

Yochanan (John) 1:1c & Arianism's fatal flaw:

In my article ['The Torah Dressed Itself as Flesh'](http://www.circumcisedheart.info) at www.circumcisedheart.info I relate how a number of scholars, following research based around the Dead Sea Scrolls now argue that Yochanan 1:1c should read **"And godly was Torah"** and that the whole verse then also reads "In the beginning was the Torah, and Torah was for the sake of G-d, And godly was Torah."¹

This translation is clearly not viewed favourably by those within Christendom who have a Hellenistic and/or anti-Torah pre-suppositional understanding. One such group are Arians. Arians follow the lead of Arius, an Alexandrian Priest at the time of the Nicene Council who argued for the pre-existence of the Messiah.

For example, a Hellenistic Christian and Arian, Mark Davis in reading my article on this translation of the Greek argued that: **"And godly was Torah"** doesn't work because the Logos has the definite article and is the subject of the clause and THEOS is the predicate nominative. In other words, the Logos is THEOS, not that THEOS is the Logos or that the Logos is an attribute of THEOS. THEOS is a count noun, it is used indefinitely or definitely. If John had wanted to convey the meaning of "godly" he could've used an adjective or THEOU (genitive of possession, conveying that the Word was "of God"). Whenever "THEOS" is applied to a subject in John's writings, it always refers to a person. Hence, the Logos is a person, a god, a divine being. The Logos is another name for Jesus. (Revelation 19:13)."

Mark also wrote that: "Word order does not determine the meaning in Greek as it does in English, inflection does. Both the logos and theos are in the nominative case, and with theos being fronted in front of the verb we require the definite article to determine the subject, which logos has."

Mark Davis has two points of difference here. Firstly he argues for a grammatical understanding that many Greek scholars actually reject. In part, they reject this argument because it does not fit contextually. In the first instance, the author is steeped in Jewish thought and especially in the clear declarations in the Tanakh, that the 'word' or the plans, or Torah of God, are clearly not God.

Secondly, this passage in reflecting the style and composition of other similar passages from other Jewish writings that pre-date this prologue, clearly articulates a position that matches the Tanakh in understanding that this 'word/Torah' or 'logos' (in Greek) is a property or attribute of God rather than a direct description for God.

William D. Chamberlain² (former Professor of NT Language and Literature at the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary) explains this point well by offering an alternative reading of John 1:1c which in Greek is 'theos en ho logos':

*"The article with each of these predicate nouns would equate them and make them interchangeable, e. g., 'ho theos en ho logos' would make God and the Word identical."*³

Note that Chamberlain has inserted a 'ho' in 'theos en ho logos' (Jn 1:1c). That is, by counter example, by adding the definite article to theos that is not there in the Greek, he is arguing that 'logos' here is not God (but a quality of God). That is, if there was a 'ho' in front of 'theos' then 'theos' and 'logos' would effectively be the same, but as there is not a definite article with 'theos', they are not the same and instead 'theos' is a 'qualitative noun', a noun that acts as an adjective to the other noun in the phrase.

He explains this further with: *"The predicate of a sentence may be recognized by the absence of the article: ... The effect of this can be seen in 'ho theos agape estin' (1 Jn. 4 :8), 'God is love.' As the sentence now stands 'love' describes a primary quality of God; the article 'ho' with agape would make God and love equivalents, e. g., God would possess no qualities not subsumed under love."*

And again, as the 'ho' is not here in Jn 1:1c with 'logos', Chamberlain through this analogy as well, demonstrates that

¹ The argument that 'Logos' has been used by Greek translators as a translation of 'Torah' has a very ancient heritage. Both Rabbi Hoshayah (c.225 C.E.) as described in the Talmud (Genesis Rabbah 1:1), as well as the Alexandrian and Hellenist Jew, Philo in his 'De Opificio Mundi' share this opinion.

² Bruce Metzger, a very well-known and highly respected theologian recommends Chamber's textbook on Greek grammar.

³ Chamberlain; William D. – 'An Exegetical Grammar Of The Greek New Testament'

'logos' and 'God' are not equivalents, but rather that 'logos' (or in my argument, 'Torah') is a 'quality' of God. This is exactly what the translation of 'and Godly was the Torah' argues for – for a quality of the Torah/logos/word⁴.

Here are two well-known Trinitarian Greek scholars who also concede the possibility of 'theos' being used here in a qualitative sense:

First, Daniel Wallace writes:

"Colwell's Rule is often invoked to support the translation of θεός (qeos) as definite ("God") rather than indefinite ("a god") here. However, Colwell's Rule merely permits, but does not demand, that a predicate nominative ahead of an equative verb be translated as definite rather than indefinite.

Furthermore, Colwell's Rule did not deal with a third possibility, that the anarthrous predicate noun may have more of a QUALITATIVE nuance when placed ahead of the verb."⁵

And Dr Philip Harner (whom Jehovah Witnesses who are also Arians, appear to mis-quote) writes:

"Perhaps the clause could be translated, "the Word has the same nature as God". This could be one way of representing John's thought, which is, as I understand it, that 'ho logos', no less that 'ho theos', had the nature [i.e. was God-like] of theos....

In John 1:1, I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite."^{6, 7}

And "... primarily qualitative in meaning. They indicate that the logos has the nature of theos..." (p 85)

These are just two of many Biblical Greek scholars who concede that 'theos' in Yochanan 1:1c could be understood in a qualitative sense, that is, that the Greek word 'logos' in this phrase is being described as having a quality or nature that is 'God-like' or Godly, and so both these scholars are not ruling out the possibility that the phrase can be understood as 'and godly was the logos' or 'and godly was the Torah' (where the use of Torah for logos is a separate argument – see my article 'The Torah Dressed Itself in Flesh').

This whole argument is a nuanced one. That is, even with the best of scholarship and understanding available to date, we cannot make absolutely unequivocal statements on this phrase. Dr Harner also makes this statement in the same article, when he states:

"At a number of points in this study we have seen that the anarthrous predicate nouns preceding the verb may be primarily qualitative in force yet may also have some connotation of definiteness.

The categories of qualitateness and definitiveness, that is, are not mutually exclusive, and frequently it is a delicate exegetical issue for the interpreter to decide which emphasis a Greek writer had in mind". (Page 87)⁸

So having accepted the potential or possibility that this translation 'and godly was the Torah' may be valid, it is also worth reading a couple of quotes that Daniel Wallace has also made in respect of the study and impact of the grammar:

"Language, by its nature, is compressed, cryptic, symbolic. We can see this on many levels. Words in isolation mean next to nothing —simply because they are capable of so many meanings. Given no context, it would be impossible to

⁴ Chamberlain, a Trinitarian, does go on to argue for a Hellenistic interpretation of Yochanan 1:1c, though he may not have been aware of the research and arguments for the use of 'Torah' rather than 'Logos/word'

⁵ Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0310218950>

⁶ Philip B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1." in 'The Journal of Biblical Literature'

⁷ Any use of square brackets involves the addition of my personal explanations and is not in the original quote. Also the use of ... in a quote indicates that the sentences are not continuous.

⁸ Harner also argues that the great German scholar, Rudolf Bultmann agreed on the 'qualitative' nature of 'theos' in Jn 1:1c. He wrote: "*Rudolf Bultmann's explanation of the clause reflects an appreciation of the qualitative force of theos ... The clause means first, he suggests, that the Logos is equated (gleichgesetzt) with God...*" [Bultmann's words have been translated from German].

define, for example, 'bank,' or 'fine,' or trust.' In the NT, ἀφίημι can have a variety of meanings such as 'forgive,' 'abandon,' divorce,' 'leave,' 'permit,' etc. Without a context, we are at a loss to decide."

And: "Much in language that is easily misunderstood is outside the scope of syntax, even broadly defined. Although a decent grasp on syntax is a *sine qua non* for sound exegesis, it is not a panacea for all of one's exegetical woes. Only rarely does the grammar hand the exegete his or her interpretation on a silver platter. In most cases, the better we understand the syntax of the NT, the shorter is our list of viable interpretive options."⁹

So Wallace is also explaining that the grammatical considerations of the Greek (of Jn 1:1c for example) can limit the possible interpretations, but it does not always, (and certainly not in this case as Wallace himself has pointed out), give us a definite answer.

To explain 'qualitative nouns' better, I like this quote from "Qualitative Nouns in the Pauline Epistles and Their Translation in the Revised Version" by Arthur W. Slatten, 1918 pp. 6-7.

"THE DETERMINATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF QUALITATIVE NOUNS

... A qualitative noun is a noun (in Greek always anarthrous) whose function in the sentence is not primarily or solely to designate by assignment to a class but to ascribe by the attribution of quality, i.e., of the quality or qualities that are the marks of the class designated by the noun.

The effect is to ascribe to that which is modified the characteristics or qualities of a class and not merely to ascribe to it membership in that class. "

So in Jn 1:1c is it 'logos' that is modified by the qualitative noun 'theos' and thus 'logos' (or 'Torah') is here given the characteristics or qualities of the 'class' of God.

What does this mean then?

It appears to indicate that the logos or better 'torah' is very much a characteristic of God, that His 'teachings' (the principle meaning of torah) are what help us understand who and what He is and more importantly what He wants from us.

It then very helpful to see that when we read that Yeshua has been 'dressed' in Torah, we then understand that Yeshua gives us the perfect example of how we are to live, as God-loving and hence Torah obeying people of faith.

Quote of Arthur W. Slatten continued:

"It is the connotive rather than the denotive sense that emerges. In the sentence "Frederick is a prince" the word "prince" is either designative, marking Frederick as a member of a class, a son of a monarch, or qualitative, describing Frederick as the possessor of the superior character presumed to distinguish the son of a king."

So Slatten here elaborates with this example that the qualitative noun (prince) indicates that the object of this qualitative noun (Frederick) has the characteristics that we would understand a 'prince' or 'son of a King' to have.

So in the same way, but even more understandably 'Torah', more so than 'Logos/Word' has the characteristics one would expect of God Himself. And it can really be no other way - the Instructions/Plans of God that pre-existed with Him before the Creation of the Universe most clearly have the very essence or characteristics of God.

This should all help establish that **'and godly was the Torah'** cannot at least be discounted as a valid interpretation based on Greek grammatical rules.

Further support for the argument that 'theos' in Jn 1:1c may be qualitative is found in the Coptic NT (presumably translated from the Greek in the 4th century CE). The Coptic text for 1:1c includes the indefinite article, which, at the very least, shows that those ancient translators, who knew Koine as a living language, didn't understand it to be a definite noun.

Thus, their understanding leads credence to the argument that 'theos' could have a qualitative meaning here and thus fits with the 'and Godly was the Torah' interpretation.

Mark Davis' second argument was that "Whenever 'THEOS' is applied to a subject in John's writings, it always refers to a person."

⁹ Wallace, Daniel B. 'Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics'. p 8-10

While this has already been shown to be false in this case at least, Mark Davis argues that as, in his understanding, every other use of 'theos' in the Gospel of John refers to a person and not a quality or nature, then this occurrence must as well. Even if this is true of every other occurrence of 'theos' in John's Gospel, it can only add some weight to Davis' argument and really does not prove anything, especially when the full message of the Tanakh and the NT are taken into account.

As well as this, there are other places in the Gospel of John where human beings are referred to as Gods. For example in John 10:34-35:

"34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? 35 If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken."

Davis may be on more solid ground if he had referred to places where 'ho theos' (the God) is used, as it is used some 1325 times in the NT and appears to always refer to the Almighty and is not used in any qualitative sense. Of course, 'ho theos' is not used in Jn 1:1c.

The translator of the Moffat Bible (James Moffat who was a Professor of Greek and NT Exegesis at Oxford), clearly understand the use of 'theos' in Jn 1:1c as he translated it as 'and the logos was divine'. This is really the same as 'and godly was the logos' and so also leads credence to the argument (if 'Torah' is accepted as more appropriate than 'logos', that the phrase should be 'and godly was the Torah').

Here's a great explanation by John W. Schoenheit:

A very clear explanation of how to translate theos without the definite article can be found in 'Jesus As They Knew Him', by William Barclay, a professor at Trinity College in Glasgow:

In a case like this we cannot do other than go to the Greek, which is theos en ho logos. Ho is the definite article, the, and it can be seen that there is a definite article with logos, but not with theos. When in Greek two nouns are joined by the verb "to be," and when both have the definite article, then the one is fully intended to be identified with the other; but when one of them is without the article, it becomes more an adjective than a noun, and describes rather the class or sphere to which the other belongs.

An illustration from English will make this clear. If I say, "The preacher is the man," I use the definite article before both preacher and man, and I thereby identify the preacher with some quite definite individual man whom I have in mind. But, if I say, "The preacher is man," I have omitted the definite article before man, and what I mean is that the preacher must be classified as a man, he is in the sphere of manhood, he is a human being.

[In the last clause of John 1:1] John has no article before theos, God. The logos, therefore, is not identified as God or with God; the word theos has become adjectival and describes the sphere to which the logos belongs. We would, therefore, have to say that this means that the logos belongs to the same sphere as God; without being identified with God, the logos has the same kind of life and being as God. Here the NEB [New English Bible] finds the perfect translation: "What God was, the Word was."¹⁰

While I think there are other problems with the NEB version, the point is that the 'Word' or 'logos' or 'Torah' has the same nature as God, that is, it is 'god-like' or 'godly'.

'Torah' rather than 'Logos' or 'Word':

Now let us look again at the argument for 'Torah' in Jn 1:1c. Please refer back to the article **'The Torah Dressed Itself in Flesh'** for the main detail on this argument.

¹⁰ <http://www.biblicalunitarian.com/videos/but-what-about-john-1-1>

Consider the connection between Torah and logos in Deut 32:47: *"For this is no idle word for you—it is your life! By this word [‘logos’ in the Greek LXX] you will live a long time in the land you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."*

Here, ‘word’ or ‘logos’ really means Torah, as the Nation of Israel was informed here in no uncertain terms that they were to be obedient to the Torah if they were to live long in the Land of Israel.

But for further clarity, look at the previous two verses:

"45 When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel

46 he said to them, "Keep in mind all the words I am solemnly proclaiming to you today; you must command your children to observe carefully all the words of this Torah."

Here, in Hebrew, the text joins the concepts... "Kol Div'rei Ha'Torah Ha'Zot." '...all the words of this Torah'. Also, earlier in the verse we have "Simu le'vav'chem le'chol ha'D'varim..." or "put into your hearts all of the words, which I am testifying before you today..."

Clearly the Torah IS the words or in Greek, the ‘logos’. When the Jew/Israelite of the Second Temple Period (1st Century CE) heard the word ‘logos’/loh'gohse, what else would he think of except Torah?

Moses calls the ‘10 Commandments’, "Aseret Ha'D'varim" from the Hebrew "D'var"(word), that is, literally the ‘10 Words’ (see Exodus 34:28, and Deuteronomy (D'varim) 4:13 and 10:4).

‘Divrei HaShem’ to any Jew, means the Word of God, that is, the Torah. Further there are many occurrences in the Tanakh [for example: Deut 27:3, 26; 31:12, 24; 32:46; 2 Kings 22:11; 23:24; 2 Chr 34:19; 35:26; Neh 8:9, 13; Prov 7:2; Mic 4:2; Zech 7:12; Is 1:10; 2:3; 5:24; Jer 6:19; 18:18], where ‘Torah’ in Hebrew, is translated in the LXX as ‘logos/loh'gohse’ in one Greek case or another.

Some of these usages are not a one-to-one correspondence however, but are a little more obscure and subtle. For example consider 2 Kings 11:22 *"And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Torah, that he rent his clothes."*

The Greek has ‘words’ translated into the plural of ‘logos’ and ‘Torah’ translated into ‘nomos’, but the meaning of this statement that the ‘words/logos’ of God is the ‘Torah’. As I wrote in ‘The Torah Dressed Itself in Flesh’: “Divrei HaShem’ to any Jew, means the Word (or words) of God, that is, the Torah”.

Perhaps the very best example though is Isaiah 2:3 where we have a classic example of Hebraic parallelism (where a phrase is repeated in a different way, but meaning the same thing):

"For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word (‘logos’) of YHVH from Jerusalem." – Is 2:3

So in conclusion, despite the protestations of Arians (and Trinitarians), to give the best sense of what the Jewish author of Yochanan 1:1 meant, when he originally wrote this Gospel (and most likely did so in Hebrew), this translation of Jacobus Schoneveld seems to say it best:

"In the beginning was the Torah, and Torah was for the sake of God, And godly was Torah." – Jn 1:1

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