

Excerpt from:

John 1:1 *Caveat Lector* (Reader Beware)

"In the beginning was the word" does *not* mean "In the beginning was the Son"

The Meaning of "Word" - by Anthony Buzzard

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Anthony Buzzard is the author of numerous books including: Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: a Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus; Who is Jesus? A Plea for a Return to Belief in Jesus the Messiah and The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self Inflicted Wound. Anthony is the author of many theological articles and papers.

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Sensible Bible study would require that we attempt to understand what "word" would mean in the background of John's thinking. Commentators have long recognized that John is thoroughly Hebrew in his approach to theology. He is steeped in the Hebrew Bible. "Word" had appeared some 1,450 times (plus the verb "to speak" 1,140 times) in the Hebrew Bible known so well to John and Jesus. *The standard meaning of "word" is utterance, promise, command, etc.* It never meant a personal being — never "the Son of God." Never did it mean a spokesman. Rather, word generally signified the index of the mind — an expression, a word. There is a wide range of meanings for "word" according to a standard source. "Person," however, is not among these meanings.

The noun *davar* [word] occurs some 1455 times...In legal contexts it means dispute (Ex. 18:16, 19; 24:14), accusation, verdict, claim, transfer and provision...[otherwise] request, decree, conversation, report, text of a letter, lyrics of a song, *promise*, annals, event, commandment, plan (Gen. 41:37; II Sam. 17:14; II Chron. 10:4; Esther 2:2; Ps. 64:5, 6; Isa. 8:10), language...Dan. 9:25: decree of a king; [also:] thing, matter or event. Of particular theological significance is the phrase "the word of the Lord/God came to..."...In Jud. 3:19-21 Ehud delivers a secret message (i.e. a sword to kill him)...Yahweh commands the universe into existence. Yahweh tells the truth so everyone can rely on Him. The word of the Lord has power because it is an extension of Yahweh's knowledge, character and ability. Yahweh knows the course of human events. Similarly human words reflect human nature ("the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart/mind")...Words are used for good or evil purposes (Prov. 12:6)...Words can cheer, correct and calm. [3]

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We might add that "As a man thinks in his heart [and speaks] so *is* he" (Prov. 23:7). A person "is" his word. "In the beginning there was the word," that is, the word of God. Clearly John did not say that the word was a *spokesperson*. Word had never meant that. Of course the word can *become* a spokesperson, and it did when God expressed Himself in a Son by bringing Jesus onto the scene of history. So then Hebrews 1:2 says: "God, *after* He had spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, at the end of these days has spoken in a Son." The implication is that God did not *earlier* speak through His unique Son, but later He did. There is an important chronological distinction between the time *before the Son* and the time after the Son. There was a time when the Son was not yet.

It would be a serious mistake of interpretation to discard the massively attested meaning of "word" in the Hebrew matrix from which John wrote and attach to it a meaning it never had — a "person," second member of a divine Trinity. No lexicon of the Hebrew Bible ever listed *davar* (Hebrew for "word") as a person, God, angel or man.

[3] *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1, 912, emphasis added.

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