2. The Logos in John's Prologue

a. John is the only New Testament writer to specifically and directly connect the concept of the Logos with the Messiah. Nevertheless, the connection is suggested by others, most notably Paul and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews.

- Paul observed concerning Jesus in his Colossian epistle that He is both the image of the invisible God and the incarnate fullness of deity (1:15, 2:9) as well as the One through whom all things came into existence (1:16). So also He is the embodiment of God's wisdom and knowledge (2:1-3). These sorts of statements closely align Paul with John's logos doctrine, though he never used the term. Instead, he tended to use the concept of *sonship* to express the truths associated with John's logos doctrine (cf. Colossians 1:13ff; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; etc.).

- The Hebrews writer also came near to the logos concept when he declared that God's full disclosure to men – His word of truth and wisdom – has come in His incarnate Son who is His express image and His revelation made flesh. So also he ascribed the creative fiat to the Son (cf. "word of God" in 11:3) and observed that He upholds all things by the exercise of His own power (1:1-3). Like Paul, the author of Hebrews emphasized the language of *sonship* in speaking of the Messiah (1:1-12), but he more directly connected the divine Son with the divine *word* (cf. 1:2 with 11:3).

b. John alone explicitly identified Jesus with the Logos, but he did so in a particular manner. Three things are particularly important in this regard:

1) First of all, John's Logos isn't the Logos of Jewish and Greek philosophy. Again, John's Logos is the actual reality and embodiment of the concept the philosophers formulated in theory. The two are not – and cannot be – identical inasmuch as John's Logos is the living truth behind the philosophers' observations and speculation; it is the living substance of that which men discerned dimly but couldn't fully define or lay hold of.

2) Secondly, a careful distinction must be made between Jesus and the Logos. The man Jesus isn't the eternal Logos, but the Logos *incarnate*; the Logos is the bridge between the eternal God and His creation, and so between God and the man Jesus. Thus, the Logos of 1:1-3 is the eternal, divine and pre-incarnate entity which, by virtue of incarnation, *became* Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word (1:14; cf. Revelation 19:11-13).

3) The previous observation points to a third consideration, which is that John's prologue deals with the Logos in both pre-incarnate and incarnate terms and they must be carefully distinguished. This is especially so since John presented these two categories, not in a purely linear order (pre-incarnate followed by incarnate), but in a more organic, thematic fashion.

3. The Logos in Relation to God (1:1-2)

John initiated his prologue by establishing the intimate relationship between the Logos and God. The other gospel writers also emphasized the God-Christ relationship, but they did so in terms of the incarnation – Yahweh's coming in the person of His Servant/Messiah. John uniquely began his account, not with the incarnate Messiah promised by the Scriptures, but with His pre-incarnate existence. This not only shifts his introduction of Jesus away from the matter of his humanness, it locates Jesus' origin in a non-human – indeed, non-creaturely – entity John identified as the Logos. Here again it is critical to recognize how John's readers would have understood this title. Whether their understanding was informed more by the prevailing Greek conception or its Jewish counterpart, everyone reading John's account would have framed the logos concept in terms of the particulars discussed previously: *To the Greek and Jewish philosophers and their followers, the Logos represented the interface between the divine and the natural – between the created order and that which created it and upholds and governs it*.

- The Logos signified the principle of divine knowledge and understanding (wisdom) which expresses itself in purposeful, directed and effectual power in both originating and ordering the material universe. Thus the Logos embodies the divine will and power as much as divine knowledge; the Logos makes actual, tangible and functional that which exists in the divine mind and purpose.

- By implication, to observe accurately the creation's nature and manifold operation is to see the face of the Logos and therefore also the face of the *divine* (whether "divine" is conceived in terms of Greek paganism or Jewish monotheism).

These are central premises behind John's use of the Logos concept and they are critically important for understanding his prologue and why he constructed it the way he did.

a. Precisely because John first connected the Christ with the Logos, he necessarily situated his introduction at the outset in the realm of eternity when nothing existed except God Himself. This pre-creation setting is evident first in John's use of the prepositional phrase, *"in the beginning"* (1:1a), which also introduces the creation account (Genesis 1:1), but he then made it explicit by assigning the work of creation to the Logos (John 1:3). In this way John indicated his first priority, namely establishing the intimate association between the Logos and God Himself.

   Some have argued that the phrase, "in the beginning," refers to the time at which God initiated the work of creation. So the opening statement in the book of Genesis: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*; it was "in the beginning" that God created the universe. This understanding, then, allows for the Logos to be present at the time of the creative fiat – the time of the "beginning," but without necessarily being eternal and uncreated. This view was embraced by the ancient Arians and is maintained by the Jehovah's Witnesses today; the Logos is not eternally existent, but is the first creation (the "only begotten") of the One eternal, uncreated God and the instrument by which He created all other things.

Taken as written, John's opening declaration might seem to support this interpretation. Even his use of the imperfect tense of the verb "to be" only indicates that the Logos already existed at the time of the beginning: The Logos *was* in the beginning. Again, if the "beginning" refers to the time just preceding God's work of creation, this presents no challenge to a non-eternal Logos.

The people of John's time, however, wouldn't have had such a quandary. Unlike the Arians and Jehovah's Witnesses, they weren't concerned with the difficulties of Trinitarian doctrine. The philosophical conceptions of the Logos *did* allow for its eternality; in fact, they *demanded* it. The reason was that the Logos signified the divine knowledge, wisdom and will. As long as the divine existed (whether as a divine principle or divine personal being), the Logos existed. And so John's readers would have taken his statement at face value: The Logos existed before time, space and matter; the Logos existed eternally with eternal divinity.

b. John's second statement builds upon this idea by further defining the relationship between the Logos and the divine: The Logos was *with* God (1:1b). Again, the philosophers and their disciples wouldn't have disagreed with this in the least: The nature of the Logos as they understood it implies that it was eternally with God (or "god"); how can God be separated from His mind, knowledge and will?

But John was saying something more – something that begins to move his conception of the Logos beyond the notion embraced by natural philosophy. For John's statement speaks to *relationship*, not proximity. That is, he was affirming *how*, not *where,* the Logos was in relation to God. His language conveys, not that the Logos was "with" God in terms of time, space, ethics or judgment, but relational orientation. John's expression is perhaps best rendered, "the Logos was *face-to-face* with God," where the issue is relational intimacy and oneness. This statement thus elaborates on the Logos in two significant ways:

1) First, it shows that the Logos must be *distinguished* from God. At first glance this might appear to make a solid break between John's Logos and that of the philosophers. For if the Logos is intrinsic to the divine (whether conceived as a principle or living being), how can it be face-to-face with that divine entity? But Philo, at least, would have no problem with John's assertion. For him, the Logos denotes God's wisdom, and while His wisdom is intrinsic to Him, it is distinct from Him in that the two aren't identical. God's wisdom reveals and expresses Him, but it is not *Him.*

2) Secondly, it shows that the Logos existed in the beginning in *absolute oneness* with God. The Logos must be distinguished from God, but in such a way that the two yet exist in perfect accord. Once again the Greek and Jewish philosophers would say "yea and amen." For if the Logos represents the divine knowledge, purpose, will and power, clearly the Logos and "god" are perfectly agreed. They are "face-to-face" in the sense that they are one in thought, intent, judgment, and work.

c. But as much as the philosophers and their followers could affirm John's first two declarations, his third would have rocked them. For the Logos he was introducing to his readers wasn't merely present with God in the beginning in a relationship of perfect unity; John's Logos *was* God Himself. Within the purview of the prevailing notions of the Logos, this was a step too far. For any Jew – including Philo and his Alexandrian brethren – the fundamental tenet of faith is the oneness of God expressed in Israel's *Shema* ("Here, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.") The Jews acknowledged the intimacy the Scriptures draw between God and His wisdom and word (ref. again Proverbs 8), but this is a far cry from what John was asserting. Even the most Hellenized Jews were staunch monotheists and this left no place for a divine Logos, let alone a divine Messiah. Yes, Messiah would come in Yahweh's name and in the power of His Spirit, but in the same sense as other *men* before him, including Moses, David and the prophets.

The same monotheistic concern underlies the Jehovah's Witnesses' insistence that this statement should be rendered, *"the Logos was **a** god"* – that is, a lesser divine being "begotten" by the un-begotten God. They justify this by the absence of the definite article before the noun *God*. But John's grammar was necessary as well as intentional; had he included the article he'd have been asserting that God and the Logos are one and the same, identical and co-extensive (which accords with the various forms of modalism). By omitting the article, he was indicating that the Logos and God share the same essence and nature, but without being identical and interchangeable (cf. 17:17; 1 John 4:16). Ironically, the very grammar Jehovah's Witnesses cite to refute the Logos' full deity actually affirms it.

d. The first verse of John's prologue contains three declarations which build upon one another synergistically. Together they form a completed whole and the next statement in verse 2 expresses that whole in summary fashion while also making a contribution to it: *"This one was in the beginning with God."*

The summary nature of this statement is evident in John's repetition of the two prepositional phrases of verse 1. In this way he punctuated his opening assertions that the Logos existed in the beginning before the creation and did so in a face-to-face, intimate and harmonious relationship with God – a relationship of oneness expressive of the fact that the Logos was itself God. At the same time, John deviated from his pattern thus far by referring to the Logos, not by name, but with a demonstrative pronoun ("this one"). As used here, this type of pronoun has an emphatic quality that suits John's design to bring his first three declarations into sharp focus with a succinct summary. *But he may also have intended it as a means of transition.* For the next two verses describing the Logos' creative role (vv. 3-4) use personal pronouns – pronouns which strongly suggest a *personal* quality to the Logos. In comparison, the demonstrative pronoun only hints at this quality, and so John may have employed it as a kind of bridge: a way to transition from the prevailing notion of an impersonal Logos (which his opening statements would have seemed to allow) to his forthcoming identification of the true Logos as a personal being – a personal being who is Himself the personal creator God.