

In the Beginning with Messiah

Yochanan 1:1-18

Yochanan 1 begins by bringing us back to the beginning of all things. As one commentator has said, it is a story that begins with a sense of ‘once before time’. From this grand temporal perspective, Yochanan the Shaliach presents the Messiah in relationship to God (vv. 1-2), creation (vv. 3-5), Yochanan the Immerser (vv. 6-9), the wider Jewish community (vv.10-11), and the Messianic Jewish community (vv. 12-16).

Yet what should be noticed is that the Messiah’s name, Yeshua, is not mentioned until v. 17: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Yesuha the Messiah.’ Yeshua is an elusive Messiah. This expectation to hear Yeshua’s name is heightened by the importance attached to ‘believing in his name’ in v. 12. Yeshua is the one through whom we receive “the right to become children of God,” yet is often difficult for Israel to find and veiled in mystery.

Still, Yeshua is the one through whom diety lives: ‘In the beginning was the Word.” Or consider a more contemporary reading of these words. David Stern correctly recognizes that in the Septuagint *logos* translates *davar*, which can mean not only ‘word’ but ‘thing.’ As a result, the Messianic Jews Richard Wurmbrand offers a midrashic reading: ‘In the beginning was the Real Thing.’ Please, no t-shirts.

What should also strike us in this passage is an unfortunate historical development. The wider Jewish community as a whole did not accept this Messianic testimony. ‘Messiah came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.’ This failure to ‘receive’ led to a family division between larger Israel and a Messianic remnant within Israel. The ‘but’ of v. 12 reflects a tragedy of significant proportions, yet prepares the way for the nations entering the Messianic Kingdom and for Israel to be drawn to Messiah through a Jewish remnant in its midst.

Yochanan closes this section of the story with another reference to Yeshua’s relationship to diety. The literary device known as *inclusio* is used and the passage ends where it begins. “Messiah was in the beginning with God” (v. 2). “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (v. 18).

But before we get too comfortable with Yochanan’s introduction, we need to be conscious of the Word’s multivalence (multiple layers of meaning). Someone has said, “At the first level, the Prologue celebrates the genesis of the world. At the second level, the Prologue seems to celebrate the genesis of the Gospel. At this secondary, concealed level, we may be encouraged to see in the incarnation of the Word a kind of allegory of the composition of the Gospel itself.”

This multivalent nature of this Word may be a key to understanding the union and mystery of all the relationships explained in Yochanan 1:1-18 (Messiah’s relationship to God, creation, the wider Jewish community, and the Messianic Jewish community). As a

Messianic Jewish community, we need to consider one remaining relationship. The union and mystery of Yeshua's relationship to Moses (v. 17) must continually be upheld. Ultimately, Moses and the Law, and Yeshua and grace are multivalent. To talk of Moses is to speak of Yeshua - - to talk of Yeshua is to speak of Moses.