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Why John Calls Jesus “the Word”

INTRODUCTION

This book depends entirely on, and argues for, the view that John’s decision to call Jesus “the Word,” the Logos (ὁ λόγος), was influenced by the Targums, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, many or most of which were prepared for recitation in the synagogue after the reading of the Hebrew text. In hundreds of cases in these Targums, where the MT refers to God, the corresponding Targum passage refers to the divine *Word*. Considered against this background, calling Jesus “the Word” is a way of identifying him with the God of Israel. This book also argues that understanding the Logos title as based on the Targums is crucial to understanding not only John’s Prologue, but the body of the Gospel as well, for if we understand the Logos as a divine title, we can see that John’s statements about the Word (the Word was with God, the Word was God, and the Word became flesh) presage themes throughout the Gospel.

My reader is probably more familiar with other explanations for the Logos title: (1) that it is based on “the word of the LORD” in the OT, through which God reveals himself and accomplishes his will in the world, just as he does through his Son in the NT, (2) that it is developed from the idea of Wisdom personified in the OT and in the intertestamental Wisdom literature, and (3) that it is adapted from the Greek philosophical concept of the Logos, especially as found in the writings of the Alexandrian Jew Philo. Each of these views is plausible, and each is described in the next section. A fourth view, Bultmann’s gnostic hypothesis, is not considered plausible and will not be discussed here.¹

THREE PLAUSIBLE PROPOSALS

OT Word of the LORD

In the first view, the OT use of “the word of the LORD” (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) is considered sufficient to explain John’s use of “the Word” for Christ. For instance, C. H.

¹For a refutation of the gnostic view, see Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

Dodd, though an advocate of the third view, nevertheless noted that there is “a very strong case to be made out, stronger than has sometimes been recognized, for the view that the Logos of the Prologue is the [OT] Word of the Lord.”² Likewise, William Hendriksen wrote, “Already in the Old Testament the Word of God is represented as a Person,” citing Ps 33:6, which can be related to John 1:1 (“by the word of the LORD the heavens were made”).³ In addition, Donald A. Carson suggested that John chose the title as fitting Christ’s work of revelation, to which he was uniquely suited, being the only one to have been to heaven; he paraphrases John 1:1, “In the beginning God expressed himself.” Carson contends that God’s word is so important in the OT in creation, revelation, and deliverance; that John 1:1 (“In the beginning”) alludes directly to Gen 1, where the phrase “and God said” is so prominent that this word is sometimes personified (e.g., Ps 107:20). All this makes “it suitable for John to apply [the Word] as a title to God’s ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son.”⁴

Franklin W. Young pointed to Isa 55:10–11 as an attractive possibility for an OT background to Christ as God’s Word, with a focus more on agency:

As the rain and the snow *come down* from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, . . . and furnishing . . . *bread to the eater*, So shall *my word* be which *goes forth* from my mouth; It shall not *return to me* empty, without *accomplishing what I desire*.⁵

Young noted that one could view “my word” here as a description of Christ’s work as described in John 6: he came down from heaven to do the Father’s will (v. 38); he is the bread upon whom people must feed to have life (vv. 48, 50); and he will not return until he accomplishes the Father’s will (v. 44). The LXX for “accomplish” in Isa 55:11 is a form of *συντελέω*, which Young compares to the Lord’s final saying on the cross, “It is finished” (*τετέλεσται*; John 19:30).⁶ The LXX of Isa 55:10 has *ῥῆμα* for “word,” but *λόγος* could have been used just as well, and John does not necessarily use the LXX for his OT citations and allusions.⁷

Delbert Burkett gave further support for this view by relating John 7:34, “You will seek me but will not find me . . .” (similarly 8:21) to Amos 8:11–12, which

²C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 273.

³William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1954), 70.

⁴Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 96, 115–16.

⁵Franklin W. Young, “A Study of the Relation of Isaiah to the Fourth Gospel,” *ZNW* 46 (1955): 228.

⁶Ibid. Similarly, Delbert Burkett, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 56; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 131–32.

⁷See Günter Reim, *Studien zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund des Johannesevangeliums* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 1–98, which studies OT quotations in John as designated by the author. In these quotations John does not necessarily follow the LXX, and it follows that the same would hold for allusions, as we will see in ch. 2. Consider, for example, “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14, which depends on a non-LXX rendition of Exod 34:6.

predicts a famine for hearing the words of the LORD: “They will wander from sea to sea . . . to seek the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.”⁸ This passage is especially striking in that the context indicates that the sign of the fulfillment of this judgment is that “I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight” (Amos 8:9; cf. Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). That John does not mention this darkening of the land does not necessarily count against this allusion if (as I assume) John’s intended audience is already familiar with the synoptic tradition.

As impressive as Burkett’s argument is, John 7:34 can also be used to furnish equally striking support for each of the other views to be discussed. Support for the notion that the Logos title is based on the OT “word of the LORD” can also be found in John 14:6, where Jesus calls himself “the truth” and later says that the Father’s “word is truth” (17:17), echoing Ps 119:60, “the sum of your words is truth.” Thus, “Jesus is the truth” implies “Jesus is the [OT] word.”

Andreas J. Köstenberger offered four lines of support for the idea that the OT word of the LORD is preferable to either Wisdom or Philo’s Logos as a basis for the Logos title:

- (1) the evangelist’s deliberate effort to echo the opening words of the Hebrew Scriptures by the phrase “in the beginning”; (2) the reappearance of several significant terms from Gen 1 in John 1 (“light,” “darkness,” “life”); (3) the Prologue’s OT allusions, be it to Israel’s wilderness wanderings (1:14: “pitched his tent”) or to the giving of the law (1:17–18); and (4) the evangelist’s adaptation of Isa. 55:9–11 for his basic Christological framework.⁹

Wisdom in the Wisdom Literature

Interpreters have also made a reasonable case for the second view—that the idea of Wisdom as developed in Proverbs, Sirach, Baruch, and Wisdom of Solomon provides a possible background to John’s Logos.¹⁰ Thomas H. Tobin, though an advocate of the third view, summarized the connection to Wisdom as follows:

Both the logos of the hymn in the Prologue [of John] and wisdom in Jewish wisdom literature are with God in the beginning; both are involved in the creation of the world; both seek to find a place among humankind; both are within a Jewish tradition of speculation about the deeper meanings of the early chapters of Genesis. In addition, many of the parallels between the logos in the hymn and the figure of wisdom are found in passages which like the hymn are poetic in character (Prov 8:22–31; Sir 24). The parallels are not simply conceptual but also stylistic.¹¹

⁸Burkett, *Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*, 151.

⁹Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 27.

¹⁰This view was initially proposed by J. Rendel Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917).

¹¹Thomas H. Tobin, “Logos,” *ABD* 4:354. Tobin made similar comments in an article “The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 252–69. As many

Especially of interest in connection with John 1:14 is Sirach's image of Wisdom as dwelling in a tent among men:

I (Wisdom) dwelt in the highest heavens,
 and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.
 Alone I compassed the vault of heaven
 and traversed the depths of the abyss.
 Over waves of the sea, over all the earth,
 and over every people and nation I have held sway.
 Among all these I sought a resting place;
 in whose territory should I abide?
 "Then the Creator of all things gave me a command,
 and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
 He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob,
 and in Israel receive your inheritance.'" (Sir 24:4–8 NRSV)

"Dwelt" in v. 4 and "make your dwelling" in v. 8 are from κατασκηνώω, often used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew verb יָשַׁב, used for God's dwelling among his people. John 1:14 uses the similar verb σκηνώω. Likewise, "tent" in v. 8 is σκηνή, used in the LXX for the tabernacle. Similarities to John 1:14 are thus obvious. Of course, there is a major difference as well, since John says that all things were created through the Word, whereas in the wisdom passage, Wisdom is said to be "created" by "the Creator of all things."

Baruch 3:36–37 also is reminiscent of John 1:14: "(God) found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to his servant Jacob and to Israel, whom he loved. Afterward she appeared on earth and lived [συναναστρέφω] with humankind" (NRSV).

The view that John's Word depends on Wisdom in the Wisdom Literature has much in common with the view that the Logos title depends on the οὐρ word of God, since Wisdom is specifically equated with God's written word. Immediately following the quote just given about Wisdom living with humankind, we read of Wisdom, "She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die" (Bar 4:1 NRSV). Thus, Wisdom "appeared upon earth" as the Torah given to Israel.

In Proverbs the message of Wisdom is essentially the same as that of the Law and the Prophets: fear God, heed his commandments, and live. Craig Keener thinks that John combined the idea of Torah (οὐρ word in its most complete sense) and Wisdom to present Jesus as Torah, because his life exhibited perfect obedience to (thus was a revelation of) the Torah.¹²

In terms of the close verbal parallels to John's Prologue, the Wisdom background can be seen as an improvement over the οὐρ word background. There is

do, Tobin regards the sections of John's Prologue that mention the Logos as part of an originally independently circulating hymn to which some material was later added before it was incorporated in the Gospel.

¹²Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 360–63.

nothing as explicit as "and Wisdom became flesh," but Dodd notes that the fact that Wisdom is immanent among men "provides a kind of matrix in which the idea of incarnation might be shaped." In addition, he notes that the Wisdom literature comes closer to the proposition "the Word was God" because "the functions assigned to Wisdom are often clearly those which are elsewhere assigned to God Himself"¹³ For example, while the passages quoted above speak of Wisdom dwelling among humankind (specifically, Israel), the OT speaks of the LORD himself dwelling among humankind.

Glory is an attribute of Wisdom, and Wisdom is associated with the glory of God (Wis 7:25; 9:11; Sir 14:27). Wisdom is also unique (Wis 7:22, using *μονογενής* as in John 1:14, 18), which leads Martin Scott to conclude, "Just as the glory of the unique Sophia is seen as she comes into the world, so too the glory of the unique Logos is seen as he comes among human beings as a human."¹⁴ However, Wis 7:22 says that Wisdom has a *spirit* that is *μονογενής*, and there is no Wisdom text that uses phraseology anything like "the glory of the unique Wisdom is seen as she comes into the world."

Other texts in John could be used to support a personified Wisdom background to "the Word" in John. In 15:10, Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." Because Jesus defines love for him as keeping his commandments (14:15, 21; 15:14), 15:10 could also be interpreted, "If you love me, you will abide in my love," agreeing with Prov 8:17, where Wisdom says, "I love those who love me, and those who diligently seek me shall find me." This last phrase could also be connected to John 7:34 ("You [the Jews] will seek me but will not find me"), the same verse Burkett connected to Amos 8:11–12 to support the OT word view (see above). John 7:34 could support the view that outside the Prologue, the Gospel of John depicts Jesus as Wisdom; they will not find him because they do not seek diligently. Proverbs 14:6 makes a similar point about wisdom, though the verb "find" is not actually used: "The scornful seeks wisdom, but there is none." With Jesus understood as Wisdom, this verse would imply that they do not find him because they are scoffers (cf. Luke 16:14, where the Pharisees are scoffing at him).

While the personified Wisdom interpretation might be preferable to the OT word interpretation, as it accords better with the statement "the Word was God," it has the disadvantage that John uses "Word," not "Wisdom." The switch to "word" is sometimes explained as due to the avoidance of the feminine gender of the word "wisdom" (both in Greek and Hebrew, not to mention Aramaic). Further, "word" is an appropriate substitute for "wisdom" on the grounds that either (1) personified Wisdom is the wisdom of the OT word or (2) Philo's Logos incorporates Wisdom and brings us closer to "the Word was God." This leads us to a discussion of the Logos in Philo.

¹³Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 275.

¹⁴Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup 71; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 107.

The Logos in Philo

One of the most prominent advocates of the third view was C. H. Dodd, who wrote that "With Wisdom we are already half-way to Philo's Logos." Dodd argued for the following parallels between the Logos in Philo and John's Prologue:¹⁵

In the beginning was the Word.

"Before creation, God conceived in His mind the κόσμος νοητός [the world perceptible to the mind], which is His λόγος." This plan of the world is analogous to that of an architect before he builds a city. "Discerned only by the intellect," this plan can only be called "the Word of God" (*On the Creation of the World* 24).

The Word was with [πρὸς] God.

"God sent forth His younger son, the κόσμος αἰσθητός, but kept the elder, κόσμος νοητός = λόγος (see above), παρ' ἑαυτῷ (with him)." God decided that this older son "should remain in His own keeping" (*That God Is Unchangeable* 31).

The Word was God.

"The anarthrous θεός may be used of the λόγος while ὁ θεός is reserved for the Self-existent." Dodd cites *On Dreams* 1.229–30 where Philo is commenting on Gen 31:13, which in the LXX reads, "I am (the) God [ὁ θεός] who appeared to you (Jacob) in the place of God" (ἐν τόπῳ θεοῦ, without the definite article, for MT Bethel). What Moses calls "God" without the article is "His chief Word." Dodd could have cited this text also under "the Word was with God," since Philo is wondering why God does not say to Jacob "in my place," but rather "'in the place of God,' as though it were another's" (*On Dreams* 1.228). This apparent "other" is the Logos.

All things came into being through him.

In *On the Cherubim* 127 Philo says that God is the cause of the world coming into existence, while "its instrument (is) the word of God, through which it was framed."

In him was life.

Dodd did not find a direct parallel, but pointed to *On Flight and Finding* 97, where Philo interprets the command to flee to a city of refuge as a command to flee "to the supreme Divine Word, who is the fountain of Wisdom, in order that he may draw from the stream and, released from death, gain life eternal as his prize."

¹⁵Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 276–77. In what follows, the quoted summaries of Philo are from Dodd, and the quotes from Philo are from LCL (in these quotes "word" always stands for logos).

In *On the Posterity of Cain* 68–69, Philo says, “he that lives an irrational [ἀλόγως] life has been cut off from the life of God.”

The Word is true light.

In *On Dreams* 1.75, Philo refers to God as light, and the highest model of light: “For the model or pattern was the Word which contained all His fullness—light, in fact.” *On the Creation of the World* 33 speaks of the adversary relationship between light and darkness. In *On the Confusion of Tongues* 60–63, Philo calls the incorporeal light “the eldest son,” elsewhere called “His first-born” which is also elsewhere called the Logos.

To those who received him, he gave the right to become children of God.

Philo notes that Moses calls the Israelites “sons of God” in Deut 14:1: “But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God’s First-born, the Word” who is called by many names, such as “the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image,” so that at least “we may be sons of His invisible image, the most holy Word” (*On the Confusion of Tongues* 145–47).

No man has seen God at any time . . .

Commenting on Exod 24:10, which in the LXX reads, “they saw the place where the God of Israel stood” (cf. the MT: “they saw the God of Israel”), Philo says that those who choose Moses as their guide will see this place. It is natural to “desire to see the Existent if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate his image, the most holy Word” (*On the Confusion of Tongues* 96–97).

Tobin has also advocated Philo’s Logos over wisdom as the source of John’s Logos title. He reasons that the fact that we find λόγος and not σοφία in John 1 shows that the author has moved beyond wisdom speculation to the kind of Logos speculation found in Philo, in which the “logos overshadows wisdom in importance,” is “a reality which existed with God before creation,” is described with “the anarthrous *theos* (God)” connected to “in the beginning” from Gen 1:1, was the instrument of creation, and is associated with light and with becoming children of God.¹⁶

Despite these parallels, Philo’s Logos falls short in providing a complete explanation for the Logos of John 1, specifically, “the Word became flesh.” Dodd maintains, however, that this sentiment is more understandable in Philo than in the Wisdom literature since in Philo the Logos is not a word but “creative reason,” which in some sense is “immanent in man, as the equivalent of the divine, essential humanity.”¹⁷

¹⁶Tobin, “Logos,” 4:354. Tobin had already noted, however, that not just the λόγος in Philo, but wisdom in the wisdom speculation was light and was associated with life and with becoming children (actually, “friends”) of God (ibid.).

¹⁷Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 281.

Dodd also explained why the word λόγος is not used in this Philonic sense in the Gospel itself: "It is only in the Prologue that the evangelist deals with cosmology." Even so, he maintained that the Logos theology pervaded the Gospel. As evidence, he noted: (1) "truth" as used in the Gospel is very close to λόγος in Philo; (2) the metaphysics of John is not unlike Philo (Jesus' use of ἀληθινός for true light, true bread, true vine); (3) the term "Son of Man" is best understood as true man (ἄνθρωπος ἀληθινός) or "the Idea of Man," identified in Philo with the Logos. Thus, "the substance of a Logos-doctrine similar to that of Philo is present all through the gospel."¹⁸

Returning to John 7:34, we have noted previously how this text ("You will seek me, but will not find me") can be related either to OT Word or to wisdom texts so as to provide striking support for either of the two previously discussed views. But if one was inclined to explain the Logos title as deriving from Philo, one can also find support for this view in John 7:34.

In *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 3.27, Philo explains the meaning of Gen 16:7 ("An angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water . . ."), in the course of which he says, "If the divine Logos is to be found, he seeks it"—"he" being "the soul that progresses" who is not "completely foolish." In *On Flight and Finding* 5, Philo identifies the angel of the LORD who found Hagar (Gen 21:17) as the divine Word [θεῖος λόγος].

In *On Flight and Finding* 120, Philo discusses the possible combinations of seeking and finding: (1) some neither seek nor find; (2) some both seek and find; (3) some seek but do not find; (4) some do not seek yet find. John 7:34 would put Jesus' hearers in the third category, but Philo's discussion of the second category is actually more pertinent to John's Gospel. In a discussion of the manna in the wilderness, Philo says that the Israelites' question concerning the manna (Exod 16:15, "What is it?") was an inquiry of those seeking to know about "What it is that nourishes the soul," adding that they "became learners and found it to be a saying of God [ῥῆμα θεοῦ], that is the Divine Word [καὶ λόγον θεῖον], from which all kinds of instruction and wisdom flow in perpetual stream" (*On Flight and Finding*, 137). Such a view of the manna as divine word could be seen as underlying John 6, where Jesus, called the divine Word in the Prologue, presents himself as the true manna (vv. 32ff.), after being both sought and found (vv. 24–25). In closing his discussion of seeking and finding, Philo quotes Moses from Deut 4:29, that if Israel seeks the LORD with all their soul, they will find him (*On Flight and Finding*, 142). Deuteronomy 4:29 assumes that Israel has been exiled for their sins, and promises restoration, which is of relevance to John if, as most interpreters believe, the Gospel is also written from a post-AD 70 perspective, so that Palestinian Jews have experienced a recent exile and would naturally hope for a restoration such as Deut 4:29 anticipates.

While Philo ascribes spiritual motives to the Israelites' seeking to know what the manna is, implying that this is why they found what they sought, Jesus says that his hearers seek him for baser motives: "You seek me, not because you saw

¹⁸Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 278–79.

miracles, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). He goes on to direct their attention to spiritual nourishment and their need to feed upon him, the one whom John has called “the Word.” Their rejection of this invitation means that they will fall not into Philo’s second category but into his third: “You will seek me but will not find me.”

Summary

In this chapter, we have reviewed the plausible arguments for three views of the source of John’s Logos title. A wrong hypothesis will typically be harder to recognize as wrong, the closer it is to the correct one. It is easy to assume that data which is *consistent* with a particular hypothesis confirms that hypothesis and thereby to overlook the fact that the data might also be consistent with another hypothesis. We saw that John 7:34 could be interpreted to support any of these three views, which diminishes its value in supporting any one of them in particular. Further, John 7:34 can just as plausibly be interpreted as consistent with a Targum derivation of the Logos title. I make the case for such an understanding in ch. 8, but at this point I will simply mention that the Targum view takes “the Word” as a divine title denoting the name of God. Consequently, one may, for example, relate John 7:34 directly to Deut 4:29 (the passage mentioned by Philo, and noted above, which promises that if Israel seeks the LORD with all their heart, they will find him) or Isa 55:6 (“Seek the LORD while he may be found”), two passages that imply the possibility of seeking God but not finding him.

Methodologically, when faced with multiple possible interpretations, one must identify the one that best explains all the data. When there are competing views, it is necessary to explain why one’s favored view is better than the others. As we have seen, Dodd did so when advocating Philo’s Logos, except that he did not consider the “Word” language of the Targums, even though (as we shall see) he acknowledged that the targumic Word was conceptually similar to Philo’s Logos. Often interpreters completely overlook the Targum view. We will address the arguments of those who do consider this view in ch. 12, when we will be in a better position to critique them.

A PRELIMINARY CASE FOR DERIVING THE LOGOS TITLE FROM THE TARGUMS

What Are the Targums?

“Targum” is a Hebrew word (also used in Aramaic) meaning “translation,” and it is used especially for Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures that were read in the synagogues on the Sabbath and on feast or fast days. Scholars usually assume that the practice of translation was necessitated by the loss of Hebrew fluency by Jews growing up in exile. Nehemiah 8:7–8 says that after Ezra’s reading

of the law, the Levites explained the law to the people: "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating [*or explaining*] to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (v. 8 NASB). Other versions say not that they translated, but that they made clear, or read clearly or distinctly.¹⁹ In any case, the NASB translation of Neh 8:8 seems to be a good summary of the goal of the Targums. Translations developed over time, and at some point began to be written down, though in the synagogue they were recited, not read, so as not to be put at the same level as the Hebrew Scriptures. The written Targums were subject to modification from one generation to another, while the Hebrew Scriptures were preserved as they were received. All of the extant Targums seem to date from the second century C.E. and later, yet a number of the translations would preserve readings that were current in the first century, as is evident from various passages from the NT itself.²⁰ For the Targums of individual books or sets of books described below, the relevant volumes of *The Aramaic Bible* provide suitable introductions with bibliographies (Collegetown, Minn., Liturgical Press; Edinburgh, T&T Clark). This ongoing project, started in 1987, aims to provide English translations for all the Targums.

Targums Jonathan and Onqelos

Targum Jonathan (*Tg. Jon.*) covers the Former and Latter Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets). Tradition ascribed this Targum to Jonathan ben Uzziel, who lived in the first century C.E., although it is more likely a product of many hands and continued to be modified into the fourth century. *Targum Onqelos* (*Tg. Onq.*) covers the Pentateuch and, like *Jonathan*, probably has many authors. *Onqelos* and *Jonathan* are considered "official" Targums in the sense that they are supposed to represent rabbinic Judaism after c.E. 70. They apparently originated in Palestinian Judaism, but their latest editions were done in Babylon.

The Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch²¹

Targums considered "Palestinian" (*Pal. Tgs.*) are *Neofiti 1* (*Tg. Neof.*), *Pseudo-Jonathan* (*Tg. Ps.-J.*), and the *Fragmentary Targums* (*Frg. Tgs.*). In the case of *Tg. Ps.-J.*, both "Palestinian" and "Targum" need qualification. Michael Maher suggests that *Ps.-J.*, though based on a Targum, is not a proper "Targum" in that (1)

¹⁹The Hebrew is *פְּרָשׁוּ* (*pual*), "to be made distinct."

²⁰See, e.g., J. T. Forestell, *Targumic Traditions and the New Testament: An Annotated Bibliography with a New Testament Index* (SBL Aramaic Studies 4; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1979).

²¹For introductory material for *Tg. Neof.*, see Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (ArBib 1A; Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), ix–50, 231–49; also see Alejandro Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense* ms de la Biblioteca Vaticana (5 vols.; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1978), for the Aramaic text of *Tg. Neof.*, various introductory studies, and Spanish (Díez Macho), French (Roger Le Déaut), and English (Martin McNamara and Michael Maher) translations. For *Tg. Ps.-J.*, see Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (ArBib 1B; Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 9–14, 167–85.

it shows signs of being a scholarly work meant to be read and studied in private by other scholars rather than recited publicly in the synagogue as a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures; and (2) it approaches the genre "rewritten Bible" because of the extensive embellishments which have little or nothing to do with translating the relevant Hebrew text. "Palestinian" is also problematic because that term is supposed to distinguish these Targums from the "official" Targum of the Pentateuch, namely, *Tg. Onq.* Yet it is clear that in a great many cases *Tg. Ps.-J.* agrees with *Tg. Onq.* against the *Pal. Tgs.*²² This fact underscores the importance of the discovery of *Tg. Neof.* sixty years ago; until then we did not have "Palestinian" renderings of a great number of passages in the Pentateuch.

The name *Pseudo-Jonathan* came about due to the fact that at one time (e.g., J. W. Etheridge's nineteenth-century translation) the author was considered to be the same Jonathan who was thought to have authored *Tg. Jon.*, the Targum of the Prophets. This conclusion seems to have resulted from mistaking the initials TJ (ת״י), likely meaning "*Targum Jerusalem*," for "*Targum Jonathan*." When the mistake was realized, the text then became known as *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. Of course, as noted above, Jonathan did not write the Targum of the Prophets, either, but the Targum of the Prophets is not called *Pseudo-Jonathan*.

The *Frg. Tgs.* are not fragments of manuscripts of complete Targums but rather portions of Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch that were selected and copied out according to some unknown principle. The two major types are called P (after the Paris ms 110) and V (after mss from the Vatican, Nürnberg, and Leipzig).²³ In this book, *Frg. Tg. V* indicates a reading found in one or more of the mss of this type.

Targum Neofiti, thought to be a copy of a Targum from about the fourth century, is therefore the only complete Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch. Actually, as Martin McNamara notes, because of the extensive marginal and interlinear glosses (*Tg. Neof.* [mg.] / [int.]), it is a witness also to three other types of Palestinian Targums.²⁴ *Neofiti* glosses tend to agree with the *Frg. Tgs.* (where extant) more closely than does the body of the text. *Neofiti* was discovered in the Vatican library in 1949, about the same time as the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in the caves of Judea. It had been overlooked for some time because it was considered to be just another copy of *Tg. Onq. Neofiti*, so called because it was produced by a college for Jewish converts to Catholicism (thus neophytes).

Fragments of Targum manuscripts from the famous Cairo Synagogue Genizah (*CTGs.*), not to be confused with the *Frg. Tgs.*, often agree with one or more of the Palestinian Targum readings.²⁵ McNamara's volumes on *Tg. Neof.* in The Aramaic Bible series include readings of interest from these fragments.

²²Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 1–8.

²³See Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch according to Their Extant Sources* (2 vols.; AnBib 76; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 1:12–42.

²⁴McNamara, *Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 15.

²⁵These fragments are published in Michael L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1986).

Besides having odd-sounding names, the Palestinian Targums are characterized by more paraphrase and inclusion of legendary material than *Tg. Onq.* They also tend to be of more significance for NT studies, including (as we shall see) the concept of the divine Word.

Other Targums

Targums of the other OT books, with the exception of Ezra-Nehemiah and Daniel (originally written partly in Aramaic), also exist and are relevant for our study. The *Tosefta Targum of the Prophets* (*Tos. Tg.*) consists of Targums of individual verses in the Prophets which have a more "Palestinian" character than *Tg. Jon.* and may be witnesses to a now (mostly) lost Palestinian Targum of the Prophets.²⁶

There is some evidence that there may once have been a Palestinian Targum to the Prophets that contained large units of material added into the translation. The evidence is that some manuscripts of the known Targum to the Prophets preserve such additional material in their margins. Similarly, medieval scholars such as Rashi and Kimḥi cite prophetic traditions in Aramaic designated as Targum Yerushalmi (i.e., Palestinian Targum) as do some manuscripts such as Codex Reuchlinianus. The best explanation for this material is that they once belonged to a complete Palestinian Targum to the Prophets, but during the early middle ages when the more literal Jonathan Targum to the Prophets became the dominant targum in the West, the aggadic material was extracted to preserve it alongside the newly authoritative translation, while the Palestinian Targum itself was lost.²⁷

The Aramaic texts of the Targums are available online, through the "Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon" project (CAL) of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The texts are displayed a verse or chapter at a time, with some morphological information. Online dictionaries and concordance searches are also available on the website.²⁸ Etheridge's nineteenth-century English translations of *Tg. Onq.*, *Tg.*

²⁶Rimon Kasher published 150 such texts in *Toseftot Targum to the Prophets* [Hebrew; תוספתות תרגום לנביאים] (Sources for the Study of Jewish Culture 2; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1996).

²⁷Paul V. M. Flesher, ed., "Palestinian Targum to the Prophets," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (ed. Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green; 2 vols.; New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 2:467. Articles in this dictionary are unsigned, but p. ix indicates that Flesher was responsible for editing articles on the Targums.

²⁸Online: <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/>; accessed June 30, 2009. Users of the CAL text should be aware that marginal readings in *Tg. Neof.* that only indicate the addition of *Memra* are not indicated in that text (or in programs such as BibleWorks that use this text). Therefore some of the marginal readings in *Tg. Neof.* noted in this book will not be found in the CAL text. The CAL texts were produced independently and thus may differ on occasion from published texts. *BibleWorks 7* has the Aramaic texts of the Targums, although version 6 omitted the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Pentateuch. *Accordance 8* has the Aramaic texts and is in the process of producing English translations. *Logos Bible Software* has a Targum module based on the CAL material, including the *Pal. Tgs.*, for use in the Libronix Digital Library System. Public domain English translations of *Tg. Song* (Adam Clarke) and *Tg. Isa.* (C. W. H. Pauli)

Ps.-J., and *Frg. Tg. V* (labeled “Jerusalem”),²⁹ along with recent English translations of the Targums of Psalms, Lamentations, Ruth, and Song of Songs, are available online through “The Newsletter for Targumic and Cognate Studies.”³⁰

The Divine Word in the Targums

In the Targums, the divine Word is usually indicated by a form of the Aramaic word מִימְרָא (*Memra*), which, when so used, is not a translation of anything in the Hebrew text; rather, the phrase “the Word of the LORD,” is often a circumlocution, or substitute, for the Tetragrammaton (the “four letters,” יהוה, or YHWH), the pre-eminent OT name for God.³¹ “The Word of the LORD” is actually more than a circumlocution, since “Lord” by itself was already in use as a substitute for the divine name, as is clear from a comparison of the MT and the LXX. In recitation of the Targums, when the Hebrew *Adonay* was used, rather than another Hebrew word meaning “Lord,” the hearers would know that the Tetragrammaton was meant.³²

“*Memra*” is the emphatic (definite) form of מִימְרָא (*memar*), from the root אָמַר. Aramaic *memar* may be used simply as a translation of a Hebrew word for “word” (usually the etymologically related אָמַר or אָמְרָה). When the word is used as a circumlocution for the divine name, it is of particular interest with relation to the Logos title. When so used, in English translations of the Targums it is often transliterated consistently as *Memra*, even though the underlying Aramaic spelling changes depending on whether or not the word is emphatic or has pronominal suffixes.

Another important word used in “the Word of the LORD” as a way of rendering MT “the LORD” is דִּבְרֵיָא (*Dibbera*), also spelled דִּבְרֵיָא (*Dibbura*). This word is

have been compiled and made available as user databases for *BibleWorks* by Jay Palmer: see <http://bibleworks.oldinthenew.org/?cat=37> (Accessed: July 21, 2009).

²⁹J. W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch, with Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee* (2 vols.; London: Longman, Green, Longman, 1862, 1865; repr., 2 vols. in 1, New York: Ktav, 1968).

³⁰Online: <http://targum.info/>; accessed June 30, 2009. The site has links to various English translations of Targums; these include Etheridge, *Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel*; Edward M. Cook, “The Psalms Targum: An English Translation” (2001); Christian M. M. Brady, “Targum Lamentations” (print ed.: *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* [Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 3; Leiden: Brill, 2003]); Samson H. Levey, “Targum to Ruth” (1998); and Jay C. Treat, “The Aramaic Targum to Song of Songs” (2001).

³¹In English translations of the Hebrew Bible, the Tetragrammaton is traditionally rendered LORD, with capital letters indicating the name of God as opposed to the Hebrew word *Adonai*, “Lord.” In the Targums the Tetragrammaton is represented in various ways besides יהוה, such as ה, יי, ״ or ״״. The ״ seems to be used as a syllable place holder, such that ״״ represents the 3 syllables of Hebrew *Adonay*, ״ represents the 2 written vowels of the Tetragrammaton as it is usually found in MT, while the ״ in ״״ indicates the long ō vowel of *Adonay*. ה would represent the Hebrew definite article and be an abbreviation for “the Name.”

³²Aramaic דִּבְרֵיָא is used for human masters in the Targums but sometimes also for God (e.g. *Tg. Neof. Exod 23:17*). “Marana-tha” (“Lord come!”) in 1 Cor 16:22 is based on another Aramaic word, מָרָא, or מָרָי, also found in the Targums occasionally for God, e.g. *Tg. Ps. 35:23*.

used primarily in the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Pentateuch and appears infrequently compared to דְּבַר־יְהוָה . Yet, among its relatively few uses are several that give key support to the view that the Logos title in John does in fact depend on the Word of the LORD terminology from the Targums. *Dibbera/Dibbura* is generally overlooked by those considering the Targums as possible background for the Logos title, though its use was noted as long ago as the nineteenth century by Ferdinand Weber and B. F. Westcott.³³

To some extent, *Memra* and *Dibbera* are used interchangeably, as can be seen from several examples: (1) Gen 3:8 says that Adam and Eve heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden; in v. 10 Adam says, "I heard the sound of you." In *Pal. Tgs.* Gen 3:8, 10, Adam and Eve hear the sound/voice of "the Word of the LORD" strolling about in the garden. Both *Memra* (*Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 3:8, 10; *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 3:8) and *Dibbera* (*Tg. Neof.* [mg.] and *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 3:10) are used. (2) In giving instructions for the building of the ark of the covenant, the LORD says, "there I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will command you concerning the sons of Israel" (Exod 25:22). In place of "I will meet you," *Tg. Neof.*, *Tg. Ps.-J.*, and *Tg. Onq.* all read "I will appoint my *Memra*."³⁴ In reporting the fulfillment of this purpose in Num 7:89, *Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* say that from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim, the *Dibbera* used to speak to Moses. Also, in Num 17:[4] God describes the place before the ark as the place where he meets with Moses, and again *Tg. Neof.*, *Tg. Ps.-J.*, and *Tg. Onq.* say that his *Memra* meets Moses there. (3) Leviticus 1:1 says, "The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him." The *Tg. Ps.-J.* Lev 1:1 says the *Dibbera* of the LORD called to him and the *Memra* of the LORD spoke to him. *Targum Neofiti* and *Frg. Tg. V* also use *Dibbera* as subject of the verb "call," and both of the *Frg. Tg.* traditions use *Memra* as subject of the verb "spoke." When "Word" (capitalized) appears in Targum passages in this book, *Memra* is meant, unless otherwise indicated (e.g. by adding *Dibbera/Dibbura* in brackets).

But despite the overlap between the two terms, *Dibbera* is used in a more specialized sense than *Memra*. Etan Levine notes that *Memra* is used for more or less the full range of God's activities in the world; *Memra* "conveys the *being* and *doing* of YHWH, across the entire spectrum."³⁵ Samson H. Levey notes the *Memra* "is

³³Ferdinand Weber, *System der Altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch, und Talmud* (1880); repr. in *Jüdische Theologie auf Grund des Talmud und verwandter Schriften* (ed. Franz Delitzsch and Georg Schnedermann; 2d ed.; Leipzig: Dörrling & Francke, 1897), 180, cited in Robert Hayward, *Divine Name and Presence: The Memra* (Totowa, N.J.: Allenheld, Osmun, 1981), 2, 11 n. 5; B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: With Introduction and Notes* (1880; repr., London: James Clarke & Co., 1958), xvi. Westcott noted that in *Tg. Onq.* "the action of God is constantly though not consistently referred to 'His Word' . . . It may be noticed that the term *Debura* (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) occurs in this sense as well as *Memra*" (ibid.).

³⁴Evans noted the association of the *Memra* with the tabernacle in *Tg. Neof.* Exod 25:22; 29:43; 30:6, 36 (*Word and Glory*, 118).

³⁵Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of the Bible: Contents and Context* (BZAW 174; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 59–60.

everything that God is supposed to be, and its manifold activity encompasses the entire spectrum of divine endeavor,” but “the *Dibbur* is the divine word, limited to speech, articulation, proclamation.”³⁶

Since *Dibbera* by itself means divine speech, it is not necessary to say “the *Dibbera* of LORD.” Thus, in Num 7:89, cited above, the *Pal. Tgs.* say, “From there the *Dibbera* (not the *Dibbera* of the LORD) used to speak with (Moses).” This is potentially significant since in the Prologue John calls Jesus “the Word,” not “the Word of the Lord” or “the Word of God” (although this term is used for Jesus in Rev 19:13). George Foot Moore argued against the idea of relating *Memra* to John’s Logos because

memra does not occur without a genitive—“the word of the Lord,” “my word,” etc., or a circumlocution for the genitive, “a *memar* from before the LORD.” “The *Memra*,” “the Word,” is not found in the Targums, notwithstanding all that is written about it by authors who have not read them.³⁷

However, John called Jesus “the Word” based on both *Memra* and *Dibbera*, this objection loses its force. As shown below, several passages in John 1 seem to be illumined by passages in the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Pentateuch, where Jesus in the NT corresponds to the *Dibbera*, “the Word,” of the Targums.

In its “common” meaning, דְּבִיר is used for the Ten Commandments, which are the ten “words” in Hebrew, rendered in the LXX with both λόγοι (Exod 34:28; Deut 10:4) and ῥήματα (Deut 4:13). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut 4:12–13 illustrates the two usages: “You heard the voice of the Word [דְּבוּרָא] . . . And he declared to you his covenant, . . . the ten words [דְּבוּרֵיא].”³⁸ *Dibbera* is also not used in pronominal expressions such as “my Word.” דְּבִיר is also found once as a biblical Hebrew word, if the pointing is correct, where again it has the connotation of divine speech: “The word [הַדְּבִיר] is not in them (the false prophets)” (Jer 5:13).

An objection to examining targumic passages containing *Dibbera* with passages in John could be made on the basis that “*Dibbura* is usually held to be a late and secondary insertion within the Targumic versions.”³⁹ Against this view I would draw attention to the use of *Dibbura* in *Tg. Ezek.* 1:25. Levey notes how *Tg. Ezek.* (part of *Tg. Jon.* of the Prophets) avoids use of the term “Messiah,” despite a

³⁶Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel* (ArBib 13; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1987), 15.

³⁷George Foot Moore, “Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: *Memra*, *Shekinah*, *Metatron*,” *HTR* 15 (1922): 61 n.24.

³⁸Cf. Ernest G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy* (ArBib 5B; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 18, where v. 13 is mistakenly rendered “the ten *Memras*.”

³⁹Andrew Chester, *Divine Revelation and Divine Titles in the Pentateuchal Targumim* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), 115. Chester cites in agreement Paul Billerbeck (Str-B 2:316–19), Vinzenz Hamp (*Der Begriff “Wort” in der aramäischen Bibelübersetzungen. Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Hypostasen-Frage und zur Geschichte der Logos-Spekulationen* [Munich: Neuer Fiber-Verlag, 1938], 93–97), and Domingo Muñoz-León (*Dios–Palabra. Memrá en los Targumim del Pentateuco* [Granada, 1974], 668–79). In Klein’s opinion, “Muñoz León’s argument for the lateness of *dibberah* relative to *memra* is not convincing” (*Genizah Manuscripts*, 2:70).

number of opportunities to use it, and where one might expect it to be used. For example, in *Tg. Ezek.* 34:23–24; 37:24–25, “my servant David” is translated literally, whereas “David their king” in Jer 30:9 and Hos 3:5 is rendered “the Messiah, son of David, their king” in *Tg. Jon.* In Levey’s view, “Merkabah Mysticism” is substituted for “Messianic activism” in *Tg. Ezek.* in order to avoid Roman persecution of Jewish nationalism. Levey ascribes this substitution to the work of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai.⁴⁰ The Merkabah is the divine chariot seen by Ezekiel, and it is in this context that *Dibbura* is used (the angels’ wings were silent before the Word).

Since the term *Dibbura* is used only here in all of *Tg. Jon.* of the Former and Latter Prophets, it would seem reasonable to ascribe the unique use of *Dibbura* in *Tg. Ezek.* 1 also to Johanan ben Zakkai. But Johanan ben Zakkai was a contemporary of Johanan ben Zebadiah, better known as John son of Zebedee, the traditional author of the Gospel named for him. It could be, then, that *Tg. Ezek.* preserves an early usage of *Dibbura* which does not appear elsewhere in *Tg. Jon.*, and that the use of *Dibbura/Dibbera* in the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Pentateuch dates at least as far back as the first century.

For an example of *Memra* being used in the Targums where the MT refers to God, apparently to guard the transcendence of God, consider Exod 34:5. The MT reads, “The LORD came down in the cloud,” whereas a marginal gloss of *Tg. Neof.* for this passage reads, “The Word of the LORD was revealed.” Two devices safeguard the transcendence of God here: (1) changing the anthropomorphic “came down” to “was revealed”; (2) changing “the LORD” to “the Word of the LORD.”

Anthropomorphic references to God’s hand, arm, etc., were also frequently changed to “Word” in targumic translations. For instance, in the MT of Exod 33:22, God says to Moses, “I will cover you with my hand,” while *Tg. Onq.* reads, “I will shield you with my Word.” Such a practice could be considered an extension of the substitution of “command” for “mouth,” as in *Tgs. Onq.* and *Ps.-J.* Exod 17:1, where Israel journeyed “according to the word of the LORD” (MT, “according to the mouth of the LORD”). A substitution like this may be done for the sake of idiom, not simply to remove the anthropomorphism. In such cases, *Memra* in the Targums could be understood literally as God’s word, that is, command. The Word may also be used for anthropopathisms, as in *Tg. Isa.* 63:5, “By the Word of my pleasure I helped them” (MT: “my wrath sustained me”).

There is some dispute about whether the Targums have avoidance of anthropomorphisms as a goal, not only because the Targums do not consistently avoid anthropomorphisms, but also because some language that has been interpreted as anti-anthropomorphic is also used of kings or people in general, meaning we may be dealing with language of respect or idiomatic renderings.⁴¹ Still, as Andrew Chester says, “the Pentateuchal Targumim change a very great number of

⁴⁰Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 4.

⁴¹See e.g., Michael L. Klein, “The Translation of Anthropomorphisms and Anthropopathisms in the Targumim,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 32 (1979): 162–77; and “The Preposition *qdm* (‘before’), a Pseudo-anti-anthropomorphism in the Targum,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979): 502–7.

expressions which bear directly upon the understanding of God, and a substantial number of which in Old Testament scholarship are generally labeled 'anthropomorphisms.'⁴² The targumists may not have been concerned so much with avoiding anthropomorphisms per se as with avoiding wrong impressions about God on the part of the synagogue hearers. Thus anthropomorphisms which would not mislead ordinary people could be translated literally. "The main point is their concern for the most appropriate way to speak of God in the synagogue setting."⁴³ Similarly, Robert Hayward notes that some anthropomorphisms remain in the Targums, but the targumist "can act quite drastically" when "anthropomorphic language of the Bible might lead to misconceptions about God," citing the example of *Tg. Jer.* 14:8–9, where Jeremiah's question to God, "Why are you like a stranger in the land . . . like a mighty man who cannot save?" is changed so that the inhabitants of Judah are strangers in the land, whom God is able to save.⁴⁴

As for the transcendence of God, McNamara explains the "extremely frequent use" of "the Word of the LORD" to refer to God as due to "the religious mentality which produced the Targums [which] shrank from speaking of God as acting directly in the world and spoke instead of his *Memra* doing so."⁴⁵ This aspect of the targumic Word is conceptually similar to Philo's Logos. Similarly, J. Stanley McIvor writes, "The Targumist ensures that God is God and remains 'high and lifted up'; he achieves this purpose through various means, such as "by removing God from the scene of direct action or direct contact with human beings" and "by rephrasing many expressions which might suggest that there was something human about God."⁴⁶ In Isa 57:15, the one who is "high and lifted up" says, "I dwell in a high and holy place, *yet also with the contrite and lowly of spirit.*" That is, he is both transcendent and imminent. But in the Targum, he is "high and lifted up"—period:

For thus says the high and lofty One who *dwells in the heavens*, whose name is Holy; *in the height he dwells*, and *his Shekhinah is holy*. *He promises to deliver the broken in heart* and the humble of spirit, to *establish* the spirit of the humble, and to *help* the heart of the *broken*.⁴⁷

At the same time, the nearness of God is rendered literally throughout some Targums, such as *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Ps.*

⁴²Chester, *Divine Revelation*, 298. See all of Chester's ch. 6 for a discussion of various views on how anthropomorphisms were dealt with in the Targums, and why.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 383.

⁴⁴Robert Hayward, *Targum Jeremiah* (ArBib 12; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1987), 22–23.

⁴⁵Martin McNamara, "Logos of the Fourth Gospel and *Memra* of the Palestinian Targum (Ex 12⁴²)," *Expository Times* 79 (1968): 115. Attributing God's actions to his Word was just one of many stratagems employed by the targumists to this end.

⁴⁶*The Targum of Chronicles* and *The Targum of Ruth* (trans. J. Stanley McIvor (Chronicles) and D. R. G. Beattie (Ruth); ArBib 19; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 24–26. The second and third quotes given here are italicized in the original.

⁴⁷Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (ArBib 11; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987), 111. Italic font in The Aramaic Bible series indicates differences in meaning from (and additions to) the MT.

The targumic Word is frequently employed in passages that speak of God's interaction with his creation, including humankind (especially his people), a fact consistent with the view that such usage is meant to guard the transcendence of God. In such passages, what the MT ascribes to God the Targums often ascribe to his Word. Above, we noted Levey's description of the targumic Word: "It is everything that God is supposed to be, and its manifold activity encompasses the entire spectrum of divine endeavor."⁴⁸ Levey was not promoting any connection between the Logos of John and the targumic Word, but what he said agrees closely with what John says about the Word. "It is everything that God is supposed to be" agrees with "the Word was God" (John 1:1), or as REB translates it, "What God was, the Word was." As for the divine Word encompassing "the entire spectrum of divine endeavor," we see in John's Gospel that the Son's activities encompass the entire spectrum of divine activity in the OT. John says explicitly that creation was accomplished through the Son (1:3), but in addition John shows us that the redemption of Israel from Egypt was accomplished through the Son who came down from heaven, the law was given through the Son, Israel was led through the wilderness by the Son, as his bride, and Israel had life by believing in the Son (as shown in chs. four through eight below). The Targums employ Word in describing the works of God in all these categories.

Of course, it would be going too far to say that since the divine Word "is everything that God is supposed to be," therefore "the Son is everything that the Father is supposed to be." The Son is not the Father; the Son is in relationship to the Father, a relationship of love, trust, dependence, and submission. This relationship between the Father and the Son is not the same as that between God and his Word in the Targums, where reference to the divine Word is simply a way of speaking of God himself under certain circumstances, and sometimes "my Word" in the Targums is equivalent to "myself" in the MT.⁴⁹ In many contexts, one could view the divine Word as a projection of the transcendent God into his creation. But the Son in John and the Word in the Targums share the same relationship with God in the fact that they both speak the words of God, interact with his people, and accomplish his will in the world.

The divine Word is also associated with the divine name. The targumic paraphrase "the Word of the LORD" for YHWH in the MT is sometimes further developed as "the name of the Word of the LORD," as we can see for example in various renderings of Gen 15:6:

⁴⁸Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 15. Levey also said that the targumic Word was used for "safeguarding divine dignity, shielding the deity from unseemly expressions and mundane matters" (ibid.).

⁴⁹For MT "by myself I have sworn," *Tgs. Onq.* and *Ps.-J.* Gen 22:16 and *Tg. Isa.* 45:23; *Tg. Jer.* 22:5; 49:13 have "by my Word I have sworn." In Deut 18:19, God says, "I myself will require it of him"; *Tg. Ps.-J.* says, "my Word will require it"; *Tg. Neof.* says, "I, in my Word, will require it." In Isa 44:24 God says that he is "the one who stretches out the heavens by myself"; *Tg. Isa.* has "by my Word," with obvious relevance to John 1:1. Similarly, in 1 Sam 2:35, God says he will raise up a faithful priest "who will act according to what is in my heart and soul." *Tg. 1 Sam.* has, "who will act according to my Word and according to my pleasure."

MT	<i>Tg. Onq.</i>	<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Tg. Neof.</i>
Abram believed in the LORD.	He believed in the Word of the LORD.	He had faith in the Word of the LORD.	Abram believed in the name of the Word of the LORD.

Faith in Jesus, or faith in his name, is a key issue in John’s Gospel, analogous to faith in the divine Word, or the name of the divine Word, in the Targums. This will be explored in more detail in ch. 8.

A close association between the divine Word and the divine name is also seen in *Tg. Isa.* 48:11. In the MT, God says, “For my own sake, for my own sake I will act.” In the Targum, this becomes, “For the sake of my name, for the sake of my Word.” Similarly, *Tg. Neof.* Num 6:27 says, “so shall they put my name, my Word, upon the sons of Israel.” The association of the divine Word with the name of God is also of interest for John’s Gospel, which expresses the theme that the Father’s name (i.e., the Tetragrammaton, YHWH) is given to the Son and that the Son’s mission is to make known or manifest the Father’s name to his people (John 17:6, 11–12, 26). Similarly, John 1:18 says that while no man has seen God (the Father), the Son has explained him. “Explained” is the Greek word from which comes our word “exegesis” (ἐξηγήσομαι). In light of this, it is interesting to note what Chester wrote of the targumic Word and glory of the *Shekinah* as used in the Targums of the Pentateuch: “In a sense, both these terms are used as an *exegesis* of the divine names, especially the tetragrammaton.”⁵⁰

It is my contention that understanding the Logos title of the Gospel of John is based on targumic “Word” best fits the OT background to John 1:14 and its context, can also explain at least in part the evidence put forth for the other views, and leads to the recognition of a close connection between John’s Prologue and the body of his Gospel. That is, John’s Gospel as a whole can be seen as showing us what it meant by the statement that “the Word [that is, YHWH the Son] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” We will see that the so-called *Pal. Tgs.* to the Pentateuch are of greatest interest with respect to this subject.

Evidence from John 1

In this section, we look at various passages from John 1 that can be understood to support the view that the Logos title is based on the divine Word of the Targums. Since we are looking only at ch. 1, the case will be made only in a preliminary way. After examination of those passages, we will also be able to see, in a preliminary way, how John has adapted the divine Word of the Targums to the person of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁰Chester, *Divine Revelation*, 374. “*Shekinah*” is a word used to refer to the divine presence manifested locally in some way. As discussed in ch. 2, “*Shekinah*” and “Word” are overlapping concepts.

The Word Was with God, and the Word Was God (John 1:1)

“The Word of the LORD” (or, “My Word,” etc.) in the Targums is usually a translation of names and titles of God in the MT; it is a divine title. Hundreds of times, the targumic Word corresponds to the divine name or some other designation of God in the MT. The divine Word of the Targums is thus a circumlocution for God, a way of saying “God” or the Tetragrammaton. McNamara points out that such a use constitutes metonymy, that is, calling something by an attribute or feature associated with it.⁵¹ “The Word of the LORD” can be taken literally in many cases, but often it simply means “the LORD.” We can compare it to the expression “the name of the LORD” in Isa 30:27, “Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar,” where the reference is to God coming in judgment (NLT: “Look! The LORD is coming from far away”).

While “the Word of the LORD” is a metonym for “the LORD,” its use is not random or arbitrary (though it is inconsistent). As already noted, it tends to be used when God is interacting with his creation, so that God can be viewed as transcendent, yet still immanent. Thus, “the Word of the LORD” is metonymy used under particular circumstances, such as in the act of creation itself, as noted below. God remains transcendent over creation; his Word creates. In terms of language, the very words “his Word” imply a certain distinction between God and his Word, even though conceptually that Word is something like a projection of God himself into the creation. While this targumic relationship between God and his Word is not nearly as developed as the relationship between the Father and the Son, who are distinct persons, yet in both cases the Word is God, and yet to some extent distinct from God.

The targumic Word is explicitly called God in many passages. In Gen 17:7–8, where God says to Abraham, “I will establish my covenant . . . to be God to you,” and “I will be their God,” *Tg. Neof.* has “to be, in my Word, God to you” and “I will be to them in my Word a savior [or redeemer] God.” Similar expressions are found in *Tg. Neof.* Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 11:45 [mg.]; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 45; Num 15:41 [mg.]; Deut 26:17.⁵² In *Tg. Neof.* Lev 26:12, the context of the promise of the Word of the LORD being a savior God is that the LORD will make the glory of his *Shekinah* dwell among them (v. 11). For MT “I will walk among you,” *Tg. Neof.* has “My Word will go among you.” *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Lev 26:12 also refers to the divine Word as a savior God. *Targum Neofiti* Deut 26:17 is also of interest, in light of Pilate’s presentation of Jesus as king in John 19: “This day you have made the Word of the LORD your God to be King over you, so that he may be for you a savior God, [promising] to walk in ways that are right before him” (also *Frg. Tg. V, CTg. AA*).

Tgs. Onq. and *Jonathan* usually render God’s promises to be God to individuals or to Israel literally. However, *Tg. Onq.* Gen 28:21 has Jacob vow, “The Word

⁵¹McNamara, *Targum and Testament: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 99; “Logos of the Fourth Gospel and *Memra* of the Palestinian Targum,” 115.

⁵²Listed in McNamara, *Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 141 n.16.

of the LORD will be my God,” and in *Tg. Onq.* Exod 19:17 (also *Frg. Tg. P*), Moses brings the people to meet the Word of the LORD (MT: to meet God), to which we might compare the declaration of Thomas to Jesus the Word, “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28).⁵³ In *Tg. Onq.* Deut 4:24, Moses says, “the LORD your God, his Word, is a consuming fire, a jealous [or zealous] God.” *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut 4:24 says, “the LORD your God, his Word is a consuming fire; the jealous God is a fire, and he avenges himself in jealousy.” When Jesus cleansed the temple, the disciples were reminded of the zeal of a man, David (John 2:17; Ps 69:9). Identifying Jesus as the Word who is God points more significantly to divine zeal in the cleansing of the temple.

Creation through the Word, Who Was in the Beginning with God (John 1:1–3, 10)

Targum Onqelos and *Tg. Ps.-J.* of Gen 1 do not ascribe creation to the divine Word, but the Word of the LORD is the subject of verbs in the creation account seventeen times in *Tg. Neof.* and twenty-five times in *Frg. Tg. P*.⁵⁴ In *Frg. Tg. V*’s abbreviated account, the divine Word is the subject of the verb “create” only in v. 27, but v. 28 is quoted in Gen 35:9 of the same Targum, with the Word of the LORD as subject of “blessed” and “said” (*Tg. Neof.* [mg.] here agrees with *Frg. Tg. V*, but, interestingly, *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 35:9 has “God” as subject).

Further, where the MT of Gen 1 says “and it was so,” *Tg. Neof.* and/or *Frg. Tg. P* say that it was so “according to his Word” (*Tg. Neof.* Gen 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30) or “through the decree of his Word” (*Tg. Neof.* [mg.] Gen 1:24; *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24). *Targum Neofiti* Gen 1:3 says “there was light according to the decree of his Word,” while *Frg. Tg. P* says “there was light through his Word.”

Outside of the creation account itself, *Tg. Neof.* [mg.] Gen 3:1 says that the serpent was more clever than all the beasts of the field which “the Word of the LORD” created. In *Tg. Neof.* Gen 14:19, Melchizedek says, “Blessed is Abram before God Most High, who by his Word created the heavens and the earth,” and Abram echoes this description of God in v. 22. Both *Tg. Neof.* Exod 20:11 and 31:17 say “In six days the LORD created the heavens and the earth,” and in both passages, the gloss “and the Word of the LORD perfected” suggests an alternate text which could have read either “In six days the Word of the LORD created and perfected” etc.

⁵³Westcott cited *Tg. Onq.* Gen 28:21 and Exod 19:17 as part of his argument for the superiority of the Targum background to Philo’s Logos (*St. John*, xvi).

⁵⁴*Tg. Neof.* Gen 1:1 (created), 3 (said), 4 (separated), 5 (called), 6 (said), 8 (called), 9 (said), 10 (called), 11 (said), 16 (created), 20 (said), 22 (blessed), 24 (said), 25 (created), 27 (created), 28 (said); 2:2 (completed). *Targum Neofiti* Gen 1:1 actually reads “the Son of the LORD,” which McNamara says “is due most probably to a late, even sixteenth-century, correction. . . . The original Palestinian Targum probably read: ‘From the beginning in wisdom the Memra of the Lord created’” (*Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 52 n.2). *Fragmentary Targum P* agrees with *Tg. Neof.* at Gen 1:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28; 2:2 (variant). In addition, the Word of the LORD is subject in *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 1:7 (created), 14 (said), 17 (placed), 21 (created), 26 (said), 28 (blessed), 29 (said); and 2:3 (blessed and created). Of these nine, *Tg. Neof.* has “the Glory of the LORD” as subject five times (Gen 1:17, 28, 29; and 2:3 [twice]).

or “In six days the LORD created and the Word of the LORD perfected,” etc. And although *Tg. Onq.* of Gen 1 does not depict creation through the divine Word, *Tg. Onq.* Deut 33:27 does, in a manner very close to John 1:10, implying that the divine Word was “with God in the beginning”

Tg. Onq. Deut 33:27

The dwelling place of God is from the beginning, (when) *through his Word* the world was made.⁵⁵

John 1:10

The world *through him* (the Word) was made.

The existence of the Word from the beginning is also implied in *Tg. Neof.*, which uses the oath formula, “I live and exist in my Word forever” (*Tg. Neof.* Num 14:21; Deut 32:40; *Frg. Tg. V* Deut 32:40), and in *Tg. Neof.* and *Frg. Tg. V* Deut 32:39, which render “I am he” as “I, in my Word, am he.” As God exists, so does his uncreated Word; it therefore existed “from the beginning,” which in such contexts means prior to creation.

Targum Psalms 124:8 says, “Our help is in the name of the Word of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Clearly, based on comparison to the MT, the name of the divine Word is the Tetragrammaton; this name is given to the Son according to John 17:11–12. The MT of Ps 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD [בְּדְבַר יְהוָה] the heavens were made.” Usually the Targums translate דְּבַר from the MT with Aramaic פְּתָהִים (*Tg. Ps.* 33:6 uses מוֹלֵה), but some MSS of *Tg. Ps.* 33:6 use *Memra*.⁵⁶

Several passages from *Tg. Jon.* also indicate that all things were made through the divine Word:

Tg. Isa. 44:24 I am the LORD, who made all things; I stretched out the heavens *by* [or *through*] *my Word* (MT: by myself [לְבַדִּי]); I founded the earth by my might (MT: who was with me? [*ketib*; מִי אִתִּי] or from with me [*qere*; מֵאִתִּי] = by myself).

Tg. Isa. 45:12 I, *by my Word*, (MT: I) made the earth, and created man upon it; I, *by my might* (MT, my hands), stretched out the heavens.

Tg. Isa. 48:13 *By my Word* (MT: my hand) I founded the earth, *by my might* (MT, my right hand) I stretched out the heavens.

Tg. Jer. 27:5 I, *by my Word*, (MT: I) made the earth, the men and beasts on the face of the earth, *by my great power* (= MT), and *by my uplifted arm* (= MT).

According to these four passages, all things were made through the *Memra*, just as John says of the Logos. The question “Who was with me” (*ketib* in the MT of Isa 44:24) is of interest as well. The Targum renders it “by my might,” probably to agree with *Tg. Isa.* 45:12; 48:13; and even *Tg. Jer.* 27:5, where “by my great power”

⁵⁵ מְדוֹר אֱלֹהֵא מְלֻקְדָּמִין דְּבִמְיָמְרֵיהּ אֲתַעֲבִיר עֲלֵמָא.

⁵⁶ For his translation of *Tg. Ps.* for *The Aramaic Bible*, David M. Stec consulted five MSS as well as the 1525 Bomberg's Venice printed editions (*The Targum of Psalms* [ArBib 16; Collegetville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004], 22–23). Of these six sources, two use *Memra* in *Tg. Ps.* 33:6 (p. 73 n. “g” of the apparatus).

agrees with the Hebrew. But if one looks at both the Hebrew and the Aramaic of Isa 44:24, as John may have done, the question in the MT, “Who was with me” (i.e., in creation; with the implied answer of “no one”) is answered in the Targum, “My Word was with me.” To be sure, the Word of the Targums is not another divine Person any more than God’s attribute of strength is another. In fact, one could insist that in these passages *Memra* should be taken literally as God’s decree, thus should not be capitalized. But that would not mean that John could not have adapted the Targum language for his own purpose, observing that the close association of God and his Word is analogous to the close association between the Father and the Son. Accordingly, to which the idea of creation through the Son, who “was in the beginning with God,” does not contradict the statement that God acted “by myself” in creation.

Israel also was created: “Thus says the LORD your creator [ברא] (used for the creation of man in Gen 1:27)], Jacob, and he who formed you [יצר] (used for the creation of Adam in Gen 2:7)], Israel . . .” (Isa 43:1). God goes on to say “you are mine,” where the Targum has ריילי, “my own,” which we discuss below as the Aramaic basis for “his own” of John 1:11.

Israel’s creation is not unrelated to the original creation, as we discuss below when considering the Word as light, and Israel’s creation is said in several places in the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Song of Moses (Deut 32) to be accomplished through the divine Word. The MT of this chapter speaks of God making Israel, sometimes using the childbirth or Father-child motif, reminiscent of Gen 1, to speak of Israel’s creation through their redemption from Egypt and their wilderness experiences. Verse 10 uses the noun אלהי to describe the wilderness where God cared for Israel, and the next verse uses the verb רהק (*piel*) to compare God to an eagle hovering over its young. As Meredith G. Kline noted, the only other place in the Pentateuch where these two words appear is Gen 1:2, so it seems likely that the creation theme is being deliberately alluded to.⁵⁷ Israel’s creation is described directly or indirectly in several verses: “Is he not your Father who created you [קנה; some translate *bought*]? Did he not make [עשה] and establish [בין] you?” (v. 6); “(Israel) forgot God who made [עשה] him” (v. 15); and “You forgot God who brought you to birth [*polel*; הויל]” (v. 18). For v. 15, *Tgs. Ps.-J.* and *Onq.* say that Israel forsook “the fear of God who made them”; *Tg. Neof.* and *Frg. Tg. V* say that Israel forgot or forsook “the Word of God who created them” (using בר, the Aramaic cognate of ברא). For v. 18, *Tg. Ps.-J.* joins *Tg. Neof.* and *Frg. Tg. V* in speaking of Israel forsaking “the Word of God who made them” (various verbs are used). One might object that in such expressions the antecedent of “who” is not “the Word of God” but simply “God,” just as the phrase “they forsook the fear of God who made them” ascribes creation to God, not the fear of God. Grammatically this is possible, but the creation of Israel spoken of took place in the redemption of Israel from Egypt,

⁵⁷“That Moses in his use of the verb *rhq* in Deuteronomy 32:11 is instituting a comparison between God’s presence as Israel’s divine aegis in the wilderness and God’s presence over creation in Genesis 1:2b is put beyond doubt by the fact that he calls that wilderness a *tōhū*” (Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 14).

in which, according to the Targums, the divine Word is often the subject or agent of redemption. Another objection might be that this creation is not that spoken of in John 1:1–3, 10, which was accomplished through the Word. Nevertheless, there is a close link between creation and redemption, redemption being brought about by a new creation, which would be one reason for John to begin his Gospel by mentioning that the original creation was through the Word, while the rest of the Gospel highlights redemption through the Word.

In any case, whether or not we include *Pal. Tgs.* Deut 32:15, 18 among the Targum passages which speak of creation through the divine Word, it is surprising that Moore claimed that the Targums do not ascribe creation to the Word of the LORD and, therefore, that the targumic Word has nothing to do with the Logos in John or Philo. “In the Targums *memra* . . . is not the creative word in the cosmogony of Genesis or reminiscences of it.”⁵⁸ Moore allowed that *Tg. Isa.* 45:12 was an apparent exception, but of the kind that proves the rule (presumably meaning that *Memra* could be taken literally here; thus, there is no hypostatization). Then he pointed to another exception, *Tg. Onq.* Deut 33:27, without noting its striking similarity to John 1:10.⁵⁹ Moore considered *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Jon.*, not the *Pal. Tgs.*, because the former were more authoritative, apparently not wondering whether John might be more interested in the latter because of their popular nature.⁶⁰ He did, however, refer to the *Pal. Tgs.* elsewhere, saying that, unlike Philo’s Logos, the *Memra* is not the agency of creation: “Consequently, the theory that derives the Logos-Word of John 1, 1–5 straight from the Palestinian *memra* is fallacious.”⁶¹ He thus overlooked cases in *Tg. Jon.* (Isa 44:24; 48:13; Jer 27:5), which we discussed above, as well as the *Frg. Tgs.* (which are earlier than *Tg. Ps.-J.*).⁶² Although *Tg. Neof.* was not discovered until a few decades after Moore wrote, the other Targums were available.

The Word as Light, Shining in Darkness, in Conflict with Darkness (John 1:4–5, 9)

We have already noted *Tg. Neof.* and *Frg. Tg. P* Gen 1:3, “there was light according to the decree of his Word” and “there was light through his Word.” Many have pointed to a closer identification between *Memra* and the light at the beginning of creation in the haggadah or poem of the Four Nights, which appears as an extensive addition to Exod 12:42 (where the MT refers to the Passover night of watching) in *Tg. Neof.*, *Frg. Tg. V*, *CTg. FF* and as an addition to Exod 15:18 (MT: “The LORD will reign”) in *Frg. Tg. P*.⁶³ The first night corresponds to the darkness of Gen 1:2, when God gave the command “let there be light.”

⁵⁸ Moore, “Intermediaries in Jewish Theology,” 54.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 60 n.7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 61 n.27.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 46, 54.

⁶³ McNamara says, “the bearing of this text of *Neofiti* on the prologue of John has been noted independently by A. Diez Macho (*Atlantida*, vol. I, no. 4, 1963, pp. 390–94) and R.

CTg. FF: The first night, when the Word of the LORD was revealed upon the world to create it, and the world was formless and void, and darkness was spread over the surface of <the>deep. And <the Word> of the LORD was <ligh>t and it shone.⁶⁴

Tg. Neof. reads similarly, except that there it is “the LORD” (not “the Word of the LORD”) who is revealed. The words for “was light and it shone” are slightly different, but glosses agree with CTg. FF.⁶⁵

Fragmentary Targum V begins like CTg. FF, saying that “the Word of the LORD was revealed,” and it ends with “and the Word of the LORD shone and gave light” (בְּהַיָּר וּמְנַהֵר). *Fragmentary Targum P* Exod 15:18 says that the LORD was revealed, etc., and “through his Word shone and gave light” (וּבְמִמְרֵיהּ הוּא הַיָּר וּמְנַהֵר).

The CTg. FF and Tg. Neof. are particularly close to John in saying both that the Word was “light” (using the noun) and that the Word “shone.” As Robert Kysar notes, “the parallels between this targumic passage and the prologue are striking: the prevailing darkness, the word’s existence at the beginning of creation, the identification of word and light, and the shining of the light in the darkness.”⁶⁶

McNamara criticizes Billerbeck because “in the course of his extensive treatment of the *Memra* in the Targums (which runs to thirty-two pages), [he] does not even once cite or refer to the text of Ex 12:42. Nowhere, in fact, in the entire four volumes of the *Kommentar* is the relevant part of the verse cited.”⁶⁷ *Targum Neofiti* was not available to Billerbeck, but the *Frg. Tg.* tradition was.

Some might wonder why John would care about this extrabiblical Jewish legend of the Four Nights, or what could be viewed as mere allegory of Gen 1:1–3. One answer might be that John saw an incident in the ministry of Jesus which could be viewed as a revelation of Jesus along the lines of the appearance of the Word as light on the first night. That incident was the appearance of Jesus to his disciples over the wind-driven waters, in the darkness, recalling the pre-creation conditions of the world when, according to the poem, “the Word of the LORD was the Light, and it gave light” (John 6:16–21). This incident occurred just prior to

Le Déaut (*La nuit pascale*, Rome, 1963, pp. 215 f.). The latter, in fact, considers the poem on the Four Nights . . . as a type of hymn to the Word (*Memra*) of the Lord” (“Logos,” 116; see Roger Le Déaut, *La nuit pascale: Essai sur la signification de la Pâque juive à partir du Targum d’Exode XII 42* [AnBib 2; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963]). See also McNamara, *Palestinian Judaism and the New Testament* (GNS 4; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), 237–39.

⁶⁴Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:220. Text in angled brackets is restored by Klein. Klein translates the last word “and illumination” (*ibid.*), while the CAL parses it as a verb.

⁶⁵Tg. Neof. has בְּהַיָּר וּמְנַהֵר וְהוּא הַיָּר וּמְנַהֵר דִּי יְהוָה נְהוּרָא וְנָהַר (which agrees with CTg. FF). A gloss of Tg. Neof. וּמְנַהֵר is נְהוּרָא, which likewise agrees with CTg. FF. A gloss of Tg. Neof. נְהוּרָא is בְּהוּרָא; only the הַיָּר is extant in CTg. FF, but Klein restores the rest of the word as in the Tg. Neof. gloss.

⁶⁶Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 109. Kysar mistakenly locates the text in Tg. Neof. at Exod 15:18 (where *Frg. Tg. P* has it). This statement is also found in Kysar’s *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005), 83.

⁶⁷McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 102 n.7. I would add that nowhere in those thirty-two pages does Billerbeck discuss a single verse from John’s Gospel.

the Passover, when the hymn of the Four Nights would presumably be recited (6:4). One could also view the incident as a somewhat literalistic picture of John 1:12, with Jesus coming to a remnant of his own and this remnant receiving him. "They were willing to receive him into the boat" (John 6:21, which uses λαμβάνω for "receive" as in John 1:12). We will discuss this passage further in ch. 8 in connection with the "I am he" saying of John 6:20, where we will see that *Tg. Isa.* 43 will help us complete the picture.

Another case where the divine Word is associated with shining light is *Tg. Neof.* Exod 13:21–22, which says that "the Word of the LORD led on before them during the daytime in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fiery cloud to give them light. . . . The pillar of cloud did not cease during the daytime, nor the pillar of fire by night, leading and standing in readiness and shining before the people" (similarly *Frg. Tg. P* for v. 21). The divine Word in the pillar of fire leading the Israelites can also be seen as background to John 8:12, where Jesus is the light of the world, so that his followers should not remain in darkness (more on this in ch. 8).

After saying that the light shines in the darkness, John goes on to say that the darkness did not overtake it (1:5), which suggests conflict between light and darkness, a theme also found in the body of the Gospel (3:19). "Overtake" is καταλαμβάνω, which some versions (including the Vulgate) translate as "understand." Yet a *prima facie* case for the translation "overtake" can be made from John 12:35, which has so much in common with 1:5: "Jesus said to them, 'For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you.'"

"I will overtake . . . my hand will destroy them" was Pharaoh's boast as he set out after the Israelites (Exod 15:9). Pharaoh was thwarted, however, because the pillar of cloud came between the Israelites and the Egyptians, and when darkness came, the cloud remained to keep the Egyptians in darkness, while the night for the Israelites was illuminated.⁶⁸ Thus darkness (identified with the Egyptians) did not overcome light (identified with the Israelites). Again, according to *Tg. Neof.* Exod 13:21–22, the divine Word was in the pillar of cloud and fire, even though this statement is not repeated in Exod 14 in connection with the pillar of fire. For "I will overtake" (Exod 15:9), the LXX uses καταλαμβάνω (middle voice).

In an acrostic poem to Exod 14:30 in *CTg. T*, the Red Sea is depicted as refusing to part for the Israelites, but then "The voice of the Holy Spirit called out to Moses and the Word [*Dibbera*] began speaking to him. . . . The sea heard the Word speaking to Moses <from the midst of the fire>. The sea repented with all its might, and the tribes of Jacob passed through it." The bracketed text is supplied by Klein

⁶⁸The NIV of Exod 14:20 ("Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side") follows the Syriac, which agrees with the interpretation found in *Tg. Onq.* and the *Pal. Tgs.* It is also supported by Josh 24:7: "He put darkness between you and the Egyptians." The MT is obscure and often deemed corrupt. See discussion in John L. Ronning, "The Curse on the Serpent: Genesis 3:15 in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Pa., 1997), 215–18.

from a parallel (although in any event it may be assumed from the context that the voice of the Word would come from the pillar of fire).⁶⁹ If Kline's emendation is correct, then the text depicts the Word speaking to Moses from the pillar of fire at the shores of the Red Sea, giving us another association of the divine Word (this time *Dibbera*) with light in the pillar of fire which led Israel through the sea.

Thus *Pal. Tg.* texts describing the appearance of light at creation as well as light in the pillar of fire associate the divine Word closely with this light. We should observe that even apart from the Targums, there is more than light that binds these two texts together. The division of light and darkness at the Red Sea may be part of a reenactment of the first three days of creation (most obviously with the third day corresponding to the drying up of the Red Sea, and dry land appearing).⁷⁰ Light is thus connected with redemption, conceived of as symbolic of a new creation. Again, recognizing redemption as a new creation allows us to see a link between John's Prologue, where John identifies the divine Word as the agent of creation, and the body of the Gospel, which deals not with creation but with redemption, which was also accomplished through the divine Word according to the Targums (more on this in chs. four through seven). The targumic divine Word is associated both with light shining in the darkness at creation and with the redemption of Israel, when light is in victorious conflict with darkness.

Some mss of *Tg. Ps. 27:1* say "The Word of the LORD is my light and my redemption."⁷¹ We can compare "my light" to "the light of men," John 1:4. The context of *Ps 27:1* is one of danger from evildoers who, when they approach, stumble and fall. This could be figuratively connected with John 1:5, which says that the darkness did not overcome the light. The stumbling and falling of those who came to arrest Jesus (John 18:6) could similarly serve as a sign that though the forces of darkness appear to succeed, they are actually in the category of those who perish.

A variant reading of *Tos. Tg. Zech. 2:10* is quite striking in its association of the divine Word with light. In the *MT*, the LORD says, "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst." The *Tos. Tg.* reads, "Rejoice and be glad, assembly of Zion, for the glory {Word} of the Lord will be revealed, and he shall illumine the world from the brilliance of his glory, in that he said (i.e., promised) to make his *Shekinah* dwell in your midst. And it is not before him to act falsely, and he will not turn from what he says. Behold, like the light {splendor} of morning which goes forth and prevails [*or* increases, becomes strong; *תִּקְרַח*] and increases his light to all the world more than all."

The text with the variant "Word" (*Memra*) is like the poem of the Four Nights in associating light with the divine Word, but here the light happens not at creation but on the occasion when the LORD comes to dwell with his people. He illumines all the world with his light, and his light prevails over darkness. Thus

⁶⁹ Klein, *Genizah Fragments*, 1:238–39 (slightly adapted). *CTg. X* Exod 14:30 (an acrostic poem thereto) says (letter *Shin*), "The sea heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, that was spea[king] with Moses from the midst of the fire" (*ibid.*, 236–37).

⁷⁰ See Ronning, "Curse on the Serpent," 215–18; Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 14–16.

⁷¹ The same two mss that use *Memra* in *Tg. Ps. 33:6* (see above, n. 56) do so here as well (Stec, *Targum of Psalms*, 65 n. "a" of the apparatus).

this text adds two parallels to the Word as light in John 1 that are not in the poem of the Four Nights: “The true light which enlightens every man” (1:9) agrees with “increases his light to all the world,” and “the darkness did not overcome it” (1:5) agrees with the *Tos. Tg.* description of the light as prevailing from morning (thus prevailing over darkness). Judges 5:31 (where the wording is similar to *Tos. Tg. Zech. 2:10*) speaks of the sun going forth in its strength as a simile for the righteous, in contrast to the LORD’s enemies, who perish.

A further parallel between *Tos. Tg. Zech. 2:10* and John’s Prologue pertains to John 1:14, which we discuss below. Rimón Kasher compares the character of the *Tos. Tgs.* of the Prophets to *Tg. Jon.*, noting that they tend to be more like *Tg. Ps.-J.* than *Jonathan*, that they arose in the synagogue rather than the academy, and that they are later than *Jonathan* in their final form but “obviously . . . may also contain traces of ancient traditions.”⁷²

Receiving/Not Receiving the Divine Word; Believing in His Name (John 1:11–12)

In these verses, John indicates that the Word came to those who were “his own” and contrasts his own, who did not receive (παρὰ λαμβάνω) him, with those who did receive (λαμβάνω) him, those who believed in his name. In the Targums, the idea of receiving or not receiving the Word of the LORD is very common, where the MT speaks of listening to God himself (or his voice) or coming to him, etc.

It has been suggested that “his own” from v. 11 reflects an underlying Aramaic הַיְיָ לִי.⁷³ Moses says to Israel in *Tg. Onq. Deut 32:6*, “You (Israel) are his (God’s) own.” “My own” (הַיְיָ לִי) is what God calls Israel in *Tgs Ps.-J.* and *Onq. Lev 25:55* and *Tg. Isa. 43:1*. In *Tg. Isa. 46:3* (and many other places), he urges them (whom he has called “my own”) to “receive my Word” (for MT “listen to me”). “My own” is also what God calls “the ages of the ages” in conjunction with some of the “I am he” declarations in Isaiah (*Tg. Isa. 41:4; 43:10; 48:12*). Indeed, Isa 43:10 is echoed by Jesus in John 13:19 and alluded to in other places (see chs. eight and nine below).

Concerning the expression “those who believed in his name,” Anthony Tyrell Hanson comments, “in the context this must refer to the name of the Logos.”⁷⁴ The expression “the name of the Word of the LORD” is common in the *Pal. Tgs.* of the Pentateuch and is found also in other Targums, except for the “official” Targums, *Tg. Onq.* (the Pentateuch) and *Tg. Jon.* (the Former and Latter Prophets).

Both the idea of believing in the name of the Word of the LORD and the idea of not receiving the Word of the LORD are found in *Tg. Ps. 106*. Psalm 106:12 says

⁷²Rimón Kasher, “Eschatological Ideas in the Toseftot Targum to the Prophets,” *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* 2 (2000): 58–59. The text published by Kasher is available on the CAL website and in BibleWorks 7 (under the FTT database). The English translation given here is mine.

⁷³Charles F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), 33, 41; this agrees with Peshitta and Old Syriac. Cf. Hebrew אֲנִי לַיהוָה.

⁷⁴Anthony Tyrell Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 24.

that after Israel passed through the Red Sea and witnessed the destruction of the Egyptians, “they believed his words.” This probably refers to Exod 14:31, which says they “believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.” *Palestinian Targums* Exod 14:31 speaks of believing in the name of the Word of the LORD, language also used to interpret Ps 106:12. The following shows how plausible it is to associate John’s language with that of the Targums:

MT of Exod 14:31	The people . . . <i>believed in the LORD.</i>
Tg. Ps.-J., Tg. Neof., Frg. Tg. P, and CTg. J Exod 14:31	The people . . . <i>believed in the name of the Word of the LORD.</i>
MT of Ps 106:12	They believed <i>his words.</i>
Tg. Ps. 106:12	They <i>believed in the name of his Word.</i>
John 1:12	He gave the right to become children of God to those who <i>believed in his (the Word’s) name.</i>

We can carry out a similar analysis of *Tg. Ps. 106:25* to show how the “receive/not receive” language of John 1:11–12 likewise can be related to a frequent use of the targumic Word. The reference is to the great rebellion of Num 14, when Israel refused to enter the promised land:

MT of Ps 106:25	They did not <i>listen to the voice of the Lord.</i>
Tg. Ps. 106:25	They did not <i>receive the Word of the Lord.</i> ⁷⁵
MT of Num 14:22	All the men . . . who have not <i>listened to my voice.</i>
Tg. Onq. and Tg. Ps.-J. Num 14:22	The men who . . . have not <i>received my Word.</i>

We can also relate *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 14:22 to John 1:14 and 2:11, 23:

The men who have seen my glory and my signs which I have done . . . and have not received my Word.

John 1:11, 14: His own *did not receive him* (the Word). . . . The Word became flesh and . . . *we beheld his glory.*

John 2:11: He manifested *his glory.*

John 2:23: Many believed in his name, beholding *his signs which he was doing.*

John could easily see biblical history repeating itself in his own generation; some believed, most did not.

A few verses earlier in Numbers (14:11), the LORD asks, “How long will they not believe in me,” which in *Tg. Neof.* becomes, “How long will they not believe

⁷⁵לא קבילו במימרא דיהוה

in the name of my Word?" Numbers 14:11 seems to be paraphrased in John 12:37 and applied to Jesus.⁷⁶ The corresponding passage in *Tg. Neof.* makes it natural to suppose that John has taken the Logos title from the Targums:

John 12:37	Though he had performed so many <i>signs</i> before them, they were <i>not believing in him</i> .
Num 14:11 (MT)	How long will they not believe <i>in me</i> , in spite of all the <i>signs</i> which I have performed in their midst?
<i>Tg. Neof. Num 14:11</i>	How long will they not <i>believe in the name of my Word</i> (<i>Tgs. Onq. and Ps.-J.</i> : believe in my Word), in spite of all the <i>signs of my miracles</i> which I have performed among them?

The targumic expression "the name of the Word of the LORD" cannot be taken literally. The LORD's Word has no name of its own, and phrases such as "the name of the Word of the LORD" and "the name of my Word" occur in the Targums where the MT has the Tetragrammaton, or in contexts such as *Tg. Ps.* 106:12 (mentioned above) where, though the MT does not have the Tetragrammaton, it is clear that the Tetragrammaton is meant (in this case because the language depends on another passage [Exod 14:31] where the Tetragrammaton is used). We are thus forced again to the conclusion that "the Word of the LORD" is metonymy for "the LORD"; thus, "the name of the Word of the LORD" is "the name of the LORD," i.e., the Tetragrammaton. Further confirmation that "his name" should be interpreted in light of the Targums as the Tetragrammaton is found in John 2:23 and 3:18, which also speak of people believing in his name, and in other passages which speak of belief or disbelief in Jesus (John 5:46; 12:37; 14:1). The context of all these passages suggests a connection between this theme in John and a Targum passage that speaks of belief/disbelief in the name of the Word of the LORD, which stands for the Tetragrammaton (see ch. 8 for further discussion and demonstration of this conclusion).

Most commonly, "listening" (Heb) to the LORD or to the voice of the LORD in the MT is rendered as "receiving" in the Targums. "Receiving" is used to render other expressions as well, such as turning to the LORD and coming to the LORD. If John was thinking of the Aramaic קביל, he could have expressed it in Greek with ἀκούω (just as modern English translations of Targums use "heed," "listen to," "attend to," etc.). Likewise, ἀκούω in various Gospel passages could reflect an originally spoken Aramaic קביל, but John's use of the literal translation παραλαμβάνω/λαμβάνω in 1:11–12 helps us make the connection to קביל of the Targums.

The expression "the name of the Word [*Memra*] of the LORD" (or variants such as "the name of my Word") is used differently in *Tgs. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.*⁷⁷ For

⁷⁶Reim, *Alttestamentlichen Hintergrund*, 139 n.61.

⁷⁷See *Tg. Neof.* Gen 4:26; 8:20; 12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 15:6; 16:13; 21:33; 22:14, 16; 24:3; 26:25; 35:1; Exod 4:31; 5:23; 14:31; 17:15; 23:21 [mg.]; 32:13; 34:5; Lev 16:8–9; Num 14:11; 18:9; 20:12; 21:5; Deut 1:32; 4:4 [mg.]; 9:23; 10:8; 11:22; 13:5; 18:5, 7, 19–20, 22; 21:5; 32:51; and *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:26; 5:2; 18:5; 21:33; 24:3; 35:9; Exod 14:31; 20:7; 26:28; 33:19; 34:5; 36:33;

example, the language of believing/not believing in “the name of the Word of the LORD” is found in *Tg. Neof.*, but in these passages *Tg. Ps.-J.* usually agrees with *Tg. Onq.*, which speaks of believing or disbelieving in “the Word of the LORD.”⁷⁸ We can illustrate this with Deut 9:23, where Moses speaks of the refusal of Israel to enter the promised land. As we saw for *Tg. Ps. 106*, so we see in the various Targums of Deut 9:23 both the “receive” language and the “believe in his name” language of John 1:11–12:

- MT** You rebelled against the mouth of the LORD your God and *did not believe him or listen to his voice.*
- Tg. Neof.*** You rebelled against the decree of the Word of the LORD your God, and you did not *believe in the holy name of the Word of the LORD*, and you did not *listen to the voice of his Word.*
- Tgs. Onq. and Ps.-J.*** You rebelled against the Word of the LORD your God and did not believe him and *did not receive his Word.*

To summarize:

	MT	<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Tgs. Onq., Ps.-J.</i>
you did not:	believe him	believe in the holy name of the Word of the LORD	believe him
you did not:	listen to his voice	listen to the voice of his Word	receive his Word

Targum Joshua 5:6 likewise says that the wilderness generation perished because it did not receive the Word of the LORD. Likewise, the exile of Israel and Judah took place because of a failure to receive the Word of the Lord (*Tg. 2 Kgs.* 18:12; *Tg. Jer.* 40:3). Such passages are significant to John’s Gospel not only because of the similarity in wording to John 1:11–12, but also because of the Gospel’s modeling of the generation that rejected Jesus after the wilderness generation (as we will discuss in ch. 8, and because John is writing from a post-exilic perspective,

Lev 5:21; Num 6:2; 21:8–9; Deut 4:7; 5:11; 6:13; 18:7; 32:6, 9; 33:29. *Frg. Tgs.*, where extant, agree with *Tg. Neof.* According to Robert Hayward, “the name of the *Memra* of the LORD” is the Tetragrammaton properly pronounced, as it was in the ceremonies associated with the Day of Atonement in the temple (*Divine Name and Presence*, 100–11). He cites *m. Yoma* 4:2; *Soṭah* 7:6; *Tamid* 7:2 in connection with *Tg. Neof.* Lev 16:8–9, which mentions the “lot for the name of the Word of the LORD” where MT has “lot for the LORD” (Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Leviticus* [introduction and notes by Robert Hayward]; Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Leviticus* [ArBib 3; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994], 62 n.6).

⁷⁸Generally, where the MT speaks of someone believing/not believing in the LORD, *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* speak of believing/not believing in the Word (*Memra*) of the LORD, *Tg. Neof.* speaks of believing/not believing in the name of the Word of the LORD (Gen 15:6; Num 14:11; 20:12; Deut 1:32; 9:23). In Exod 14:31, however, all of the *Pal. Tgs.* (including *Frg. Tg. P.*) say that Israel believed in the name of the Word of the LORD (MT says simply “the people believed . . . in the LORD”).

which might naturally be compared to earlier exiles and give rise to identical explanations). Further, John's identification of Jesus as the Word would suggest a reason for Jerusalem's destruction in C.E. 70 that could make sense to Aramaic-speaking Jews who contemplated that catastrophe in relation to the covenant curses: "If in this you do not receive my Word . . . you shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters . . . and I will destroy your cities and make desolate your sanctuaries" (*Tg. Onq. Lev* 26:27–31).

In Ezek 3:7, God says to Ezekiel, "The house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me." In *Tg. Ezek.*, he says, "they will not be willing to receive from you because they will not be willing to receive my Word" [לְקַבֵּל אֶת לִמְיָמֵיךָ]. Jesus the Word uses similar language in speaking of those whom he sends: "Whoever receives [λαμβάνω] the one I send receives me (the Word), and whoever receives me receives him who sent me" (John 13:20; similarly Matt 10:40, which uses δέχομαι for "receive").

Finally, we note that John's connection between receiving the Word and being given the right to become children of God (1:12) can be seen as based on the reading of *Tgs. Onq.* and *Ps.-J. Exod* 19:5–6: "If you will diligently receive my Word, . . . you shall be before me . . . a holy people." This passage is cited in Jer 7:23, where *Tg. Jer.* reads, "Receive my Word, and I will be your God and you shall be a people before me." The equation of the holy people of God and the children of God is made in Deut 14:1–2: "You are children (*Tg. Ps.-J.*: beloved children; cf. Eph 5:1) of the LORD your God. . . . You are a holy people."

We should also take note of the doctrinal implications of understanding the word "receive" in John 1:11–12 according to the Aramaic background. To "receive the Word of the LORD" has connotations of obedience, and is thus not accurately explained as analogous to merely receiving a gift.

Word, Glory, Shekinah (John 1:14)

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." In ch. 2 we explore the idea of God dwelling among his people and manifesting his glory as an important OT theme (e.g., Exod 40:34–35). "Glory" could be directly related to OT references to God's glory when he dwells among his people. Further, in John's word "dwelt" we have the rare situation where a Greek word (σκηνώω) is related to a Semitic word, namely, the Hebrew verb used for God dwelling among his people, יָדַשׁ as well as the noun יְדֻשָׁה used for the tabernacle (translated in Greek as σκηνή). Σκηνώω can also be related to the Aramaic word אִתְּיָדָשׁ, the *Shekinah*, the manifest presence of God. This word is used commonly in the Targums with the word "glory," and the two are commonly also found with *Memra*. Charles F. Burney suggested, therefore, that "so far from owing his λόγος-doctrine to an Alexandrian source, [John] is soaked through and through with the Palestinian Jewish thought which is represented by the Targums."⁷⁹ For proof Burney noted that

⁷⁹Burney, *Aramaic Origin*, 38–39. Burney credits this observation to Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 231. R. D. Middleton cites Burney approvingly:

John 12:40–41 says that Isaiah saw Christ’s glory, which depends on Isa 6:1, where *Tg. Isa.* reads, “I saw the glory [אִרְבָּנִי] of the LORD resting on a throne,” and v. 5 says, “my eyes have seen the glory of the *Shekinah* of the King of the ages.”

It should however be noted that the use of “glory” in John 12:41 does not prove influence from *Tg. Isa.* 6:1, since the LXX of that verse interprets “the train of his robe” as “his glory” (similarly, *Tg. Isa.*: “the brilliance of his glory”). That is, “Isaiah saw his glory” could be influenced by LXX Isa 6:1 “I saw the Lord . . . and the temple was full of his glory.” On the other hand, a connection between John 12:41 and *Tg. Isa.* 6:1 seems likely if one has already accepted a targumic background of the Logos title, since *Tg. Isa.* 6:8 says Isaiah heard the voice of the Word of the Lord speaking to him. In *Tg. Isa.* 6:5, Isaiah pronounces woe upon himself, because, he says, “my eyes have seen the glory of the *Shekinah* of the eternal King.” Thus in these two verses from Isaiah’s commissioning we have the three key targumic words that have been connected to John 1:14. Further, *Tg. Ps.-J.* Deut 4:7 borrows a phrase from Isa 6:1 with a significant variation from *Tg. Isa.*: “The Word of the LORD sits on his throne, high and lifted up.” We may infer that the now-lost “Palestinian” Targum of Isa 6:1 might have read something like, “I saw the Word of the LORD sitting on his throne, high and lifted up, . . . and the temple was filled with the brilliance of his glory.” If such a reading existed in John’s day, the connection to John 12:41 would be even more obvious.

Tg. Ps.-J. Deut 5:24 also associates these three key words:

Deut 5:24 (MT)

And you said, “Behold, the LORD our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice from the midst of the fire.”

***Tg. Ps.-J.* Deut 5:24**

And you said, “Behold, *the Word of the LORD* our God has shown us *the Shekinah of his glory* and the greatness of his praise, and we have heard *the voice of his Word* from the midst of the fire.”

Deuteronomy 5:24 looks back to God’s revelation on Mt. Sinai to all the people. As we shall see in ch. 2, John 1:14 also has echoes of God’s revelation on Sinai, but primarily of the private revelation to Moses in Exod 34.

We also noted above that one variant of *Tos. Tg. Zech.* 2:10, besides associating the divine Word with light which illumines the whole world, also speaks of his glory and making his *Shekinah* dwell among his people. Below is a comparison of John 1:14, MT, *Tg. Zech.*, and *Tos. Tg. Zech.* 2:10:

“Thus the three terms are used together to describe the mystery of the incarnation” (“Logos and *Shekinah* in the Fourth Gospel,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 29 [1938–1939]: 130). Similarly George R. Beasley-Murray, “The language used of the incarnation of the Logos is reminiscent of the dwelling of the *Shekinah* among the people of God in the wilderness” (*John* [Word Biblical Commentary 36; Dallas: Word, 1987], lix). McNamara also connected the three targumic terms *Word*, *glory*, and *Shekinah* to John 1:14 (*Palestinian Judaism*, 238). More recently Mary L. Coloe said, “These terms from the Targums used in the Jewish synagogue worship may have provided the Johannine author with the theological tools to express the divinity they saw, heard, and experienced in Jesus” (*God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2001], 61).

- MT** “Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold *I am coming* and *I will dwell* (LXX: κατασκηνώ) *in your midst*,” declares the LORD.
- Tg. Zech.** Rejoice and be glad, O congregation of Zion, for behold, *I will reveal myself* and *I will make my Shekinah dwell in your midst*, says the LORD.
- Tos. Tg. Zech.** Rejoice and be glad, assembly of Zion, for the Word {glory} of the LORD will be revealed, and he shall illumine the world from the brilliance of his glory, in that he said to make his Shekinah dwell in your midst.
- John 1:14** *The Word* became flesh and *dwelt among us*, and we beheld *his glory*.

Whether *Tos. Tg. Zech.* 2:10 existed in a similar form to that above in John's day we cannot be sure, but the conceptual similarities between the two passages could be used to argue that this targumic way of speaking is early. John of course would have to have transformed the idea of the divine Word being revealed into the idea of the Word becoming flesh, which, we can be sure, was not in the mind of the targumist.

Burney's observation about the relationship between the Word, glory, and *Shekinah* in the Targums implies that in assessing the likelihood of a targumic background to the Logos title, we are interested not only in potential Johannine allusions to the targumic Word, but also in possible allusions to the *Shekinah*, the glory of the *Shekinah*, etc. It is often the case that in a particular passage both “Word” and “*Shekinah*” (or “glory” or “glory of the *Shekinah*”) are used, or that one Targum might use “Word” where another uses “*Shekinah*.” In the case of *Tg. Neof.*, this variation often occurs between the main text and marginal readings.

One important place where the divine Word, glory, and *Shekinah* occur together is in the revelation of the glory of God to Moses on Mt. Sinai after the golden calf incident (Exod 33–34). In *Tg. Neof.* Exod 33:23, for example, God says to Moses, “You shall see the Word of the glory of my *Shekinah*” (mg.: “I make you see the Word of glory”). *Dibbura* occurs in both the main text and the marginal reading. This passage is especially significant because John 1:14–18 arguably has this revelation of the glory of God to Moses as its background, with “full of grace and truth” being John's translation of “abounding in kindness and truth” of Exod 34:6 (רַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת). The OT background of John 1:14–18 is explored in more detail in ch. 2.

Jesus Identified as the Word and the Messiah in His Baptism (John 1:32–34)

John 1:32–34 twice mentions the Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus, thereby identifying him as the Son of God. The association of the Spirit with the Messiah in OT prophecy is well known (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1) and can be seen in continuity with the Spirit of God coming upon David when he was anointed to be king (1 Sam 16:13). The Spirit “remaining [μένω] on him” especially agrees with Isa 11:2: “the Spirit of the LORD will rest [יָנַח] upon him (a Branch from the roots of Jesse).” John's testimony about Jesus that he is “the Son of God” could be understood in a purely human sense, in connection with Isa 11:2, since the concept of

sonship expressed in the metaphor “I will be a Father to him, and he will be to me a son” (2 Sam 7:14//1 Chr 17:13) originally applied to Solomon, a man from the roots of Jesse. But John’s testimony also strikingly resembles *Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89*, noted above for its use of *Dibbera*, and the verbs “descending” and “remaining” used by John can be related to the Messiah of the MT of Isa 11:2 (“resting”) and to the Word of the LORD from this Targum passage (“descending”):

Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89 When Moses entered the tent of meeting to speak with him [YHWH], he heard the voice of the Spirit who was speaking with him, *as he descended from the heaven of heavens* over the mercy seat which was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim. And from there was the Word [*Dibbera*] speaking with him.⁸⁰

Isa 11:1–2 A branch from (Jesse’s) roots shall bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him.

John 1:32–33 I have seen the Spirit *descending* as a dove *out of heaven*, and he *remained* upon him. And I did not recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, “He upon whom you see the Spirit *descending* and *remaining* upon him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.”

Targum Isaiah 11:2 uses the verb שָׁרַי for “rest.” This verb (or the causative) is also used in the Targums for the dwelling of the *Shekinah*. For example, it appears in *Tg. Song* 3:10, which is reminiscent of *Num 7:89*: “Between the cherubim over the mercy seat dwelt [שָׁרַי] the *Shekinah* of the LORD, who made his name dwell [שָׁבַן] in Jerusalem.” Thus the *Shekinah* dwells, and the Word speaks, from between the cherubim. One might add that *Tg. Isa.* 6:1–8, noted above, conveys the same idea, since in that passage Isaiah sees the heavenly reality represented by the situation in the holy of holies (i.e., he sees the glory of the Lord’s *Shekinah* in the temple, with angels, and hears the voice of the Lord’s Word speak to him).

The two verbs “descending” (agreeing with *Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89*) and “remaining” (agreeing with the MT of Isa 11:2) support the idea that “the Word (who used to speak to Moses from between the cherubim) has become flesh (from the root of David).” This connection further implies that “Son of God” in John the Baptist’s testimony (John 1:34) is not a merely human title connected to 2 Sam 7:14, but corresponds to the targumic divine “Word of the LORD,” now become a man. We also see that the initiative for this identification is from the Father, who chose this means to identify his Son to the Jews through John’s testimony.

⁸⁰Westcott noted the use of *Dibbera* in *Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89* in arguing for a targumic background for the Logos title but did not relate that passage to John 1:32–34 (*St. John*, xvi). McNamara also noted this passage but focused on the mention of the Spirit as possibly illuminating 2 Cor 3:17, “the Lord is the Spirit,” i.e. the Spirit of Jesus, who spoke to Moses (*Palestinian Judaism*, 230–31). *Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89* can be compared to *Midrash Numbers Naso* 14:19: “A voice would then descend from heaven, as though through a kind of tube of fire, to between the two cherubim, and Moses would hear the voice speaking to him from within” (Judah Slotki, *Midrash Rabbah Numbers II* [London: Soncino, 1951], 632–33).

It also may be observed that in this linking of “the Word of the LORD” with the Messiah on whom the Spirit rests, there is a clear difference from the usage of the *Memra/Dibbera* of the Targums, where the Word represents God, but not the Messiah. For example, *Tg. Isa.* 42:1 says, “Behold, my servant, . . . my chosen in whom my *Memra* (MT: my soul) is pleased. I will put my Holy Spirit upon him.” That God’s *Memra* is pleased with the Messiah obviously demonstrates that John’s usage of the Logos title (if targumic) represents an adaptation, not a simple reproduction. The targumists did not think of the Word of the LORD as the Son of God in any NT sense. When the Targum says “the Word spoke to Moses,” it is a way of saying “YHWH spoke to Moses.”

Could this connection between the Targums and the Spirit’s descent upon Jesus be mere coincidence? Is there any other reason to see John’s report of the baptism of Jesus as connected to *Ps.-J. Num* 7:89? In answer I would point to what might be called the Moses–Elijah–John the Baptist typology.⁸¹ A comparison of Exod 34 to 1 Kgs 19 (Moses and Elijah seeing God on Mt. Sinai) would seem to establish Elijah as a “new Moses.” That John the Baptist is considered a “new Elijah” is further evident in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 3:4 and Mark 1:6 compared to 2 Kgs 1:8; also Matt 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13; Luke 1:17). Viewing the Gospel of John’s experience of the Spirit’s descent upon Jesus in the light of the OT experience of Moses in the holy of holies as described in *Tg. Ps.-J. Num* 7:89 provides another way in which John the Baptist could be considered a new Moses (though there are differences, such as Moses hearing the Spirit speak, John seeing the dove representing the Spirit, and John hearing the Father speak). Perhaps John has also pointed in this direction in that the first three people mentioned by name in his gospel (besides Jesus) are John the Baptist (1: 6, 15, 19), Moses (v. 17), and Elijah (vv. 21, 25).

Moses died outside the promised land for his episode of unbelief, and was succeeded by Joshua, who brought Israel into the promised land. In this sense, Joshua is one greater than Moses, and God began to exalt Joshua at the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3:7). One sees the same pattern in Elijah and Elisha (2 Kgs 2:14), the new Moses/Joshua pair. Elijah crosses over to the east side of the Jordan before being taken up by the whirlwind, and God begins to exalt the successor Elisha in the miracle of crossing the Jordan. Then Elisha follows Joshua’s path into the promised land, where he fulfills Elijah’s unfinished mandate. Like-

⁸¹In Rom 5:14 Paul describes Adam as “a type of the coming one” (i.e. Jesus). In his discussion of Adam and Jesus it is evident that for Paul there is significance both in the similarities and differences between the two. The criteria for what makes for a “type” have been much discussed, and opinions have ranged from one extreme (someone can only be called a “type” if designated so in the NT) to the other (a type can be found almost literally under every rock). A middle ground should, I believe, recognize that there are rather clear examples of types and historical foreshadowings that are not mentioned by NT writers (but may be presumed by them). Further, types may be designated as such by other means than the use of the word “type” or “figure,” etc., as e.g. when the Messiah is called “David” in OT prophecy (Jer 30:5; Ezek 34:23; 37:24–25; Hos 3:5) and when John the Baptist is called “Elijah” (Mark 9:13). Here we are describing *historical* typology, in which a person living in one historical period, and the events with which he was involved, somehow relate to a later period in which history is to some extent repeated.

wise, John the Baptist speaks of his successor as one who is greater than him (John 1:15, 27), and the Father begins to exalt Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. John died at Herod’s palace (Matt 14:10; Mark 6:27), which according to Josephus at least was Machaerus, on the east side of the Jordan (*Ant.* 18.119). That John was aware of this typology is further evident from the fact that he added to the Synoptic material, since the activities of Jesus at the Jordan in John 1 are reminiscent of those of Joshua at the Jordan before Israel crossed, as we will see below in ch. 5.

This combination of OT and targumic backgrounds to Jesus’ baptism therefore sheds light on the phrase “the Word became flesh” not only by reference to prophecy (Isa 11:2), but also by typological connections to Israel’s history. The Word has become “flesh”—a man like Joshua (his human namesake) and Elisha (a name with the same meaning as Joshua). Since the Synoptic Gospels also describe the Spirit descending upon Jesus, they too could convey the message “the Word has become flesh” to those familiar with the reading of *Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 7:89 (see ch. 11).

While it is true that there is no direct proof that the reading in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 7:89 was current in the first century, interpreters must account for John’s emphasis on the Spirit “descending” and “remaining” on Jesus. The interpretation offered above does so in a way that agrees with a stated theme of John’s Gospel, namely, the Word became flesh. We will see this theme brought out over and over as we examine John’s Gospel from the Targum background. Therefore, one can turn the tables and suggest that John 1:32–34 can be considered evidence that *Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 7:89 preserves a pre-Christian tradition. It would hardly be the only case where *Tg. Ps.-J.*, alone of the Targums, preserves a passage of interest to NT studies.

The Word Speaks to Jacob and Nathanael (John 1:43–51)

As many interpreters recognize, the Lord’s words to Nathanael, “you [pl.] shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man,” draw in some way upon Gen 28:12, Jacob’s dream of a ladder extending from earth to heaven:

Gen 28:12

(Jacob) had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, *the angels of God were ascending and descending* upon it.

John 1:51

And he said to (Nathanael), “Truly, truly, I say to you [pl.], you [pl.] will see heaven opened, and *the angels of God ascending and descending* on the Son of Man.

This comparison can be analyzed from at least three perspectives:

1. In a verbal comparison of John 1:51 to the LXX of Gen 28:12, “the Son of Man” takes the place of the ladder:

Gen 28:12

καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνέβαινον
καὶ κατέβαινον ἐπ’ αὐτῆς

John 1:51

καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναβαίνοντας
καὶ καταβαίνοντας ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ
ἀνθρώπου

Noting this similarity, Burkett suggests that substituting Jesus for the ladder symbolizes that Jesus is the way to heaven, much as Jesus says in calling himself the way to the Father (14:6).⁸²

2. To state the obvious, John 1:51 portrays Jesus as a man—the Son of Man. As we shall argue in ch. 4, the Son of Man title depends in part on the depiction of Jacob in the OT as a new Adam.

3. Jesus' dialogue with Nathanael has several features that correspond to the LORD speaking to Jacob in Gen 28: (a) Jesus calls Nathanael "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit" (John 1:47). Jacob was at Bethel, fleeing for his life, precisely because of his deceit in Gen 27 ("Your brother came in deceit"; v. 35). His deceit consisted in lying about his identity (v. 32). "Israel" was the name given to Jacob when he had lost his deceit, answering truthfully when asked, "What is your name?" (Gen 32:27–28). Nathanael is thus like Jacob after he was renamed Israel. (b) What Jesus claims Nathanael (and/or others) will see is similar to what Jacob did see (the angels of God ascending and descending). (c) Nathanael's astonishment and change of mind at the revelation of Jesus recall Jacob's at Bethel (Gen 28:16–17).⁸³

Interpreters tend to focus on and pick one or at most two of these three perspectives—Jesus as the ladder, Jesus as the new Jacob, or the pre-incarnate Jesus as the one who appeared to Jacob. But there is no reason not to combine them: "All three interpretations of the Son of Man are conclusions an ancient reader well versed in the Scriptures and in the on-going tradition of their interpretation might reach after pondering John's Gospel."⁸⁴

⁸²Burkett, *Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*, 117–18. Cf. Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSup 220; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 164: "This suggests that Jesus as Son of Man is a mediator between heaven and earth."

⁸³"We are led to conclude that the text apparently sees the disciples of Jesus in the position of Jacob, promising them that they will see a vision just as Jacob did. The Gospel does not state explicitly that Jacob saw the heavenly Jesus, but that is a safe inference both from the examples of Abraham [8:58] and Isaiah [12:41] and from the argument in the text that *no one* (Jacob included) has ever seen God" (Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51," *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 591). But Neyrey somewhat incongruously says, "Jesus is not making himself identical with Yahweh but identifying himself as the appearing God of OT theophanies" (*ibid.*).

⁸⁴Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean, "A Tale of Two Weddings: The Divine Trickster in John" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Boston, Mass., November 21, 1999), n.p. (accessed December 11, 2007; no longer available). <http://www.roanoke.edu/religion/Maclean/SBL/DivineTrickster.htm>.

Anthony Tyrell Hanson combined two of the three perspectives: "In this piece of elaborate typology Jesus corresponds to 'the Lord' in the Bethel vision, the Lord who stood at the top of the ladder: but he also corresponds to the ladder itself, since the point of the midrash [John 1:51] is to emphasize that Jesus is now the place where God is to be found, both in heaven and on earth. . . . The conclusion is of course, that according to John he whom Jacob saw in his vision at Bethel was the pre-existent Logos, just as Moses saw him on Sinai" (*Prophetic Gospel*, 37).

Turning to the *Pal. Tgs.*, we note that all of them (including both traditions of the *Frg. Tgs.*) have a lengthy addition at Gen 28:10 describing a legend of five miracles that “were done for our father Jacob when he went forth from Beersheba to go to Haran.” The first miracle was that “the hours of the day were shortened, and the sun set before its time, because the Word [*Dibbera* or *Dibbura*] desired to speak to him.” (This desire led to the LORD’s appearance to Jacob in his dream.)⁸⁵

A number of parallels are evident between the LORD speaking to Jacob (in the MT) and Jesus speaking to Nathanael. In the *Pal. Tgs.* the parallel is with *the Word* speaking to Jacob. Three perspectives on John 1:51 and its OT and targumic contexts show us (1) Jesus as the ladder from earth to heaven; (2) Jesus as a man; and (3) Jesus as the divine Word who spoke to Jacob and now speaks to Nathanael. In combination, they suggest that the invisible Word (who spoke to Jacob) has become flesh (a person like Jacob but without sin) so as to provide for lost people (not for angels) a way to heaven. In ch. 9 we will see that the “I am he” (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings of Jesus in John can be placed into these same three categories.

Recalling Burney’s suggestion that in John 1:14 not just “the Word” but “dwelt” and “his glory” reflect targumic concepts (the *Shekinah* and the glory, or the glory of the *Shekinah*), we note that these latter two are combined in *Tg. Neof.* and *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 28:16. For MT “surely the LORD is in this place,” they say “truly the glory of the *Shekinah* of the LORD dwells in this place.” *Targum Onqelos* reads similarly but omits “the *Shekinah* of.” Elsewhere John connects the revelation of the glory of Jesus to the evidence of the supernatural in his working of miracles (John 2:11). Here likewise Jesus gives evidence of the supernatural in his knowledge of Nathanael’s circumstances when Philip called him (1:48). Nathanael’s experience could thus be described, even without referring to the Targums, as seeing the glory of the Word who became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Turning to the *Pal. Tgs.*, we find much the same language describing Jacob’s experience at Bethel before the Word became flesh.

We can also see in the rest of John’s Gospel various elements of the Word’s promises to Jacob and Jacob’s vow at Bethel as rendered in the Targums, if we understand them as fulfilled in Jesus the Word. The common divine promise to be with someone is often rendered in the Targums with the idea that God will be with someone in his Word (always *Memra*) or that the Word of the LORD will be with them or that his Word will be for their help. For MT “I am with you” *Tgs. Ps.-J.* and *Onq.* Gen 28:15 read “My Word is for your help” (similarly v. 20, and *Tg. Neof.* [mg.] v. 20). In *Tg. Neof.* this phrase is rendered “I, in my Word, am with you.” In John 13:33, Jesus the Word says he will be with the disciples a little while longer. In 14:16, he says, “I will ask the Father and he will give you *another Helper*, that he might be with you forever,” which means that until then Jesus (the Word) has been their helper (similarly, 1 John 2:1).⁸⁶ Genesis 28:15 also says, “I will not leave you

⁸⁵In arguing for a targumic background for the Logos title, Westcott noted the use of *Dibbera* in *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 28:10 but did not relate that passage to John 1:51 (*St. John*, xvi).

⁸⁶“For your help” is בסעריך. For סעך McNamara uses “aid,” Maher “assistance.” I translate this term as “help” to illustrate the possible Targum background to the term Paraclete,

until I have done what I have promised," which in *Tg. Neof.* is "My Word will not leave you . . ." (*Tgs. Onq.* and *Ps.-J.*: "I will not leave you"). Jesus the Word likewise says in connection with the promise of another helper, "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you" (John 14:18).

For MT "the LORD will be my God," *Tg. Onq.* Gen 28:21 reads, "the Word of the LORD shall be my God." *Tg. Neof.* [mg.] and *CTg. E* read, "(if) the Word of the LORD is for my help as a redeemer God."

At the same time, this journey on which Jacob is embarking can also be seen to provide a paradigm for the mission of Jesus Christ during the "little while" that he is with Israel. Jacob left his father's house on a two-fold mission. The first was to save his life from his brother Esau, whom he had wronged (Gen 27:41–45). The second was to find a wife (Gen 28:1–2). Likewise Jesus has left his Father's house and will return (John 14:12, 28) when his mission is complete. Based on the idea of the church being the bride of Christ (which we explore in chapter six as we look at John 4 in part from a background of Jacob meeting his bride Rachel at a well in Gen 29), we can relate this second mission of Jacob to the mission of Jesus. But since the bride of Christ is gained by saving her (eternal) life, this mission of Jesus also relates to the first mission of Jacob: Jesus left his Father's house because of the wrong Jacob did, and to save Jacob's life (the same may be said of all of God's people), not just for "a few days" (Gen 27:44), but forever. Seeing the twofold mission of Jacob as a paradigm of Christ's mission is consistent with the fact that in Isa 49:3–5 the Servant of the Lord is named "Israel," and this same mission is described in different words, "to bring Jacob back" to God.

One might dismiss the foregoing interpretation based on *Pal. Tgs.* Gen 28:10 by saying that the addition of the five legends is late (it is not in *Tg. Onq.*) and of no interest to NT studies. Against this, it is of interest that another of these five miracles is apparently alluded to in John 4:14, a fact which makes it more plausible that the first legend was also known at the time, and thus that something like the present reading of *Pal. Tgs.* Gen 28:10 was extant in the first century. The fifth miracle (the fourth in *Tg. Ps.-J.*) was that when Jacob removed the stone from the mouth of the well (Gen 29:10), the water surged up and overflowed for twenty years, the time that Jacob lived in Haran. Similarly, in response to the Samaritan woman's question, "You are not greater than our father Jacob are you?" Jesus replies that for anyone who drinks "the water that I shall give," that water "shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." "Our father Jacob" or "Jacob our father" occurs six to seven times in the *Pal. Tg.* legend (except that it

which is rendered as "Helper" in some NT translations. The verbal and nominal forms from root עזר in MT are often rendered in the Targums with verbal and nominal forms from root סער (see, e.g., Targums at Exod 18:4; Ps 20:2; 35:2; 60:11; 70:5; 71:12; 108:13; 119:86; 121:1, 2; 146:5). We could also note that when the targumists made such changes they liked to have precedent elsewhere in Scripture. Such precedent could come from Exod 18:4, "The other [son of Moses] was named Eliezer, for, 'the God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" Such wording could easily be interpreted as equivalent to "the God of my father was with me." For "my help" (בעזרי), all of the Targums have בסערי, the same word used when the Targums render "I am with you" as "my word is your help."

does not occur at all in *Tg. Ps.-J.*). Thus even if the legend were true, what was believed about Jacob is insignificant when compared with the work of Jesus in giving the waters of eternal life to his people. While we might be tempted to ignore the embellishments of the Targums as distracting inventions designed to cast the spotlight on humans (Jacob in this case), it is plain that familiarity with them can add to our understanding of the Gospel of John. It follows that it is the task of the interpreter to discover and bring this information out to educate those who read the Gospel without knowledge of this background.

HOW JOHN HAS ADAPTED THE DIVINE WORD OF THE TARGUMS AS A TITLE FOR JESUS

One might observe first of all that the examples discussed above seem to justify including *Dibbera/Dibbura* along with *Memra* in examining the possibility of a targumic background to the Logos title. Although *Dibbera/Dibbura* appears in a small number of cases compared to *Memra*, it figures prominently in possible Targum passages illuminating portions of John 1. Of the seven passages from John 1 that we looked at in the previous section, *Dibbera/Dibbura* figures in the last three (John 1:14–18, 32–34, and 43–51). These results reinforce the suggestion that John’s terminology of “the Word” fits targumic usage, since *Dibbera/Dibbura* is used in this absolute sense, while *Memra* is not (or at least, its absolute usage is rare enough to be considered anomalous when it does occur). Adding to this conclusion is the fact that though John 1:32–34 is the fourth of the passages discussed above, chronologically it would be the first identification of Jesus as the Word in the ministry of Jesus, coming after his baptism, which, again, recalls *Pal. Tgs. Num 7:89*, “from there the Word [*Dibbera*] spoke to him.”

John Lightfoot wrote in 1859 that almost all then-recent commentaries took note of targumic *Memra* and that this expression “may something (i.e., somewhat) enlighten the matter now before us.” Lightfoot was noncommittal, however, noting, for example, that for “by my Spirit” of Zech 7:12 the Targum has “by my Word,” which would not fit John’s purpose.⁸⁷ We have already noted that the Word is clearly not the Messiah in the Targums (see above on *Tg. Isa. 42:1*, where God’s Word delights in the Servant of the LORD; the MT says “my Soul delights in him”). For another example, on the fourth night of the haggadah of the Four Nights mentioned above, the Messiah and Moses return, with the Word of the LORD leading them. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Deut 30:4* says that the divine Word will gather Israel through the mediation of Elijah and the Messiah.

Clearly, then, if the divine Word of the Targums lies behind John’s Logos title, some modification of the concept would be required in the process of appropriation. Does that fact constitute evidence against the Targum background of

⁸⁷John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica; Matthew–I Corinthians* (Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 1859; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 238.

the Logos title? Not when one recognizes that all proposals regarding the origin of the Logos title require some modification of the source concept. For instance, neither the OT word of the LORD, nor Wisdom, nor Philo's Logos is identified with the Messiah. Reasons that scholars have rejected targumic *Memra/Dibbera* as the background for the Logos title will be explored more in ch. 12. For now we can say that a substantial number of passages in John 1 make good sense when seen against a targumic background for the Logos title, and that these connections reinforce John's opening statement that "the Word was God." In particular, the Targums support that idea that the divine Word was the God of Moses (John 1:14 compared to *Pal. Tgs. Exod 33–34*, to be examined in more detail in ch. 2; and John 1:32–33 compared to *Pal. Tgs. Num 7:89*) and the God of Jacob (John 1:51 compared to *Pal. Tgs. Gen 28:10*). These results suggest that McNamara was correct in his proposal that John used the Logos title because in the Targums the Word of the LORD is a metonym for God. While we can't claim that the divine Word of the Targums refers explicitly to the second person of the Godhead, the fact that the divine Word is employed especially in contexts where God interacts with the creation to accomplish his will in the world (especially the redemption of his people) makes it a suitable term to apply specifically to the Son. While *Memra* and *Dibbera* in the Targums are used to refer to God under certain circumstances, and *Memra* implies the name of God, the Tetragrammaton, John uses Logos specifically and exclusively of the Son. Thus the Targums make clear that by "the Word," John means, in NT terms, "YHWH the Son."

JOHN'S MOTIVES FOR THE LOGOS TITLE

Although at this point there is much more to be said in favor of the Targums as forming the background for the Word of John's Gospel, from what has already been seen we can suggest John's motivation for identifying Jesus as the targumic Word who has become flesh. I would put John's motives in two categories: *Christology* and *apologetics*.

Christology

If it is correct to say that the Logos title has a Targum background based on the fact that the Word of the LORD implies the Tetragrammaton and refers to God through metonymy, especially as he interacts with his creation, then presumably John has a christological motive for identifying Jesus as the Word. Jesus is YHWH the Son. John is unique in calling Jesus the Word, but is he unique in identifying him as YHWH? We discuss this question in ch. 11, but the short answer for now is no. In terms of Christology, then, the question becomes, why does John use this particular way of saying that Jesus is YHWH?

I suggested above that the symbolism of the Spirit descending as a dove at the baptism of Jesus points to a Targum reading of Num 7:89 that would identify Jesus

as the Word who spoke to Moses from between the cherubim. My reader might have taken note of the fact that, although the reports of the baptism of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels do not stress “descending” and “remaining,” corresponding to Jesus as “Word” and as “Messiah,” nevertheless the Synoptics point just as readily to *Tg. Ps.-J. Num 7:89* as does John, since they also describe the Spirit descending on Jesus. They too could have said “the Word has become flesh.” In ch. 11, we will note a number of other synoptic texts where the same conclusion comes out. Why, then, does only John explicitly identify Jesus as the Word?

My suggestion is that in terms of Christology, identifying Jesus as the Word is only a means to an end. That end is to identify Jesus as both fully God and fully human. The goal is not simply to identify Jesus as the divine Word of the Targums; rather, identifying Jesus as the Word is a means to identifying him as YHWH the God of Israel, a name he shares with the Father (as we discuss in more detail in ch. 3). For Aramaic-speaking Jews, accustomed to hearing the Scriptures read in the synagogue, the Aramaic Scriptures help make a connection between what John says about Jesus, or what Jesus says about himself, and what the OT says about God, or what in the OT God says about himself.

Again we can note how John 12:37 seems to depend on Num 14:11:

John 12:37

Though he had performed so many *signs* before them, they were *not believing in him*.

MT of Num 14:11

How long will they *not believe in me*, in spite of all the *signs* which I have performed in their midst?

Is the similarity a coincidence? Does John just happen to use the terminology of Num 14:11 without intending that we see a parallel? Or are we to understand that history is repeating itself such that the unbelief of the Jews in Jesus parallels the unbelief of the OT Israelites in YHWH their redeemer? When we read this passage in conjunction with the Prologue of John’s gospel, where Jesus is referred to as the Word who is God, and in light of the Targums of Num 14:11, we see that in John 12:37 the Gospel writer clearly intends to portray Jesus as YHWH, the God of Israel, now come in the flesh:

Tg. Neof. Num 14:11

How long will they *not believe in the name of my Word*, in spite of all the *signs of my miracles* which I have performed among them?

Tgs. Onq. and Ps.-J.

How long will they *not believe in my Word* . . .

In short, identifying Jesus as the Word helps readers make the proper connection between John 12:37 and Num 14:11 and draw the appropriate christological conclusion. Jesus says to Philip in the upper room, “Have I been with you so long, and you have not come to know me?” (John 14:9). But this is the same Philip who was not slow to recognize Jesus as the Messiah: “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”

(1:45). Perhaps John observed many in the church in its second and third generations who, like Philip, acknowledged and believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but did not fully comprehend his divine nature. This, it seems to me, is John's great christological burden as he writes.

Apologetics

I believe there is a second reason that John identifies Jesus as the Word. John might have seen the incorporation of the *Memra* theology into the Targums as a providential preparation for the coming of the Son into the world. Beyond the passages which are of christological significance, there are many texts that over time could be looked back upon as something like the "prophecy" of Caiaphas (John 11:49–52). John says that Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. What John takes from this statement is quite different from what Caiaphas meant. Similarly, there are many texts in the Targums that speak of the divine Word with no explicit intention to refer to the Messiah, but which, when "Son" is substituted for "Word," can be taken as "unwitting prophecies" in the same sense.

We will look at the phenomenon of unwitting targumic prophecies with reference to the divine Word of the Targums in ch. 10. I suggest that John identifies Jesus as the Word as a way of appealing to his fellow Aramaic-speaking Jews who have survived the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in c.e. 70. Ezekiel 39:23 says that as a consequence of the exile to Babylon, "The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity, because they *acted unfaithfully against me*, and *I hid my face from them*, so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell by the sword, all of them." The changes made in *Tg. Ezek.* are quite suggestive of the first-century c.e. exile, once Jesus of Nazareth is identified as the divine Word, especially in light of the Jewish tradition that the miracles indicating the presence of the *Shekinah* in Israel ceased forty years prior to the destruction of the temple by the Romans.⁸⁸

The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile because of their sins, because *they dealt falsely with my Word*, so that *I removed my Shekinah from them*, and delivered them into the hand of their enemies, and they were slain by the sword, all of them.

If the tradition of the cessation of the miracles indicating the presence of the *Shekinah* in Israel was current when John wrote, then combining this tradition

⁸⁸ According to the Mishnah and Talmud, the westernmost light of the lamp in the temple never went out, which "was taken as a sign that the *Shechinah* rested over Israel" (*b. Yoma* 39a; pp. 184–85 n.7 of the Soncino edition). The rabbis also believed that a crimson thread that was tied to the sanctuary door turned white when the scapegoat reached the wilderness on the day of atonement: "Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-coloured strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the *Hekal* would open by themselves, until R Johanan b. Zakkai rebuked them" (*b. Yoma* 39b; see also *m. Yoma* 6:8; *b. Shabbath* 22b; *b. Menahot* 86b).

with *Tg. Ezek.* 39:23 would lead naturally to the question, "How did the LORD's people deal falsely with his Word forty years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem?" John provides a compelling answer by identifying Jesus as this divine Word.

CONCLUSION

We have now seen in a preliminary way that a Targum background to the Logos title makes good sense and that there is a good deal of evidence for it just from the first chapter of John, both in the Prologue and beyond. In the next chapter, we will go into more detail on the OT background of John 1:14–18, reinforcing what has been said so far. The third chapter examines the overall mission of Jesus as revealing the Father's name, and what that means in the light of the Targums. In subsequent chapters, we will see that Jesus as a human speaks and acts as people of God did in OT times, yet without their sinful failures. At the same time, he speaks and acts on earth as the LORD did when he "came down" from heaven in OT times. These two features are explained by John's assertion that "the Word [i.e., YHWH, the Son] became flesh, and dwelt among us." In both features we will see continuity with the OT as well as change due to the incarnation. Thus, much of John's Gospel can be seen as a commentary on this introductory statement. In the synagogue readings in Palestine, the Jews would hear the Scriptures read in Hebrew, then in an Aramaic translation. Those who knew both languages would hear first of the person and works of the LORD as recorded in the MT. Then they would very often hear in Aramaic of the person and works of the Word of the LORD. John shows his readers that this progression of thought was not just a curiosity of the Aramaic translations read in the synagogues every Sabbath, but pointed to a deeper reality in the history of redemption, in the transition from the old covenant to the new, from the pre-incarnate Word to the incarnate Word.