

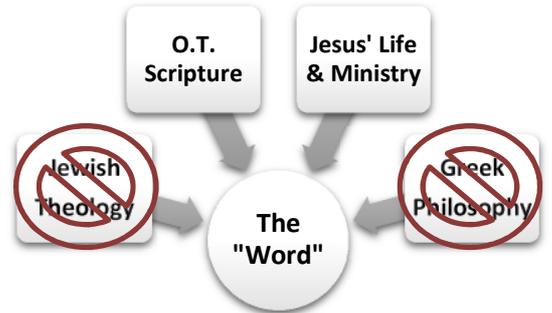
## SOULMANNA

### IN THE BEGINNING: THE WORD IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

<b>Genesis 1:1</b>	<b>John 1:1</b>
<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.	<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The same was in the beginning with God.

#### Looking at the Word:

John could not have chosen a more dramatic beginning to his Gospel account. The Greek phrase ὁ λόγος (hō lógos - the Word) as a Messianic title has resonated in the hearts of God's people from the earliest days of the church. John's striking parallelism between the opening verses in his Gospel with the opening verse in the book of Genesis is intentional!



Some have suggested John chose the phrasing for his prelude (1:1-18) on the basis of Greek philosophy. Others have thought John's use of "the Word" to be an outgrowth of Jewish theology. The first century Jewish philosopher Philo from Alexandria attempted to bring harmony between rabbinic theology and Greek philosophy, but there is no evidence from the text that this was John's intention. Even though John may have been conversant with the different schools of philosophy and theology of his day, his writing style is not one of Christian apologetic. He was not writing to debate comparative systems of thought concerning "the Word". Instead of seeking contemporary relevance in philosophical circles, he simply wrote what he knew to be truth—and then let truth be its own defense.

Gospel Account	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
<b>Messianic Title</b>	Son of David	Servant of the Lord	Son of Man	Son of God The Word
<b>Genealogy</b>	Yes – back through David to Abraham	No – Servants don't have genealogies	Yes – back through Adam to God	No – God is the eternal "I am"
<b>Ministry Fulfillment</b>	The rejected king of the Jews still keeps sacrificial covenant love with Israel	The Lord's servant completes his ministry mission of saving-sacrifice	The perfect God-man sought out and saved lost humanity through his sacrifice	The incarnate Word reveals God saving a lost world by his loving sacrifice
<b>The Beginning of the Gospel</b>	Christ's throne-rights established by his Davidic lineage	John's baptism of Christ initiating Jesus' public ministry.	Announcement and birth of John, Messiah's forerunner	Begins in eternity past before creation

Each Gospel sets forth Christ's ministry from a slightly different perspective. While Christ stood before Pilate, Jewish leadership testified of him, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). The Jewish Sanhedrin considered Christ's claim of deity to be blasphemous; but having spent more than three years as Jesus' disciple, John knew Christ's claim to be true. He never lost the wonder of having been in Christ's presence (1 John 1:1-3). John saw Old Testament Scripture being fulfilled before his eyes in the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Christ. Just as God used the prophetic Word in the past to reveal his will to man, so Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's heart and will to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear (Heb. 1:1-3). No man ever taught as Christ taught. When Jesus spoke, John heard the voice of God. John recognized the perfect will and power of the Father flowing through the words and actions of the Son. Jesus does

more than just proclaim the Gospel message. He is the Gospel message! Jesus Christ is the Word! John makes four assertions concerning “the Word” in these first two verses.

**THE WORD: WAS ALREADY IN EXISTENCE WITH GOD AT THE BEGINNING** – “In the beginning God . . .” (Gen.1:1) takes us to a time when God alone inhabited eternity before the cosmos was framed. Genesis, the book of beginnings, does not speak of God’s beginning because he is the eternal “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex 3:14), and has no beginning or end. In similar fashion, John’s Gospel prologue takes us back to this same point in eternity past when he writes, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1). This opening verse does not speak of the Word’s beginning, but that in the beginning the Word was already present. The Word already **“WAS”** in the beginning; it did not spring into being at that time. If John had wanted to say this, he would have used a form of the verb γίγνομαι (gignomai; to be, to become) as he did in John 1:14 “And the Word **WAS MADE** flesh”. Instead John used a form of the verb εἶμι (eimi; to be, to exist) which speaks of a state of being. From the parallel structure between Genesis and John we can conclude that in the beginning God was already present, as was the Word.

**THE WORD: EXPERIENCED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD** “and the Word was with God” – The phrase “with God” carries with it more than that the Word and God were in spatial proximity to one another. God is spirit (John 4:24). Before the creation of the cosmos there was no spatial proximity as such. It is not physical nearness that John speaks of, but spiritual and emotional intimacy of relationship. M. Dods quoting Chrysostom writes: “Not in God but with God, as person with person, eternally”.<sup>1</sup> Referring to this unique communion of love between the Son and the Father, Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). From a human perspective there is no way to quantify or measure the sacrifice entailed in the Son’s leaving heaven’s glory and intimacy of eternal relationship with the Father to experience the vilification and separation waiting for the Son on the cross.

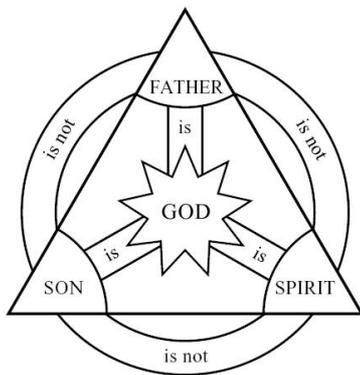
**THE WORD: WAS ONE IN ESSENCE WITH GOD** “and the Word was God” – In John 1:1 “the Word” acts as subject for each of the three clauses found in this verse. The word order in Greek is exactly the same as it is in English for the first two clauses. Rather than tip-toe around the issue of Christ’s claim of deity, John brings it front and center by placing the word θεός (Theos - God) at the head of this third clause, and in so doing, he gives it emphasis! Not only is John 1:1 a very powerful opening statement concerning the deity of Jesus Christ, but John’s intention is that this truth serve as the theological compass for the entire book (John 20:30-31). As has been often noted, θεός (God) is without a definite article in this third clause. Addressing this, Westcott writes, “It is necessarily without the article (θεός not ὁ θεός) inasmuch as it describes the nature of the Word and does not identify his person. . . No idea of inferiority of nature is suggested by the form of expression, which simply affirms the true deity of the Word.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, the Son’s claim on deity is no less than that claimed by the Father. The Father and the Son are united in nature. Whatever the Father is (in essence and substance) the Son also is.

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<sup>1</sup> Dods, M. (n.d.). *The Gospel of St. John* (p. 684). New York: George H. Doran Company.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, B. F., & Westcott, A. (Eds.). (1908). *The Gospel according to St. John Introduction and notes on the Authorized version* (p. 3). London: J. Murray; Some have suggested that because θεός (God) does not have a definite article the translation should read, “the Word was **a god**” (as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have in their New World translation). At best, this translation seems forced upon the text. In terms of grammatical structure, this third clause in John 1:1 is an example of an anarthrous predicate noun (without a definite article) coming before an equative verb. For an excellent exegetical treatment of predicate nominatives as it relates to John 1:1 see E.C. Colwell’s article, “A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933) 12–21; see also Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Zondervan, 1996, pp. 256-270; other verses with a similar grammatical structure: 1 John 4:8 “God is love” (love is anarthrous), Phil 2:11 “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Lord is anarthrous).

**THE WORD: WAS DISTINCT FROM THE PERSON OF GOD** “The same was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2) – While some see this as a mere repetition of what has already been stated, it is more than just an example of John using summarization as part of his literary style. God is not wasting words in redundancy. Plummer observes that the preposition implies a distinct personality of the Word.<sup>3</sup> John’s restatement forms a contrast with what he has just written. First he states “the Word was God” (united in nature), yet with the next stroke of his pen John lets us know the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. Both of John’s assertions are true; the Father and the Son are united in essence but distinct as individual persons. If not, then we have no Savior and there is no salvation.



What John writes here would have shocked the religious sensibilities of both Jews and Gentiles in the first century. On the one hand, the core statement for Judaism is found in Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord”. For Jews there could be only one true God. On the other hand, Greeks and Romans would read John’s Gospel from a completely different world view populated with many deities, all having different degrees of power and areas of authority. There was little unity among Gentile deities. They were in constant flux in wars and intrigues, deceiving and being deceived. There would have been great theological disagreement between Jews and Gentiles, but both would have stumbled over Christ’s claim of being one with the Father yet distinct in person.

Those who read John today are faced with the same quandary. John presents us with the claims of Christ and then calls the reader to faith. He does not offer a theological definition of what theologians today call the Trinity. He does not seek harmony or synthesis of thought. He simply writes what God revealed to him through inspiration. The deity of Christ is not an afterthought but is at the very heart of the Gospel.

**APPLICATION AND MEDITATION:** John, the Apostle speaks concerning the awesome mystery of God. Because of limited perspective and capacity, humanity will never be able to fully comprehend all there is to know about God, yet God has still chosen to reveal himself to us. We are not God’s equal. But our failure to grasp all that God has to say about himself should not bring skepticism or doubt. Instead the awesome nature of our God should elicit worship and adoration. The glory and majesty of God were never meant to satisfy our intellectual curiosity but to stir our heart and bend our knee.

<sup>3</sup>Plummer, A. (1896). The Gospel according to S. John (p. 64). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.