

# WHAT WORD BECAME FLESH? — JOHN 1:14

by Avram Yehoshua

<http://SeedofAbraham.net>

The Apostle John wrote that the Word became flesh (John 1:14). This was an emphatic statement of the incarnation—God the Son became a human being. This was also a rebuke to Gnostic Christianity, which said that the flesh of man (matter) was evil, and so, the holy God could never become a man. To them, Yeshua (Jesus) was just an ordinary man whom the Holy Spirit had been bestowed upon to make him the Christ.<sup>1</sup> John's *Word* becoming flesh also refutes Judaism today, which interestingly enough, follows Greek Gnosticism when it says that the Messiah will be just an ordinary man whom God has given His Spirit to, so that he can become the Messiah.

John, after 13 verses, hasn't yet told us the name of the man whom he has already described as the Word and co-Creator (Jn. 1:1-3), and the Light (vv. 4, 7, 8, 9). John will tell us his name in v. 17, but the question is, what *Word* was John speaking of that had become flesh? Today we know that John spoke of Yeshua of Nazareth as the Word of God (Jn. 18:5; Rev. 19:13), but John was introducing his readers to a man he hadn't yet named, and saying that some Word had taken on flesh (become a man):

“And the *Word* became flesh and *dwelt* among us, and we beheld His *glory*, the *glory* as of the only begotten of the Father, full of *grace and truth*.” (John 1:14)

The Greek word for *dwelt* is *eska'nosen* ἐσκηνώσεν, which literally means to dwell or ‘tabernacle.’<sup>2</sup> It calls to mind the Tabernacle of Moses where the divine presence of Yahveh *dwelt or tabernacled* with Israel, beginning in the Wilderness. The Hebrew for *dwelt* is *mish'kahn* מִשְׁכָּן and means,

‘a habitation, dwelling; specially a tent, tabernacle; often of the sacred tabernacle of the Israelites (Ex. 25:9; 26:1, 6, 7, 12-13, 15, 17-18, 20, 26-27, 30, 35; Deut. 16:13, 16; 31:10, etc.).’<sup>3</sup>

The Greek word for *glory* complements the word *dwelt* and also points to the Tabernacle of Moses. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states that *dwelt*,

‘in combination with *glory*...suggests the personalizing of the bright cloud that rested on the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 40:34).’<sup>4</sup>

*Shekinat* Yahveh is Hebrew for, ‘the visible Presence of the invisible God in the Cloud of Glory.’ The Glory Cloud was over the Ark of the Covenant (Lev. 16:2, 13), which was the heart of the Tabernacle of Moses. John, in speaking of the Word in relation to God's glory and dwelling, draws our attention to the Two Tablets of Stone inside the Ark. He's declaring that what the *words* of God that were written on those *stone* tablets represented had become *flesh*! The words on the Tablets had been written with the Finger of God (Ex. 31:18). They were God's *words* on stone, which speak of their being eternal (Is. 40:8). The words pictured *the* Word of God *before* Yeshua was born in Bethlehem. That's how John could speak

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<sup>1</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, Old Testament; Everett F. Harrison, New Testament, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 1073.

<sup>2</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, author and General editor, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, no publishing date given), p. 434. The Septuagint uses the Greek word for the Tabernacle of Moses.

<sup>4</sup> Pfeiffer and Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1074.

of Yeshua as the *Word* before he even mentions His name. In verse 14, John is writing that what the ancient Tabernacle of Moses embodied, the living God *dwelling* among Israel through His Glory Cloud, *and* His words written on the Two Tablets of Stone, *had walked among John's contemporaries as a man!*

John also spoke of the Word as the Light (Jn. 1:4, 7, 8, 9). This is the Light *before* Creation. God's first words recorded in Scripture are, 'Let there be Light! (Gen. 1:3), which in Hebrew is, 'Light, be!,' and Yeshua *came forth* from the Father as the living *Word* of God, *the Light* of God of the first day. Yeshua is 'one' with the father, and yet, distinct from Him, similar to a man being one with his wife (Gen. 2:24) or son.<sup>5</sup> This *Word* of John's is no ordinary man, but the uniquely begotten Son of God.

In the phrase, 'as of the only begotten,' *only* is *mono'genous* μονογενους and translators correctly write it as 'only begotten,' although *uniquely begotten* also expresses John's thought. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* translates the word as,

"being the *only one of its kind* within a specific relationship, *one and only*...of children: of Isaac, Abraham's only son...being the only one of its kind or class, *unique (in kind)* of something that is the only example of its category."<sup>6</sup>

John continues to write in v. 14 of the uniqueness of this man whom he hasn't yet named. The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* also speaks of the term as being *unique* and goes on to describe how Abraham, having more than one son, could have been told by God to take his 'only son' (better, his *unique son*, Isaac) and sacrifice him (Gen. 22:2). It states:

'pertaining to what is *unique* in the sense of being the only one of the same kind or class—'unique, only'...he who had received the promises presented his only son... Heb. 11:17. Abraham, of course, did have another son, Ishmael...but Isaac was a *unique* son in that he was a son born as the result of certain promises made by God' (to a woman who was well past the age of child bearing; Gen. 18:9-14). 'Accordingly, he could be called a' *unique* 'son, since he was the only one of his kind.'<sup>7</sup>

Isaac was the only unique son that Abraham had, in that he was promised by God and then supernaturally conceived, and so, too, was Yeshua, but the parallel stops there.<sup>8</sup> In a very real sense, we are all 'sons of God,' but *only* Yeshua is the *uniquely begotten* Son of God, as John speaks of in verse 14. Yeshua was alive *before* He was born in Bethlehem (Ps. 110:1; Micah 5:2; Mt. 22:41-46) and John writes of Him as the co-Creator, the Light and the Word of God (the Father). Being begotten means that Yeshua was God the Son, *having the same nature* as the Father and the Holy Spirit—deity.<sup>9</sup> Adam and Eve were created, not begotten. Neither they, nor any man or woman born of Adam and Eve, can claim existence before Creation or being begotten by God as Yeshua was before Creation.

John goes on to say in verse 14 that this man was *full of Grace and Truth: karitos kai alay'thee'as*

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<sup>5</sup> John 8:42; 16:27-28, 30; 17:8.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Bauer, augmented by William F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 527.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida, editors, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), p. 591, #58:52.

<sup>8</sup> See *Recognize this Man?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Recognize-This-Man.pdf> for more on Yeshua's uniqueness in being conceived in the womb of a virgin.

<sup>9</sup> See *Yeshua—God the Son* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Yeshua-God-the-Son.pdf> for the Hebraic Perspective on Yeshua's deity. Yeshua is God the Son, the unique Son of God, begotten, not created.

χαριτος και αληθειας, which again points to the man's deity because this phrase is often used of Yahveh and is found in Yahveh's description of Himself (Ex. 34:6). When these Greek words are translated into Hebrew they reveal both the character of God *and* His Torah (His Law or words to Israel). With this phrase, John is presenting this man as having the same character as Yahveh and filled with the words of Yahveh (Jn. 14:23-24).

Translating the Greek phrase of John 1:14 (*grace and truth*) into Hebrew, we find the phrase *hesed v'emet*<sup>10</sup> חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת. According to scholars it's the 'direct equivalent of' the Greek phrase.<sup>11</sup>

1. *Hesed* describes God's nature as faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and is associated with the covenant that He made with Israel through Moses, which contained the Law, the very words of God. It's because of God's character and nature of *hesed* that He was able to make a covenant with Israel *and maintain it*, despite Israel's sins. This also applies to the Body of Messiah.
2. *Emet* speaks of God as Truth. *Emet* is not an abstract Western philosophical concept. Yahveh is Truth, as Yeshua intimated to Pilate (Jn. 18:37-38). Truth was standing before Pilate, but he wasn't able to see it, nor was he interested in knowing it (Jn. 14:6-9). God is *the Reality*; He is the 'center' of the universe, *the Truth*, and all His words are a reflection of that (Dt. 8:1-3f.).

*Hesed* and *emet* ('Grace and truth') were not absent from God's relationship with ancient Israel. On the contrary, He *revealed* Himself to Moses and Israel as such. F. F. Bruce notes of *hesed v'emet* that,

"the same language is repeatedly used throughout the O.T. *as a summary of his character* (cf. Ps. 86:15)."<sup>12</sup>

Yahveh is full of, or abounding in, Grace and Truth. In Ex. 34:6, Yahveh declares His character to Moses (and I've translated 'grace' in Ex. 34:6 as it should be: *faithful forgiving-loving-kindness*):<sup>13</sup>

"And Yahveh passed before him and proclaimed, 'Yahveh! Yahveh God! Merciful and gracious! Long-suffering and *abounding in faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and truth*' (Exodus 34:6).

As the Father is, so is the Son. This will help us to better understand what John will say about this man three verses later in v. 17, when John speaks of Moses and presents *Yeshua* as the man he's been describing for 16 verses. In v. 14, John is saying that Yahveh's attributes were *fully* present within this man, the *Word* made *flesh*. John's statement in v. 17 is not a contradiction of the Law of Moses, but the true basis for who this man is: the God of Israel, His faithfulness and His Torah (words).

The *Word* was first seen when God said, 'Light, be!' It was both the living *Word* of God and God's Light (Jn. 8:12). In John 1:14, the Apostle, by his use of the terms *tabernacled* and *glory*, points to the *words* that God had written with His finger on the Two Tablets of Stone—the Ten Commandments,<sup>14</sup> which had

<sup>10</sup> The 'v' in *v'emet* means 'and.'

<sup>11</sup> Paul B. Sumner, חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת (*Hesed v'Emet*) an unpublished paper edited by Avram Yehoshua, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> The Hebrew word *hane* חַנּוּן is the word for 'grace.' The word *hesed* is better translated as faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and this is the word that is written in the Hebrew text.

<sup>14</sup> The Ten Commandments symbolize or represent all the words of God, i.e. all His commandments, statutes and ordinances, etc., that are found in the Torah (the Law of Moses). They're a unified whole. It's only the Church that has artificially divided the Law into the so-called ceremonial laws and the moral laws.

Some people wrongly say that we only need to follow the Ten, but nowhere does God say that. Only man separates the Ten from the others. The Ten are the foundation of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mt.

the Glory Cloud (the Light) over it. John presents this man as the living embodiment of the Light, the character and nature of God, and the Word of God that dwelt in the Tabernacle of Moses.<sup>15</sup>

### ***John 1:17—BUT Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ***

John 1:17 is the first place in John's Gospel that he presents the *name* of the man, and with this, John presents Yeshua as Israel's long awaited Messiah (Christ). Comparing four different Bibles for the verse, we see that two have *but* in italics, which alerts us to the fact that it's not in the Greek text for either the KJV or the NKJV, while the other two Bibles rightly exclude *but*:

KJV: 'For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'

NKJV: 'For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'

NASB: 'For the Law<sup>16</sup> was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.'

NRSV: 'The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'

There is no *but* in any Greek text. The KJV and NKJV translators added it to *contrast* the Law of Moses with Yeshua because to them, the Law 'had been done away with' by Jesus. That is not, though, what the Apostle John had in mind. The Law was God's gracious gift to Israel. It not only recorded the very acts of *hesed* and *emet*, God's faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and truth that God had done for Israel (Passover and Red Sea, etc.), it also had within it the very *words* of God, which revealed Who He was and what He expected of His covenant people (i.e. how to live one's life with the God of Israel, which meant life and not death). Israel had both *experienced* God's *hesed* and *emet*, and had a Book (the Torah) that recorded God's acts and words of *hesed* and *emet* toward Israel.

In God's *Word* being made flesh, the reality that the Book (or rather Scroll) spoke of, God's *hesed* and *emet*, was alive in Israel in Yeshua of Nazareth. Far from nullifying or contrasting the Law, John is saying that Yeshua was the walking Law of God, *the* Word of God. *Faithful, forgiving-loving-kindness and truth* in v. 17 cannot be used in the sense of Law vs. Yeshua because the Law is the verbal (written) reflection of Yahveh and His words. The contrast that can be biblically made is that what was in the Scroll had come to life, so to speak, in Yeshua. Therefore, as the Word of God, Yeshua is the living Torah, the em-

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Sinai. Interestingly enough, the Two great commandments aren't even in the Ten, and yet, the Two embody all the commandments (Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:36-40); how much more the Ten? The Torah is a seamless 'whole' or 'unity,' like a human body, which can be dissected into parts, but works best as a whole. Is an eye more important than a leg? Some might say, 'Yes,' but the body needs both to be a normal human being. Every commandment that God has given to Israel is important and speaks of God's love and wisdom for Israel (Dt. 4:5-8; 8:1-3), and consequently, for the Body of Messiah (Mt. 4:4).

Yeshua revealed what the essence, core or center of the commandment 'not to murder' meant by equating hate with murder. This understanding was 'always there' in the commandment, but needed Yeshua to reveal it. *Torah*, which means *instruction*, is Genesis through Revelation, as seen through the eyes of Yeshua.

<sup>15</sup> The symbolism of the entire Tabernacle is truly awesome (see <http://seedofabraham.net/wordpress/books-cds/>).

<sup>16</sup> *Law* should be capitalized (as the NASB does) because it's a proper noun and speaks of a specific law, the Law of Moses. Marcus Dods writes that the Law of Moses is the 'true revelation of God's will;' Dods, *The Expositor's Greek Testament: The Gospel of St. John*, vol. one, p. 690.

bodiment of all that Yahveh is and has spoken. Paul Sumner put's it this way:

‘The Torah (the Book of *hesed* and *emet*) was given through Moses; *The Hesed and Emet* (in that Book) came into being by Yeshua the Messiah.’<sup>17</sup>

Yeshua, as God's Word, is the Law incarnate.<sup>18</sup> John is saying that the Torah, the Law of Moses, which is permeated with God's faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and truth, major characteristics of Yahveh's personality, and the deeds that He has done for Israel, was now being revealed in and through Yeshua. The Law was given through Moses—Yeshua is the living essence of the Law, the living Word. This understanding is confirmed in the very next verse: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son,<sup>19</sup> who is in the bosom of the Father, He has *revealed Him*” (John 1:18).

Yeshua, the Word of God, *revealed* the deepest part of His Father's *heart* to Israel by His life and ministry, and especially by His loving, sacrificial death for us. Far from Yeshua doing away with the Law, which is the verbal reflection of God's faithful forgiving-loving-kindness and truth, Yeshua was the Law (Scroll) *come alive*. John was saying that Moses was the mediator of the words of Yahveh (the Law), and that Yeshua is *the* Word of God, embodying all the commandments or words of God.<sup>20</sup>

The term *revealed* (*declared* in some Bibles) in John 1:18 comes from the Greek word *x'ae'geo'my* ἐξηγεσθαι. It's where we get the English word *exegete*. The Greek word means, to declare, to ‘expound, to interpret, to reveal a mystery.’<sup>21</sup>

A *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* says that Yeshua, ‘has made known...the invisible God.’<sup>22</sup> The *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* states that the Greek word means,

“to make something fully known by careful explanation or by clear revelation—‘to make fully and clearly known...the *only* One who is the same as God...has made him fully and clearly known’ Jn 1:18...No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”<sup>23</sup>

Yeshua *revealed* God the Father as only the Son could do. Matthew records Yeshua saying,

“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one (intimately) knows<sup>24</sup> the

<sup>17</sup> Sumner, תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> The *Word* of God is equal to the Law of Moses: Ex. 31:18; 32:15-16; Ps. 119:13, 16, 43, 57, 66-67, 88, 89-94, 97-104, 105-106, 129-131, 133-136, 138-140, 157-160, 161-165, 172; Is. 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; 42:21; 44:3; Jer. 35:13; 44:23; Dan. 9:10, 11; Mic. 4:2; Jn. 8:8-9; 9:13; Acts 7:38.

<sup>19</sup> Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1074. The ‘leading manuscripts have’ *only begotten God* rather than *only begotten Son*, but either way it doesn't disrupt John's thought about Yeshua *revealing* the Father. Bibles such as the NASB, NET, NRSV, NIV, and the HCSB have *God* instead of *Son*.

<sup>20</sup> *Torah* (the Law of Moses) is a biblical synonym for the Word of God. Words like *judgments* and *statutes* are *synonymous* with God's Word (Law) and speak of His holy Instruction or Teaching (Torah) to Israel (Dt. 4:44-45; 5:1-22; 7:11, etc.). For *testimony* speaking of the Law see Ps. 78:5; 119:88; 132:12; Is. 8:20. For *testimonies* see Dt. 4:45; 6:17, 20; Ps. 25:10; 78:56; 99:7. For *judgments* speaking of the Law see Lev. 18:4, 5, 26; 25:18; Dt. 4:1, 5, 8; 5:31. For *ordinances* see Ex. 21:1; 24:3; Lev. 19:37; 20:22; 26:15; Num. 9:3. For *statutes* see Ex. 18:20; Lev. 10:11; 18:4, 5, 26; 19:19; 20:8; Dt. 6:1. For *commandments* see Ex. 15:26; 16:28; Lev. 22:31; Num. 15:22; Dt. 6:17.

<sup>21</sup> Tasker, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Bauer, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 275.

<sup>23</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida, editors, *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), p. 340, #28:41.

Son except the Father. Nor does anyone (intimately) know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to *reveal* Him.” (Matthew 11:27)

Yeshua came to intimately make known the Father, by Yeshua’s words, His sacrificial death, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. That’s what the incarnation is all about—God the Son becoming Man, so that Man could know and have an intimate relationship with the Father forever:

“Yeshua said to him, ‘I am the Way, the *Truth*, and the Life.’<sup>25</sup> No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had *known* Me, you would have known My Father also, and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*, so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? *The words that I speak* to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.’” (John 14:6-10)

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<sup>24</sup> To ‘know’ in Hebrew *yah’da* יָדָע, speaks of the intimacy that a man has with his wife (Gen. 4:1).

<sup>25</sup> The terms, *way*, *truth* and *life* are synonyms for the Torah (Law of Moses—God’s Word: Is. 1:10; 2:3; 5:24). Yeshua, speaking of them together, is emphatically saying that He is the living Word of God; the living Torah. *Way* is a synonym for the Law in Ps. 119:14, 27, 30, 32-33, 35 (path i.e. ‘way’), 104-105; Jer. 6:16; Mal. 2:8-9, and *truth* is a synonym for Law in Ps. 119:43, 142, 151, 160; Mal. 2:6, and *life* is a synonym for Law in Dt. 30:15, 19-20; 32:47; Ps. 16:11; Prov. 3:1-3, 13-18; 6:23; 10:17; 12:28, etc.

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