

Essay on “Logos”

By

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## Introduction: Overview

The Greek word *λόγος* (*logos*) appears 40 times in the Gospel of John (John).<sup>1</sup> In nearly all its occurrences in the book, it refers to oral “communication whereby the mind finds expression.”<sup>2</sup> The word has a range of meanings in John: a prophetic word or prophecy (John 2:22), a proverb (4:37), a declaration/testimony (4:39), a proclamation/teaching (4:41), an utterance (19:13), and a rumor/report (21:23). In at least two instances (John 12:38; 15:25), *λόγος* refers to a written statement in a literary work, such as the books of Isaiah and Psalms.

On at least 29 occasions this word is used in the Fourth Gospel to refer to a divine message from God or that which was spoken by Jesus or would be spoken by his disciples (John 2:22; 4:37, 41, 50; 5:24, 38; 6:60; 7:36, 40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51-52, 55; 10:19, 35; 12:48; 14:23-24 [3x]; 15:3, 20 [2x]; 17:6, 14, 17, 20; 18:9, 32). According to Tobin, the NT uses of *λόγος* are typified “not [by] some new meaning beyond what is found in the Septuagint but its reference to the divine revelation of God, specifically the divine revelation of God through Jesus Christ and his messengers.”<sup>3</sup> It is through this divine message that Jesus’ or his disciples’ audiences would believe in, obey, or by which they would be judged by God (John 12:48; 14:1; 17:20; etc.).

It is in the Johannine writings, such as John’s Prologue, First John, and Revelation, that readers encounter a “striking use” of this word.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of this essay explores this connotation of the word in the Gospel of John. After providing a brief exegetical analysis of the relevant passages, this essay will survey a variety of religious-historical and literary background(s) for the Gospel’s use of *logos* then offer some final thoughts about this concept, which Danker describes as a “distinctive teaching of the Fourth Gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

## Brief Exegesis of *Logos* in the Prologue

In four specific instances in John 1:1 (3x) and 1:14, the author uses this word to refer to “the independent personified expression of God” (see n. 5). Each of these occurrences of *λόγος* conveys significant existential (hypostasized) and theological meaning (hence my capitalization of the word hereafter). These passages appear in the Prologue, which many exegetes assume was a song/hymn originally devoted to wisdom or to the *Logos* then adapted later for use in the Gospel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See George V. Wigram, *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 462. This survey does not consider the related verb form of λέγω (“to say, speak”).

<sup>2</sup> See Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. revised and edited (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 599.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Tobin, “Logos,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:351.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>5</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 601.

<sup>6</sup> For an accessible overview of the hymnic position, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:334-37. Examining the Prologue within a Jewish context, Matthew Gordley, “The Johannine Prologue and Jewish Didactic Hymn Traditions: A New Case for Reading the Prologue as a Hymn,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (Winter 2009), 781-802, proposes a new synthesis of John’s Prologue as a Jewish didactic hymn, a song designed to instruct its audience through historical recitation (e.g., Ps. 34:11). While Gordley’s article offers thought-provoking analysis about the origins of the hymnic elements of John’s Prologue, it provides no new synthesis on the background of the Gospel’s *logos* concept. At most, it identified the term *logos* more centrally with a Hellenistic Jewish or traditional Jewish cultural setting, one in which John would have been at home. More persuasive is the analysis of Daniel Boyarin, “*Logos*, A Jewish Word; John’s Prologue as Midrash,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Amy-Jill Levine and

The prepositional phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ (“in *the* beginning”) in John 1:1a offers a direct literary and verbal parallel to the opening of the creation account in Gen. 1:1 (LXX). The English verb “was,” translated from the imperfect form of the Greek verb εἶμί (“to be”), is used four times in John 1:1-2 and expresses a continuous state of existence in past time. This form indicates the function of these passages most likely is to supply background information or a summary statement about the *Logos*. These passages (together with v. 3) imply a personified preexistence (beyond time and space) for the *Logos* and seem to locate the temporal setting of John 1:1-2 before the physical creation described in Genesis 1. Whether the prepositional phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν in the next clause of 1:1b indicates existence (“with”) or relationship (“in relation to”) of the *Logos* to God is a matter of debate. The phrase at the very least informs readers that the *Logos* was continuously *with* God. The grammar of the last clause of 1:1c, the word’s third occurrence, states that the *Logos* was distinct from yet consisted qualitatively of all that God was.

John 1:3 indicates that the *Logos* was God’s intermediate agent of creation (see prepositions διὰ and χωρὶς). The narrator affirms that life resided in the *Logos*, whom was the light of (God’s presence and revelation to) all humans and whom they could not comprehend (possibly “master/overcome”) (vv. 4-5).<sup>7</sup> In vv. 9-11, the narrator reaffirms that the *Logos* was the true light, which was in the world and came to his own possessions (neuter plural adjective) and people (masculine plural adjective), probably the Israelites, who did not know (recognize) him. It was only those who received (believed) in him and his revelation he gave them the power/ability to become God’s children (John 1:12-13).

John 1:1-5, 9-13 provide an expansive cosmological, historical, soteriological, and literary setting for v. 14, the Prologue’s last occurrence of λόγος. The narrator vividly professes that the *Logos* became human and dwelled (lit., “tented”) among the community (“us”), whose members (“we”) discerned the Father’s glory (presence) in the incarnate *Logos*-Son, who was full of “grace and truth” (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).<sup>8</sup> The narrator identifies the incarnate *Logos* with the human Jesus through the reiteration of this phrase (v. 17). The narrator concludes that members received the fullness of the gift of grace and truth through Jesus, the Son, who alone has seen and revealed God (John 1:16-18). The Prologue’s purpose is to outline the Gospel’s plot.<sup>9</sup> Beginning in 1:19, the Gospel narrates the story of the *Logos* incarnate in the Son. The rest of the Gospel serves as an apologetic (defense) of Jesus as the means (agent) through whom the glory (presence) of Israel’s God again is expressed and life is revealed and offered to every human.

### **Possible Backgrounds of *Logos***

The term *Logos* is largely undefined by the Prologue’s narrator, which suggests that the evangelist expected his/her readers to be familiar with it. Scholars have proposed a variety of

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Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 688-91, who argues that the Prologue begin with a midrash or “a homily on a passage of the Torah that invokes, explicitly or implicitly, texts from either the Prophets or Writings . . . as the framework for interpreting the initial passage.”

<sup>7</sup> My exegesis follows a variant reading; the other reading is “what came into being in him was life” (vv. 3b-4a). Based on the close linkage of vv. 1-4 to the Genesis creation account, verse 5 seems to refer to the disobedience and punishment in the garden (Genesis 3) and the inability of the first humans to comprehend God’s self-revelation (light = *Logos*/wisdom) due to the influence of the serpent (darkness).

<sup>8</sup> The phrase “grace and truth” might represent God’s love/abundant mercy and faithfulness (loyalty) as the covenant qualities expressed in Exod. 34:6, the apparent allusion behind the phrase.

<sup>9</sup> Keener, *Gospel*, 338-39.

religious-historical contexts for John's *logos* theology. Tobin has explored and exposed the weaknesses of the three major explanations (sources) for the background of the term *λόγος* in John: (1) Gnosticism (mainly via Bultmann), (2) Jewish targumic and midrashic interpretation, and (3) Hellenistic or Jewish wisdom and *logos* speculation, as mediated through the works of Philo and the biblical and later Jewish wisdom literature. Despite the striking similarities in several instances between these sources and John's use of *logos*, Tobin dismisses each of them due to what he considers their late dating, inconsistency in their conceptual and verbal parallels with John, and striking and distinct developments (differences) with John's portrayal of *logos* in the Prologue.<sup>10</sup> Yet, not all scholars are as skeptical as Tobin in their analyses. Since these categories are widely claimed as possible precursors or conceptual worlds for John's depiction of *logos*, this paper briefly surveys the sources and offers summary comments.

### *Gnosticism*

Relying heavily on a history-of-religions approach, Bultmann proposed that the Prologue was originally a pre-Christian gnostic hymn to John the Baptist that was later adapted by Christians to commemorate Jesus as the incarnate *Logos*.<sup>11</sup> The supposed gnostic origins of John's *logos* have been rejected by most modern scholars because Gnosticism is considered a second century (and later) religious phenomenon. The late dating of the gnostic documents to which Bultmann appealed and the distinct, advanced (possibly Christian) development of the *logos* concept in these sources (e.g., Three Forms 46-50; Mandaean writings) make it unlikely that John's *logos* theology developed from a gnostic heavenly redeemer myth in the form Bultmann asserted.<sup>12</sup> It is now less plausible to claim an exclusively gnostic provenance for the dualisms (light/dark, truth/falsehood, etc.) often associated with the *logos* concept with the discovery of these tendencies in Jewish literature, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., 1QS III, 19-24), which predate the Nag Hammadi codices and other gnostic sources by more than a century.

### *Jewish Targumim and Midrashim*

Other possible sources often cited for John's *logos* concept are the targumim (Aramaic translations and commentary on the OT) and midrashim (rabbinic homilies of Scripture). Tobin considers the evidence of the targumim and midrashim essentially non-conclusive.<sup>13</sup> Boyarin argues *contra* Tobin (and Hurtado below) that among both Greek- and Semitic-speaking Jews the Philonic *logos* (see below) and its Aramaic equivalent *memrā'* ("Word") would commonly have been understood as describing a divine mediator who possessed a personified, distinct

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<sup>10</sup> Tobin, "Logos," 352-55; see also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 263-85; Keener, *Gospel*, 1:339-363; T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church*, SNTS 13, ed. Matthew Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 6-15; and Charles B. Puskas and C. Michael Robbins, *The Conceptual Worlds of The Fourth Gospel: Intertextuality and Early Reception* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021) for other detailed analyses.

<sup>11</sup> Tobin, "Logos," 353. For Bultmann, the text had been adapted through the "influence" of "OT faith in the Creator God" (see Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. and tran. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 30).

<sup>12</sup> Tobin, "Logos," 353. See Bultmann, *Gospel*, 23-31; and idem., "The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," in *The Interpretation of John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. John Ashton, SNTI (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 43, for his musings about gnostic influences. I thank Daniel Boyarin for highlighting these sources.

<sup>13</sup> See Tobin, "Logos," 352-53, for his analysis of possible Johannine parallels to the *memrā'* ("Word") in Tg. Neof. I to Exod. 12:42, structure in Tg. Ps.-J. to Gen. 3:24, and *logos*-light in Gen. Rab. 3:3 and its interpretation of Prov. 15:23.

identity, even status as a *deuteros theos* (“second god”).<sup>14</sup> While recognizing the problem of dating the targumim, Boyarin cites several examples from them<sup>15</sup> to “show that the *Memra* performs many, if not all, of the functions of the *Logos* of Christian theology (as well as Wisdom)” and to suggest that the word *memrā*’ was not merely used in the early Christian era as a pseudonym to avoid anthropomorphism when referring to God but was viewed as “an actual divine entity functioning as a mediator.”<sup>16</sup>

### *Hellenistic Logos and Wisdom Speculation*

#### **Philo**

Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish interpreter, offers another context for viewing the concept of *logos* in the Fourth Gospel. A general impression of Philo’s concept of *logos* can be reconstructed from a variety of his works (see separate handout with key Philonic passages).<sup>17</sup>

Philo synthesizes his notion of *λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ* (“word of God”) with the metaphysics of the perfect intellectual realm in Middle Platonism, a strategy he pursues due to his goal of integrating Greek philosophy and Hebraic thought (Torah).<sup>18</sup> The *logos* was considered by Philo to be the “archetypal model” and “the idea of ideas” for the creation of the visible *κόσμος* (“world”), including the human rational soul and mind (*Creation* 24-25; 36, *QG* 2.62; cf. *Alleg. Interp.* 3.96; *Heir* 230-31; *Dreams* 1.75). Like the Stoics who allegorized *logos* in Homer’s epics, Philo used biblical allegories to develop his view of the *logos*. For example, he likens the “divine word” to the first of the Levitical cities of refuge to explain that the *logos* was the “instrument” through which (note instrumental dative case in Greek) the invisible God created the world and in whose eternal image the *logos* exists as his firstborn word, eldest angel, and shadow (*Flight* 94-95; *Confusion* 146-47; cf. *Alleg. Interp.* 3.96).<sup>19</sup> Philo closely identifies the *logos* with God, classifying it in one sense as a second deity (*Dreams* 1.228-230; *QG* 2.62; cf. *Flight* 101). Yet, he simultaneously describes the *logos* more ambiguously as an intermediary

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<sup>14</sup> Boyarin, Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue of John,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (2001): 249-261, esp., n. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Boyarin cites the targumim of Gen. 1:3; 3:8-9; 18:1; 19:24; Exod. 3:12-14; 17:21; Deut. 32:39; and the poetic homily of the “Four Nights.”

<sup>16</sup> Boyarin, “*Logos*,” 689-90; see also Boyarin, “Gospel of the *Memra*,” 252-261, for greater details.

<sup>17</sup> According to Raymond Brown, there are more than 1,200 occurrences of the term *logos* in Philo. The major Philonic passages used in this paper have been identified and compiled from Raymond E. Brown, “Appendix II: ‘The Word,’” *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, AB 29 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 517-24; Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 170, 368-69; and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, tran. Kevin Smith (Freiburg: Herder, 1965; repr., New York: Crossroad, 1990), 1:232, 235-37, 485-87.

<sup>18</sup> Yonge aptly translates the Greek expression as “reason of God.” See C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 5, which was consulted jointly with the critical Greek texts of Philo’s works from Harvard University now in public domain: Leopoldus Cohn and Paul Wendland, eds., *Philonis Alexandrini Opera Quae Supersunt*, 7 vols. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1896-1926), accessed 9 Oct. 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/pv5kqsj>.

<sup>19</sup> On at least two occasions (*Cherubim* 125-127; *Spec. Laws* 1.81), Philo uses the Greek preposition *διὰ* to describe the intermediate agency of the *Logos* in creation. This syntactical feature is also found in Jn 1:3, where the phrase *δι’ αὐτοῦ* (“through him/it”) appears in the clause “all things came into being through him/it,” and which is a reference to the *Logos* in vv. 1-2.

between God and mortal humans, neither uncreated nor created, but as the Demiurge or Intellect in Middle Platonism cosmogony (*Heir* 205-206).

While clear similarities between the Philonic and Johannine concepts of *logos* emerge (e.g., divinity, agency/meditation, and associations with light-life), the *Logos* in John's Gospel is explicitly preexistent, corporeal, and non-Platonic (cf. *Flight* 101; *Migration* 47-48; and Jn 1:1, 14, 17).<sup>20</sup> As Tobin notes, Philo's concept of *logos* "is developed far more philosophically than it is in the hymn [of the Prologue]" and "[n]or is the parallelism close enough verbally to assert that the author of the hymn was acquainted with the works of Philo."<sup>21</sup> For these and many other reasons, some commentators have refrained from making connections between the *logos* concept in John's Gospel and that found in Greek philosophy as mediated in Philo's writings.<sup>22</sup>

### Jewish Wisdom Traditions

Striking similarities exist between the Johannine concept of *logos* and wisdom (Heb., *ḥokmâh*; Gk., *sophia*), law (Heb., *tôrâh*; Gk., *nomos*), and word (Heb., *dābār*; Gk., *logos*) speculations in Hellenistic Judaism of the period. What is claimed for wisdom (// law in some instances: Sirach 24:23; Bar. 4:1) could also be said of the *Logos* in John 1:1-5. Preexistent (personified) wisdom was "besides" God at creation and served as his divine agent/helper (mediator) in creation, providing life to it (Prov. 8:27-30, 35-36 // Sir. 24:2-3; Wis. 7:22, 24-26; 8:4; 9:1-2, 9-10).<sup>23</sup> More specifically, *logos* and wisdom are used interchangeably in Wis. 9:1-2, where both words are placed in parallel (structurally in the dative case) to describe their role in the act of creation. Explicit references to the wisdom/law traditions do not exist in John 1 (the word *sophia* does not appear, while *nomos* does but in a different sense).<sup>24</sup> While wisdom/law are described as preexistent in these traditions, the inherent weakness in thinking along these lines is that both are portrayed as *created before* the world began (Prov. 8:22; Sir. 24:9).<sup>25</sup> The Johannine narrator in contrast depicts the *Logos* as preexistent from eternity past (or at least "in

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<sup>20</sup> Philo is obscure on preexistence (*Alleg. Interp.* 3.175-75). Brown (*Gospel*, 520) classifies the parallels between John and Philo and other Hellenistic *logos* works as only superficial.

<sup>21</sup> Tobin, "Logos," 354; and see also David Satran, "Philo of Alexandria," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 717.

<sup>22</sup> Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 1:482-483, 485-487; and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 10-11, emphasize the key differences (despite obvious parallels) between *logos* thought in Hellenistic Judaism (Philo) and John. In contrast, Boyarin ("Logos," 688-89) contends that Philo's idea of *logos* would have been "commonplace" and "nothing strange" among some pre-Christian Greek-speaking Jews.

<sup>23</sup> See Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 31-36, for a detailed, accessible treatment of supposed wisdom/*logos* parallels. If this characterization is accurate, then it is possible that *logos* in vv. 1-4 might function as a personified divine attribute or expression of God (YHWH/YHVH). Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 41-51, esp., 49-50, discusses the personified divine attributes of wisdom and *logos* as God's agents, which usually "were not thought of as real entities alongside God" but "intended to focus attention upon particular aspects of God's nature and (e.g., Philo) occasionally to magnify God by emphasizing that he is greater than any of his works indicate."

<sup>24</sup> See E. Luther Copeland, "Nomos as a Medium of Revelation—Paralleling Logos—in Ante-Nicene Christianity," *Studia Theologia* 27 (1973): 51-61, for a historical review of some patristic sources (Clement, Hermas, Justin) that used *nomos* (law) interpretatively in a restricted sense to enhance the universal understanding of Jesus. Dan Liroy, *Jesus as Torah in John 1-12* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), applies the *nomos* concept to Jesus in a popular treatment of John 1-12.

<sup>25</sup> *Tôrâh: b. Pesah.* 54a, *b. Ned.* 39b; wisdom: Prov. 8:22-31; Sir. 24:1-6, 9; and Wis. 7:10, 22-8:4; 9:1-3.

the beginning”).<sup>26</sup> Despite some of these weaknesses of the wisdom/*logos* parallel, Haenchen and Ashton offer a vigorous defense of the wisdom background to the Prologue.<sup>27</sup>

Other possible similarities between wisdom traditions and *logos* in John also exist. The reference to darkness not comprehending/overcoming the light in John 1:5 could be an echo of Wis. 7:29-30, where evil is described as not prevailing over wisdom. John 1:10-11 could reflect the saga of personified wisdom’s existence: its descent into the world and ascent to YHWH/YHVH after its rejection by humankind or in some texts by Israel (1 Enoch 42:1-2; Sir. 24:6-28; Bar. 3:20-37). The rejection of wisdom (law) by Israel that is described in Bar. 3:9-13 corresponds closely to the rejection of the *Logos* by his own people in John 1:11.

While Tobin considers Hellenistic Jewish wisdom literature as offering the closest parallels to John’s usage of *logos*, he also stresses that the Prologue moves beyond these striking similarities: “the figure of wisdom is never displaced by the *logos* as it was in the hymn in the Prologue.”<sup>28</sup> Boyarin would counter that John’s midrash of Gen. 1:1 in John 1:1-5 is the reason for the solitary usage of *logos* in the Prologue:

This interpretative practice is found on a notion of the oneness of Scripture as a self-interpreting text, and especially that the latter books are a form of interpretation of the Torah. Perceived gaps in the Torah are not filled with philosophical ideas but with allusions to or citations of other biblical texts from outside the Torah. The first five verses of John’s Prologue match this midrashic form nearly perfectly. The verses being preached are the opening verses of Genesis, and the extra-Torah text serving as the interpretative framework is Prov. 8:22-31. Because Genesis is interpreted, however, John uses *Logos* and not the term Proverb uses, “Wisdom/*Sophia*.” The preacher of the Prologue had to speak of *Logos*, because his homiletical effort is directed at the opening verses of Genesis, with their majestic: “Then God said, let there be light; and there was light.” It is God’s “saying,” God’s *Logos*, that produces the light, and indeed through this Word, everything was made that was made.<sup>29</sup>

Following Boyarin’s lead, I would argue that a more tenable explanation exists to account for the inconsistencies between these traditions and the presentation of *Logos* in John 1:9-13. I would consider these passages as continuing the midrash in vv. 1-5 and that they appeal obliquely to motifs and themes in various Jewish wisdom texts, primarily Proverbs 8, to fill in the gaps.

### **Uniqueness of John’s Prologue and Final Thoughts**

Tobin contends, rightly in my opinion, that the main difference between Hellenistic Jewish wisdom and *logos* speculation, especially found in Philo’s works, and John’s Prologue is

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<sup>26</sup> Gerhard Kittel, “*λόγος*,” *TDNT*, 4:128-136, advocated vigorously for a *tôrâh* connection in John 1 but passed over the issue of preexistence.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 1-6*, ed. Robert W. Funk and Ulrich Busse, tran. Robert W. Funk (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1:125-127, 139-140; and John Ashton, “The Transformation of Wisdom,” in *Studying John: Approaches to the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5-35.

<sup>28</sup> Tobin, “*Logos*,” 353. He (354) also observes six parallels where the Johannine Prologue “overshadow[s] the figure of wisdom” with the use of *logos*.

<sup>29</sup> Boyarin, “*Logos*,” 690.

that the latter explicitly links the *Logos* with the historical personage of Jesus Christ (v. 17): “The use of *logos*, however, in the hymn in the Prologue of John moves behind Hellenistic Jewish speculations about *logos*/wisdom in that it identifies this *logos* with Jesus of Nazareth. Neither Jewish wisdom literature nor the kind of Hellenistic Jewish speculation represented by Philo ever sought to identify either wisdom or *logos* with a specific human being.”<sup>30</sup>

One could lament that the origin and nature of the Johannine concept of *logos* (“word, expression, etc.”) are unrecoverable because of the conceptual and verbal differences between these texts. Brown, Schnackenburg, and Barrett seem reasonable in their conclusions, concurring that John’s usage is unique and closer to the Hebrew Bible’s concept of God’s active creative word and Jewish wisdom speculation with Hellenistic parallels limited by the Gospel’s Jewishness.<sup>31</sup> Louw and Nida offer a helpful semantic insight about the active revelatory and mediatorial aspects connected to the title of *Logos* “as a reference to the content of God’s revelation and as a verbal echo of the use of the verbs meaning ‘to speak’ in Genesis 1 and in many utterances of the prophets.”<sup>32</sup> In some respects, this description returns us to the concept of divine attributes, which suggests it is impossible adequately to describe God’s nature and actions (see n. 23). Hurtado no doubt would have explained John’s uniqueness as an innovation (possibly mutation) in Jewish thought and devotion to Jesus in the early church where the exalted Jesus became viewed as God’s divine agent.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps Pollard’s description of the three-fold agency (mediatorial work) of the *Logos* in the Prologue offers some clarity.<sup>34</sup>

- *In creation*: vv. 3, 10 (“all things/the world came into being through him”)
- *In revelation*: vv. 4-5, 9-10, 14, 17-18 (life/light, “true light,” “he was in the world/lived among us,” “seen his glory . . . as of a father’s only son,” “full of grace and truth,” “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” “God the only Son has made him known”)
- *In salvation*: vv. 12-13, 16 (“to all who received him, who believed him, he gave power to become the children of God,” “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon [for] grace”)

Perhaps *logos* and wisdom traditions in the Hebrew Bible and intertestamental Jewish wisdom literature after all provide the closest background for understanding John’s conception of *Logos* as the means, expression, or agency by which God accomplished first his creative work through the divine *Logos* (Genesis 1) then his revelatory/salvific work through the *Logos*-Son (John 1). If such an interpretation is warranted, then it would seem fitting that John 1:1-2 and 1:18 form perfect bookends to this *theo*-centric story.

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<sup>30</sup> Tobin, “Logos,” 355.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Gospel*, 522 (see pp. 520-24); Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 493 (see pp. 481-93); and C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 152-55. I would add that these parallels are also limited by John’s Jewish interpretative (midrashic) principles, as espoused by Boyarin.

<sup>32</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 2:400. See Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26 (LXX).

<sup>33</sup> Hurtado, *One God*, 97-130. Boyarin, “Logos,” 691, agrees that this aspect of John’s theology in John 1:14 might be considered “innovative” and “begins to diverge from synagogue teaching.”

<sup>34</sup> This three-fold framework has been adapted with my own modifications from Pollard, *Christology*, 14-15. Scriptural citations in the parentheses are from the NRSV.