

The Memra of God

John 1: 1-18

DIG: How is the Memra like Christ? How is Jesus like the Tabernacle? What is Yochanan the Baptist's role as a witness? Who or what fails to comprehend the light? Why? How would someone full of grace and truth treat others? Why are John and Moses not our primary focus here? From this passage, how can a person know God?

REFLECT: Have you been adopted into the family of ADONAI? Do you view yourself as God's child? Would the Lord ever disown any of His children? Are you keeping Him at the door? Or in the living room? Or even given Him the keys? Why? What strikes you most about Yeshua in this passage?

The New Covenant was written in Greek, and the Greek word for **Word** is Logos. Most people concentrate on the Greek philosophical concept of the Logos that meant two things: reason, the idea of **God**, and speech, the expression of **God**. The Greeks were hung up on philosophy. They believed in a *supreme power* whose mind, reason, will and emotion were displayed in an impersonal way through the Logos. But **John** was not a Greek philosopher, **he** was a Jewish fisherman. This does not mean that **Yochanan** was not talking to the Greeks because **he** was fond of deliberately using expressions with more than one meaning. It is **his** way of bringing out the fuller meaning of whatever term **he** was using. But here, **John** was saying something specifically to the Jews.

Jewish theology deals with **the Memra**. It is an Aramaic term that means **the Word**. In Hebrew the word is **Davar**. Therefore, Logos, **Memra** and **Davar** all mean the same thing . . . **the Word**. By the time of **Christ**, the TaNaKh had been translated into Aramaic, which was one of the major languages of the Jews of **Jesus'** day. Whenever the TaNaKh used the word **Davar**, the Aramaic version used **Memra**. These were called *the Targumin*, meaning *Aramaic translations*. But they were really more than translations, they were interpretive translations. For example, in the Hebrew text, **Isaiah 52:13** says . . . **My Servant will prosper**. However the Aramaic translation that the Jews made, said . . . **My Servant the Messiah will prosper**. As a result, out of the Aramaic translation the Jewish theologians developed a whole scale theology regarding **the Memra**.

Everything that the rabbis taught about the Memra is true of Jesus Christ. The rabbis had seven things to say about the Memra. First, the rabbis taught that the Memra was a person. Isaiah 45:23 says: By Myself I have sworn, My mouth has spoken in all integrity a Word that will not be revoked. **They taught that the Memra had**

intellect, will and emotion (Isaiah 9:8, 55:10-11; Psalm 147:15). So John would write: The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His Shechinah glory, the Shechinah glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Secondly, the rabbis taught that the Memra was the means by which God made His covenants (Genesis 15:4). Therefore, the Holy Spirit would declare through His apostle: For the Torah was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Yeshua Messiah (Yochanan 1:17).

Thirdly, they taught that the Memra was the means of salvation (Hosea 1:7 NKJ). So John would write: Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).¹⁹ In effect, John was saying, "I'm not writing merely to inform you, and I'm not writing to entertain you. I am writing to you so that you might believe! The Greek word for faith is *pisteuo*, and means *to trust in, to believe in or to have faith in*. John used this word ninety-eight times in his Gospel. It never refers merely to intellectual agreement with a proposal. Belief involves a personal response of reliance and commitment. Faith involves receiving **Christ (Yochanan 1:12)**, obeying **Christ (Yochanan 3:36)**, and abiding in **Christ (John 15:1-10 and First John 4:15)**. What does that look like? I'm glad you asked!

Around 1900, before the days of rock stars and sports heroes, some of the most famous people were known for daring feats, like climbing mountains, escaping from chains and vaults, and swinging on the flying trapeze. None was more famous than the great Charles Blondin of France, the greatest tightrope walker in the world. One time he walked the tight rope across Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada. He would walk across with a balance bar, he would ride across on a unicycle, and sometimes, with someone that believed in him, he would carry a trusting soul across on his shoulders. One day he wheeled a boy across in a wheelbarrow. The crowd saw it and cheered. The boy put his life into Blondin's hands. That is what faith is, putting our life in **Christ's** hands. When Blondin got to the other side of Niagara Falls, he asked the crowd if they believed he could do it again and go back across. They cried out, "Yes, we believe you can do it." At that he said, "Then get in the wheelbarrow." That is trust. As far as **Messiah** is concerned, are you in the wheelbarrow?

Once we have trusted in **Christ**, the most important belief about ourselves is that we are adopted in the family of **God** (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**) and have **become** a child of **God** with all the privileges and responsibilities that come with being a son or a daughter. At that point, the issue really isn't if we can hang to **Him**, the question really is, will **ADONAI** ever **leave** us? The inspired writer to the **Hebrews** answers

that question by reminding us: **the Lord has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5b).**

Therefore, we are not saved by *how we behave*; we are saved by *what we believe*. The Apostle John wrote: **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies themselves, just as He is pure (First John 3:1-3).** These important verses drive home how critical it is to know who we are as **children of God**, since that belief serves as the basis of how we live our lives. No one can live in a way that conflicts with how they view themselves.

Fourth, the rabbis taught that the Memra was the means of revelation and that God revealed Himself by means of the Memra (Genesis 15:1; Ezekiel 1:3). John would write: **No one has ever seen God, but the One and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known (Yochanan 1:18).**

Fifth, the rabbis taught that the Memra was the agent of creation; everything He created, He created by means of the Memra (Psalm 33:4-6). Thus, the Holy Spirit inspired the human author to write: **He was with God in the beginning (John 1:2).**

Sixth, the rabbis taught that the Memra was, at times, the same as God, while at other times, distinct from God. Yochanan would announce: **He was with God in the beginning (Yochanan 1:2).**

Lastly, the rabbis taught that the Memra was the agent of the theophanies in the TaNaKh. As a result, John disclosed: **The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His Shechinah glory, or the visible manifestation of ADONAI's presence, the Shechinah glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).** How did Yeshua do that? **He dwelt, or literally tabernacled among us (see my commentary on Exodus Eq - Christ in the Tabernacle).**²⁰

The first two verses emphasize that **Jesus Christ is eternal; He has no beginning and He will have no end.** **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).** Nothing higher could be said. Before any conceivable point in the eternal past, **the Word** already existed. **ADONAI** began by revelation to build a bridge between **Himself** and people.²¹ So **the Memra** has no beginning. **He was with God in the beginning (Yochanan 1:2).** The Greek word for **with**, or *pros*, when used in this way, signifies familiarity. **The Word and God the Father** existed together, sharing place, intimacy and

purpose (Psalm 90:1-2). In fact, they were so close that **the Word was God**. They share the same essence and all that is true of **HaShem** is true of **the Word**.²²

Yeshua Messiah is the Creator; all things were made by Him. In the previous verse, **John** stated that **the Word** is **God** from the perspective of time. Only **God** is eternal; and because **the Word** is eternal, **He** is **God**. Now he establishes the deity of **the Meshiach** from another point of view: creation. From both the Jewish and Gentile perspectives anything not created is deity. With this ancient worldview in mind, **Yochanan** wrote: **Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made (1:3)**. Why is this so important? Because starting in **John's** day and continuing until today, false teachers claim that **Jesus** is not **God**. Arius, a third-century false teacher, loved to say, "There was a time when **He** was not." **John** points to the moment of creation, however, to say that before anything existed, **Christ**, who is **the Creator**, spoke **all things** into existence.

Jesus Christ is the Source of life; nothing remains alive apart from Him. In **Him** was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. Our spiritual and physical life come from **Him**. Light's nature is to shine and drive out the darkness. **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5)**. In the end, **the darkness** could not overcome the **Light** even by placing **the Light** in a tomb. This summarizes **John's Gospel** message in one verse. **The Word** will be victorious despite the opposition of Satan and the kingdom of darkness. The closer you are to **God**, the farther you are from the devil.²³

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The phrase **sent from God** is in the perfect tense, indicating the permanent character of **His** mission. **He** was only the forerunner who came as a witness to testify concerning that **Light**, so that through **Him** all might believe. **He** himself was not the **Light**; he came only as a witness to the **Light** (**Yochanan 1:6-8**). But even **John**, the one **Jesus** called the greatest of all the prophets (**Matthew 11:9-13**), was no match for **the darkness**. Like **Moshe**, **Samuel**, **Elijah**, **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah**, **Daniel**, **Hosea**, **Zechariah** and all the other prophets before him, he failed to enlighten the world. After all, they were only human. The single hope for us is **the Source** of light who can lighten up every heart and mind, because **He** is more than human.

Yeshua Ha'Meshiach is the Light; but the darkness did not receive Him. The true **Light** that gives light to everyone was not hidden. On the contrary, **the true Light** came into the world in human flesh (**John 1:9**). Therefore, just as **He** revealed **Himself** through **His** creation (**Romans 1:18-20**), no one can claim ignorance. **He** was in the world, and though the world was made through **Him**, the world did not recognize **Him** (**Yochanan 1:10**). **He** came to that which was **His** own, the nation of **Isra'el**, but they did not receive **Him** (**John 1:11**). In rejecting **Him**, they refused to accept **Him** as the revelation sent by **the Father** and refused to obey **His** commands.²⁴ When **the light** is turned on, who

are the ones that are unconscious of that fact? Who needs to be told **the light** is on? That's right, the blind!²⁵ In this case the spiritually blind because **the world did not recognize Him**. In the end, **darkness** could not suppress **the Light** even by placing **the Light** in a dark tomb.²⁶

The most important belief about ourselves is that we are **children of God** and that being **His child** is a **right** given to us by **the LORD Himself**. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12). The Greek word *pisteuo*, translated **believe**, appears 98 times in the Gospel of John. It has a wide semantic range and can be translated as **trust, faith, belief**. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, how did He start? He started with: **Our Father (Mattityahu 6:9a)**. That is the most important inward, personal thing we can say when we talk to **ADONAI**. Since He is **our Father**, then we must be **His children**. Do you have that assurance? If not, why not settle it today? Pray the prayer at the bottom of this file. **God** has given you **the right** to be **His child** through faith in **His Son**. It's not a right you have earned. Here, the Bible says He *gave* it to you!

We are **children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will**. The piling up of these expressions is to be understood in the light of Jewish pride of race. The Jews believed that because of their Jewish "Fathers," their great ancestors, **ADONAI** would favor them. But **John** emphatically denies such an idea. The birth of a child of **God** is not a natural birth; it is a supernatural work of **the LORD** through regeneration. All human initiative is ruled out because believers are **born of God (Yochanan 1:13)**.²⁷

Jesus Christ, though completely human, fully reveals the Father. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling (or tabernacled) among us. In this verse we discover that **the Memra is the Messiah Himself**. This was not a man named **Jesus**, who grew up in Nazareth and one day decided that he was **God**; this was **God the Word** who decided to become a man.²⁸ **We have seen His Shechinah glory, the Shechinah glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)**. He couldn't bear to live without us, so He gave His greatest gift - **Himself**.

The essence of **Yochanan's** message about **the memra** can be seen when we combine the first and fourteenth verses. **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us; and the Word was with God, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father; and the Word was God, full of grace and truth (Yochanan 1:1 and 14)**.

The prologue ends with three points underlining the uniqueness of **the Messiah**. First, we are reminded of **His** superiority to **John the Baptist**. **Yochanan testified continually concerning Him**. He cried out, saying: **This is the One I spoke about when I said: He**

who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me (Yochanan 1:15). Yeshua was younger than John and began His ministry later than John. But because of Christ's preexistence, Yochanan said He has surpassed me.

Second, He supplies the needs of all those who are His. Out of His fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given (John 1:16). The grace of God comes to believers like waves continually coming to the shore. The believer constantly receives evidence of God's grace in place of grace He has already given us. For the Torah was given through Moses (Second Corinthians 3:6-16); grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (Yochanan 1:17). It is sometimes thought that this verse demeans Moses, but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact that a mere man, for whom no claim of divinity has ever been made, should even be compared with the Word of God shows how highly the Holy Spirit regards Moses. Nor does it demean the Torah, ADONAI's eternal teaching about Himself, by comparing it to grace and truth. Matthew tells us that Yeshua Himself declared that He did **not come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets, but to fulfill them** (Matthew 5:17-20). In fact, He then proceeded to interpret the Torah in ways that made its meaning and commands even clearer (Mattityahu 5:21-48). Grace and truth are personal attributes of God that Yeshua not only revealed during His public ministry, but has been continually giving mankind since the beginning of creation.

Third, at first glance John 1:18 may seem to have very little to do with the preceding verses. But in reality, it forms the climax to the entire prologue, stressing that the Messiah in the closest relationship with God the Father whom no one has ever seen (John 1:18a). Yet the multitudes that saw Yeshua saw ADONAI. Furthermore, Moshe saw God's back (Exodus 33:19-23), Isaiah saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted (Isaiah 6:1). The seventy elders of Israel also saw the God of Isra'el . . . and they ate and drank with Him (Exodus 24:9-11). Therefore, this passage must mean that the ultimate glory and essential nature of HaShem are hidden from sinful humanity.²⁹ Then John ends his prologue by bringing us back to the truth of the first verse that the Word is God. Jesus is unique, the One and only Son, who is Himself God and is in closest possible relationship with the Father, has made Him known (John 1:18b). The verb has made Him known, is translated recognized in Luke 24:35, where the two on the road to Emmaus recognized Yeshua when He broke bread with them. It means that Jesus has revealed God the Father to us in such a way that all can recognize Him. As the Meshiach Himself would say at the end of His ministry: **Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father** (Yochanan 14:9b). So if you want to know who God is and what He is like, look to Jesus and you will know Him.

What does it mean to be a genuine believer whose life is characterized by authentic faith? John describes five practical qualities that can be seen in the lives of His holy ones (Deuteronomy 33:2-3; Job 5:1; Psalms 16:3 and 34:9; Zechariah 14:5; Jude 1).

First, genuine believers are not too independent to admit their own needs. Only when we trust **the Lord** enough to admit our weaknesses and our inadequacies will we be able to enjoy intimacy with our family and friends. While pride keeps us trapped in our sin, vulnerability gives **Yeshua** the opportunity to work in our lives for our own benefit, and the benefit of others.

Secondly, genuine believers are not too busy to know people around them. Authentic trust in **Messiah** recognizes the value of others, despite their failures or their shortcomings, and devotes adequate time to knowing them well. People, not tasks, are their top priority as they live out their faith.

Thirdly, genuine believers believe in God's Word. Genuine faith craves to know as much about **God's Word** as possible, because it doesn't trust in its own wisdom. True believers are more devoted to knowing what **ADONAI** thinks about life and how we should live, than what *the world* (**First John 2:15-17**) thinks about life and how we should live.

Fourthly, genuine believers don't rely solely on their own perspective. Faithful believers have no trouble admitting the continuing impact of their sinful natures (**Psalm 51:1-5; Romans 3:23**), and they do whatever they can to negate its influence when making decisions. They seek the truth in **God's Word**, they pray for the leading of **the Ruach HaKodesh**, they submit to the wisdom of mature counselors, and they remain sensitive to the constructive criticism of others.

Fifthly, genuine believers don't take themselves (or life in this fallen world) to seriously. That's not to suggest that life isn't serious or even dismal at times. Life in a fallen world is hard! Nonetheless, genuine believers keep a light touch on the things of this world. They realize that injustices, abuses and setbacks are all a result of being a foreigner in this world because their real citizenship is in heaven as we eagerly await the Deliverer, the Lord **Yeshua Messiah** (**Phil 3:20 CJB**). They maintain a composed perspective, they refuse for anyone or anything to steal their joy. **Yeshua** said that **He** came so that we might **have life, and have it more abundantly** (**John 10:10**). So they laugh at every opportunity.³⁰

*If you have never made certain of your relationship with **God** let me encourage you to pray this way: Dear heavenly **Father**, thank **You** for dying on the cross, taking my place and taking my sin upon **Yourself**. I realize that I could not have any relationship with **You** on the basis of my works. But I thank **You** that in **Messiah** I am forgiven, and right now, if I have never done so before, I receive **You** into My life. I understand that its not the words of this prayer that save me, but my faith in **You** that saves. I believe that **Yeshua** died for my sins, was raised on the third day, and I confess now with my mouth that **Jesus Christ is Lord**.*

*I come to **You** as **Your** child. I thank You for giving me eternal life. I renounce any lie of Satan that I have no right to be called **Your** child, and I thank You that You have given me that right. I no longer put any confidence in myself; my confidence is in You and the fact that I am saved, not by what I have done, but by what **You** have done through **Christ** on the cross. I now accept myself as a child of **God** because of the free gift **You** have given to me. I gladly receive it and accept it for all eternity. In **Jesus'** name I pray. Amen.³¹*

*Now, why should **God** let you into **His** heaven?*

*That's right, because **Jesus** died for your sins.*