carried on the long-time family tradition. The Byrum Quartet has expanded! God is so gracious!

Congratulations to our October Food Contest Winners!!



Christopher Wilson won both the stew and cake divisions! Congratulations!
(Photos courtesy of Joy Ammerman)



Debbie Pemberton was the winner of the corn dish division :) Way to go Debbie!!
(Photos courtesy of Joy Ammerman)

Please keep the photographs coming! What a wonderful way to encourage and share details about our wonderful church family!

Merry Christmas Everyone !!

December 2011

27	28 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	29	30 Awana 6:15	1 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15 (parlor)	2	3
4 Communion B.A.S.I.C.	5 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	6 Flock Group #1 at Bill Patzold's Deaconess Mtg, 6:30	7 Awana 6:15	8 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15 (parlor)	9	10 Youth Group Cookie Bake 10:00 am to 1:00 pm
11 Christmas Caroling	12 No Ladies' Bible study	13 Deacons Mtg, 7	14 Awana Store 6:15	15 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15	16	17 Youth Christmas Party 6:00pm to 10:30pm
18 No evening service B.A.S.I.C.	19 No Ladies' Bible study	20	21	22 No Ladies' Bible study	23	24 Christmas Eve Service, 6:00pm
25 Christmas Day, 10:30 service only No 8:30 service No evening service or Basic	26 No Ladies' Bible study	27 Elders Mtg, 7:00	28	29 No Ladies' Bible study	30	31

Sunday Events:

Early Service, 8:30 am
 Sunday School, 9:30 am
 Morning Service, 10:30 am
 BASIC Youth Group, 6:00 pm
 Jesus Lodge, 6:00 pm
 Evening Service, 6:30 pm

Christmas Eve Service December 24, 6:00pm

Christmas Day Service - 10:30am ONLY

*No Service at 8:30am
 No Evening Service
 No B.A.S.I.C.*

New Year's Eve - No Party at the Church - see bulletin

New Year's Day Services at 8:30am and 10:30am

*No Evening Service
 No B.A.S.I.C.*

Food Contest on 1/22/12 - soups, breads, & pies

Quarterly Congregational Meeting - 1/29/12, 6:00pm

January 2012

1 No Evening Services No B.A.S.I.C.	2	3	4 Awana 6:15	5 No Ladies' Bible study	6	7	
8 Jesus Lodge, 6:00 B.A.S.I.C.	9 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	10 Deaconess Mtg, 6:30	11 Awana 6:15	12 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15 (parlor)	13	14	
15 Discipleship Night, 6:00 B.A.S.I.C.	16 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	17 Deacons Mtg, 7:00	18 Awana 6:15	19 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15	20	21	
22 -Youth Winter Jam, Ft. Wayne -Food Contest, soups, breads, & pies	23 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	24 Flock #1 at Oriental King, 6:00	25 Awana, 6:15	26 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15 (parlor)	27	28	
29 Quarterly Congregational Meeting, 6:00 B.A.S.I.C.	30 Ladies' Bible study, 6:15 (parlor)	31 Elders Mtg, 7:00	1 Awana, 6:15	2 Ladies' Bible study, 12:15 (parlor)	3	4	

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