

## God as the Word: *Logos* and *Rhema*

God is a living communicating Being. He communicates through His speaking, which has been recorded and preserved in the written word. Communication may be considered from the perspective of conceptualization, formulation, articulation, writing down, or compiling into scrolls or books. As far as God's speaking is concerned, either God's spoken or written word is also incorporated into and respoken by the recipients of the word so that it may be imparted into His people. Various Hebrew and Greek words emphasize these aspects of the process by which God communicates through His speaking to His people. God is involved in all stages of communication because He desires to convey not only His thought but also His very person, element, and essence through His word. The word is intrinsically related to God in His Trinity, as indicated by the fact that one of the Greek words for *word* (*logos*) is used as a designation of one of the hypostases of God—of the Son, the second of the Divine Trinity (John 1:1)—and another Greek word for *word* (*rhema*) is related intrinsically to the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). This article explores these Greek words as they relate to God and the accomplishment of His economy, and an upcoming article will consider the incorporation of God's word into the believers and its respoken by their prophesying for the building up of the Body of Christ.

### Communication and Words

Communication, whether through speaking or writing, may be seen to go through three or four stages. Communication begins in the mind with its thoughts or concepts ("conceptual preparation," or conceptualization). Then a lemma, or root, is selected from the lexicon of a language to fit into a syntactic frame ("lexical selection") and is given its correct "morpho-phonological encoding" within that frame (formulation). Finally, communication is given "phonetic encoding and articulation," in which the vocal apparatus—the mouth with the tongue, the teeth, and the lungs—coordinate together to produce meaningful sounds (phonemes), which, in turn, are combined into meaningful words in the speaker's language (cf. Levelt 226-231 and Fromkin 296). In order for the utterance to be preserved, it may be written down on some medium, such as papyrus, leather parchment (velum), or paper, and may be compiled as a scroll or a book (codex). Further, thoughts may be expressed directly in

written composition, thereby circumventing the stage of articulation in speech. The written word is incorporated into the believers and becomes the reproduction of God's speaking in the believers' words. Consequently, the believers can become letters of Christ, known and read by all men (2 Cor. 3:2).

### New Testament Words for *Word*

The two main Greek words translated "word" in the New Testament are λόγος (*logos*) and ῥῆμα (*rhema*). Some argue that these words are used interchangeably in similar contexts with little perceptible difference in use. However, they come from different roots, the meanings of which emphasize different ends in the production of spoken language. Λόγος emphasizes the conceptualization stage, whereas ῥῆμα stresses the articulation or utterance stage of communication. There has also been some consideration whether λόγος and the written word are synonymous. However, the words that indicate the written word tend to emphasize the physicality of the word: both γραφή (*graphē*) and γράμμα (*gramma*) emphasize writing, while βίβλος (*biblos*) emphasizes the finished product with the material on which the word is preserved. The written word preserves both the concepts and the utterances, although the concept, or λόγος, aspect of the word is more prominent than the utterance, or ῥῆμα, aspect of the word. However, the written word is the means for readers to receive utterance or speaking that can be applied to them in their situation and for them to respeak to others.

### *Logos*

The word λόγος is closer to the conceptualization stage of speech, in which words are chosen. It means "the word by which the inward thought is expressed...also...the inward thought or reason itself" (Liddell and Scott 416), and it is related to the verb λέγω, which has a broad range of meanings including "to lay in order, arrange, and so to gather, to pick up...to reckon, count, tell...to recount...to speak, say, utter" (408). Λόγος is the definition, explanation, and expression of the thought formulated in the mind. Greek philosophical writers used λόγος to refer to reason, from whence derives the English word *logic*. Philo, in particular, used λόγος to refer to divine reason.

It occurs three hundred thirty times in the New Testament. Λόγος rather than ῥῆμα is more commonly associated with writing, the Scripture, and scrolls or books, e.g., “the word written in their law” (John 15:25), “the word of God came,...the Scripture” (10:35), and “the words of the prophecy of this scroll” (Rev. 22:7; cf. Jer. 36:2; Luke 3:4).<sup>1</sup> The association of these words with λόγος strengthens its association with the written word.

**R**elated to λόγος is the diminutive λόγιον “a little word, a brief utterance,” which only occurs four times in the New Testament and is translated “oracles,” referring to both the Old Testament word entrusted to the Jews (Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2) and the New Testament word spoken in prophecy (1 Pet. 4:11).

### Rhema

The word ῥῆμα emphasizes the articulation stage of the process, referring to the instant spoken word that proceeds (or flows) out of one’s mouth (cf. Matt. 4:4). It means “that which is said or spoken, a word, saying expression” (Liddell and Scott 624) coming from the verb ῥέω “to say...to flow” (623). The *-ma* ending of ῥῆμα has the sense of the result of a process or an action, that is, what is flowed out or spoken. As Debrunner states, “The sense is clearly non-durative, ‘to state specifically’” (75). It occurs sixty-eight times in the New Testament. When the word is mentioned in association with the mouth or tongue, ῥῆμα is mostly used, especially with the words *of* or *from* (Deut. 32:1; Isa. 55:11; Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4).<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this has strengthened the association of the ῥῆμα with the spoken word. However, sometimes the ῥῆμα may be written and the λόγος spoken. The difference between the words lies in the two ends of the process, conceptualization and articulation.<sup>3</sup>

### Graphē and Gramma

Γραφή (*graphē*) comes from the verb γράφω, “to write,” and literally means “writing” or “something written.” In certain contexts it means “an official or accepted body of writings,” i.e., Scriptures (perhaps canonical). “By [metonymy] ἡ γραφή is used for God speaking in it: Ro. ix. 17; Gal. iv. 30” (Thayer 121); “the Scripture says,” i.e., “God says” (cf. Eph. 4:8). The Scripture is not only sourced in God, but its nature is also spiritual. All Scripture (γραφῆ) is God-breathed (θεό-πνευστος), which connects the physical writings to God’s breath or Spirit (πνεῦμα) (2 Tim. 3:16).

Connected to γραφή is γράμμα (*gramma*), the result of the process of writing (γράφω), i.e., what is produced in its most physical sense, letters combined into words and written down on some medium (Gal. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:7).

Γράμμα is used to refer to the Bible, emphasizing its physical makeup or constituents. It is also used for elements of learning, e.g., of a language or body of writings (John 7:15; 2 Tim. 3:15). The writers of the New Testament sometimes used γράμμα to contrast the written (code of the law) with the Spirit or essence of the Bible, e.g., “we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter” (Rom. 7:6), “ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

### Biblos and Biblion

The word βίβλος (*biblos*), which means “inner bark of papyrus, paper made of this bark, book,” emphasizes the material used for the writing down of the words, i.e., papyrus, or paper, and the format it into which it was compiled, e.g., a written book, roll, or scroll. It is used ten times in the New Testament and mostly refers to the books (scrolls) of the Old Testament, of the psalms (Luke 20:42), of the prophets (Acts 7:42), of Moses (Mark 12:26), and the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah (Luke 3:4). It is also used three times to refer to the book of life (Rev. 3:5; 20:15; Phil. 4:3).

**C**ognate words of βίβλος—βιβλίον (*biblion*) and βιβλαρίδιον (*biblaridion*), with the iota infix and the *-αριδι-* infix, respectively—give diminutive force to the word βίβλος, i.e., a little book or scroll. Βιβλίον occurs thirty-four times in the New Testament and is used for a small document, such as a certificate of divorce (Matt. 19:7), a smaller portion of a larger document, the scroll of Isaiah (Luke 4:17), the book of John (John 20:30), the book of the law (Gal. 3:10), and the book of Revelation (“a scroll,” “this scroll,” Rev. 1:11; 22:7). It is also used for the scroll of the old covenant (Heb. 9:19), the scroll of the new covenant (Rev. 5:1-9), and the book of life (13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27).

The little scroll that John devoured was called a βιβλαρίδιον (10:2, 9-10; also called a βιβλίον in v. 8; cf. Ezek. 3:1-3). It was sweet as honey in John’s mouth but made his stomach bitter. The action of devouring the scroll symbolizes the receiving of the word into our being to be constituted into us and make us an embodiment of the word of God, enabling us to prophesy (Rev. 10:11).

Another word that emphasizes the physicality of the word, in particular the material it was written on (leather), is μεμβράνα “parchments” (2 Tim. 4:13), a more durable but more expensive writing material.

### The Relationship between the Triune God and His Word

God the Father is the source of the Word. It is His concept

or thought that is expressed both in Christ, the living Word, and in the Bible, the written Word. God the Son as the *logos* Word defines, explains, and expresses the Father's thought, and God the Spirit as the breath conveys the *rhema* word to the recipients and applies God's essence to them.

The Lord Jesus indicated that the Father was the source of His speaking, that is, of both His utterance and concept. He did not speak *rhema* words from Himself (John 14:10), but the Father who sent Him gave Him commandment as to what to say and what to speak (12:49). He whom God sent speaks the *rhema* word of God (3:34). The *logos* word, which the disciples heard, was not His, but the Father's who sent Him (14:24). The Lord Jesus gave the believers the Father's *logos* word (17:14).

The *logos* word is particularly associated with the Son, who is the expression and embodiment of the Father. The Word also defines, explains, and expresses God in His thought. The Son is the sent One who speaks the word (3:34; 12:49), and the word is also sent forth (Psa. 107:20; 147:15; Zech. 7:12). The Son is the means for the Father to carry out His purpose; in the same principle, the Word is the means by which God accomplishes His purpose (e.g., creation, Heb. 1:2; John 1:3).

*Logos* occurs at least six times in the New Testament as a hypostatic designation of God the Son, indicated by the capitalization of the noun *Word* in some translations (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13).

John 1:1 equates God with *logos* with three predications. First, the Word was in the beginning, indicating that the Word is eternal. Second, the Word was with God. The preposition *pros* ("with") in Greek and the noun following in the accusative case indicate motion towards, implying active union and communion with, but not separation from, God. Third, the Word was God, suggesting that the Word is identified with God in some predicated sense. These predications indicate plurality in God and imply that God is triune.

In John 1:14 the eternal *logos* Word, who was with God and who was God, became flesh and tabernacled among

us. The deep thought here is that "Christ, the incarnate God, came as the embodiment of God, as illustrated by the tabernacle (v. 14) and the temple (2:21), so that man could contact Him and enter into Him to enjoy the riches contained in God" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:14, note 2).

According to 1 John 1:1, "that [a neuter relative pronoun referring to the abstract and mysterious One who was incarnated] which was from the beginning" concerning the Word of life was heard, seen, beheld, and handled by the disciples, both in the human living of Jesus and after His resurrection. The Father is the source of the divine life, and *the Word of life* indicates that this life is embodied in Christ as the living Word of God so that the life of God may be imparted into others.

In Revelation 19:10-15 the Lord Jesus, the living Word of God, is called the Word of God and is seen coming on a

white horse to execute God's judgment on the earth. As the judging Word of God, the Lord Jesus will slay the lawless one, the Antichrist, by what comes out of His mouth, the breath of His mouth (2 Thes. 2:8). The judging word comes to those who reject His living word (cf. F. F. Bruce's comments cited in note 5 at end).

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The *rhema* word is associated particularly with the Spirit in terms both of its essence and its relationship with the pneumatic Christ, Christ as the Spirit. Through His death and resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). As the pneumatic Christ, He can enter into the believers for their salvation. He is the *rhema* word of the faith that is near us, in our mouth and in our heart (Rom. 10:6-10).

The *word* is used interchangeably with *Christ* (vv. 6-7), indicating that this word is Christ. Christ was incarnated by coming down from heaven and was resurrected by coming up from Hades. Thus, He has become the living Word, the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), to be in our mouth and in our heart, just like the air, the breath, that can be taken into our being. (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 10:8, note 1)

According to the Lord's own declaration, the *rhema* words that He speaks are spirit and life. Hence, His *rhema* words impart the spiritual essence of Himself as the real food and drink into the disciples (John 6:63, 68).

He also said, “He whom God has sent speaks the [*rhema*] words of God, for He gives the Spirit not by measure” (3:34), equating the speaking of *rhema* words with the giving of the Spirit without measure. Similarly, Paul equates the *rhema* word with the Spirit when he introduces our offensive weapon in spiritual warfare, the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the *rhema* word of God (Eph. 6:17).

The written word contains God’s *logos* and *rhema* words, His concepts and His articulations or utterances. God spoke in the Old Testament in many portions and many ways to the fathers in the prophets, and He spoke directly to humanity in the New Testament in the person of the Son (Heb. 1:1-2). As the result of God’s speaking in the Old Testament dispensation, God’s people had the Hebrew Bible as the written word of God. In the New Testament dispensation Christ came as the living Word of God. His words and those of the apostles, who incorporated the words from the Old Testament, the words of Christ, and the words given to them by the Spirit, were then recorded in writing to form the New Testament, thereby increasing the written word of God. Peter confirms this by enlarging the notion of Scriptures to include Paul’s letters as part of the rest of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:16). The words recorded in the New Testament can be considered as an exposition of the Old Testament. As Augustine said, the New Testament is contained in the Old, and the Old Testament is explained in the New.

**T**he written word of both the Old and the New Testaments concerns Christ, who is the primary matter and the key concept revealed in the Bible. He expresses the Father’s thought as His beloved Son, whom we need to hear (Matt. 3:17; 17:5) and whom the Father is pleased to reveal to and in us (16:17; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 1:17). The Lord Jesus explained clearly to the two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus beginning from Moses and from all the prophets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. He related His *logos* words of exposition to the fulfillment of all the things written in the Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44-45). When we come to the Bible as the written word, we need to come to Christ as the living *logos* Word, unlike the Jews who searched the Old Testament Scriptures but were not willing to come to the Lord Jesus, concerning whom these Scriptures testify (John 5:39). Moreover, the Lord Jesus also connected the Scriptures (the writings of Moses) to His utterances, or *rhema* words: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote concerning Me. But if you do not believe his writings [γράμματα], how will you believe My words?” (vv. 46-47).

As was pointed out above, the written word is intrinsically related to the Spirit, in that the Spirit is its essence. All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). The essence

of God was breathed into the writers of the Bible to inspire them to reveal God’s concept not only concerning Christ but also concerning Satan and the human condition, in order to point to humanity’s need of Christ. Men spoke from God while being borne by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). As they spoke or wrote, God breathed Himself as the concept, the utterance, and the essence into the words.

Witness Lee summarizes three aspects of the word:

First, there is the written word of God—the Bible (John 10:35). Then there is the living word of God—Christ (John 1:1). Finally, there is the applied word of God—the Spirit (Eph. 6:17; John 6:63).

The Bible is the written word, and Christ is the living word. Without the Spirit, however, the living word cannot be applied to us. The living word becomes the applied word through the Spirit...

When the word of the Bible is spoken to us and heard by us, right away the written word becomes the living word. That is Christ. When the living word is applied to us and received by us, it becomes the word of the Spirit. Then this word of the Spirit heard by us is the source of our faith. Faith comes from the hearing of this applied word by the Spirit through the living Christ out of the written Bible...

All three—the written word, the living word, and the applied word—refer to God Himself. “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Word here is a person. God’s written word in the Bible becomes Christ as the living word, who is applied into us as the Spirit, the word of the Spirit. That is God Himself...

Over two thousand years ago, there was only the written word, not the living word, because Christ was not here yet. Today we have the living word. Without Christ as the living word, it was very hard for God’s word to become the applied word as the Spirit. This is because before Christ came, the Spirit was mostly objective; He was not yet within God’s people. Before Christ, the Spirit of God was upon God’s people. But today we have the Triune God embodied in Christ and realized as the all-inclusive, compound, life-giving Spirit indwelling us all the time. Thus, when we touch the Bible, right away the Bible can become living and applied. (*Crystallization* 83-84, 87)

**T**hese three kinds of words begin with God the Father as the source, the thought of both the spoken and written word. God’s word contains as a key concept Christ, the living *logos* Word who embodies, defines, and explains the divine concept. The Spirit applies the word to us in our situation, bringing the divine essence into us.



In His economy God first created by the word. The center of God's purpose in creation is human beings created in His image and with the ability to speak, which ability distinguishes them from the rest of God's creatures on earth. He spoke to people in the Old Testament dispensation, in many portions and ways, and His speaking was written to constitute the Scriptures. Two thousand years ago the second of the Trinity, the living Word of God, became flesh to be a God-man. He spoke the words of God, both the *logos* words containing the divine concept and the *rhema* words with the divine utterance, applying God and His essence to the recipients.

### The Word in God's Economy: God as the Word in Creation

"Through" (*dia* and the genitive case) Christ as the Word all things came into being (John 1:3), indicating that the Word was the means through which creation came into being (cf. Heb. 1:2). God the Father is the Creator, but He does not create by Himself but carries it out by means of God the Son, the Word of God. The Father had in His mind an entity to be created, and then He spoke through the Son, and it came into being. Genesis 1 contains clauses in which God (*Elohim*—with the plural *-im* ending implying the Triune God or plurality in the Godhead) said (singular), Let there be (light, an expanse, light-bearers in the expanse) and there was (vv. 3, 6, 14), or, Let (waters be gathered, dry land appear, the earth sprout, the waters swarm, birds fly, the earth bring forth animals), and it was so (vv. 9, 11, 20, 24). This speaking is His calling things not being (without a prior existence) as being (Rom. 4:17). As Psalm 33:9 says, "He spoke, and it was; / He commanded, and it stood" (cf. 148:5). Both *logos* and *rhema* words were involved in creation. "By the word [*dabar*, Heb.; *logos*, LXX Gk.] of Jehovah the heavens were made, / And all their host, by the breath of His mouth" (33:6). "By the word [*logos*] of God the heavens were of old and the earth was compacted out of water and through water" (2 Pet. 3:5; Gen. 1:9; Psa. 33:7, 9).

In the beginning, that is, of old, the heavens and the earth were created by God (Gen. 1:1). By the word of God (Psa. 33:6) first the heavens came into existence and then the earth (Job 38:4-7)...First, in Gen. 1:1 the earth came into existence, and then, in Gen. 1:9, also by the word (the speaking) of God (Psa. 33:9), the earth began to be compacted out of water and through water, that is, to stand together with water in juxtaposition, emerging partly from the water and remaining partly submerged under water. (Lee, Recovery Version, 2 Pet. 3:5, notes 3 and 4)

The heavens and earth also remain by the same *logos* word, no longer to be destroyed by water as in Noah's time but by fire on the day of judgment (v. 7).

Hebrews 11:3 states, "By faith we understand that the universe has been framed by the [*rhema*] word of God, so that what is seen has not come into being out of things which appear." Not only is the universe framed by the word of God, but also He actively and continually upholds and bears "all things by the [*rhema*] word of His power" (1:3). The *logos* expresses the divine concept and stamps the design of God and of His economy on creation. The *rhema* word frames, sustains, and maintains its very existence.

Not only is the word intrinsically related to creation, but creation itself also speaks, testifying of God and His economy to those who have the sight. For example, the heavens declare the glory of God; the expanse proclaims the work of His hands (Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). They speak, but there is no speech, no words (Psa. 19:2-3). Their voice is inaudible (lit. "is not heard"). As Craigie says, "On the one hand, there is no speech, no noise, from a literal or acoustic perspective...; on the other hand, there is a voice that penetrates to the furthest corners of the earth" (181). In all the earth their line (or "voice," LXX Gk.) has gone forth, and their words to the end of the world (v. 4; Rom. 10:18).<sup>4</sup>

The apex of creation, however, is human beings created in the image of God with the unique ability among the creatures to communicate using spoken and written language. Their highest function is to prophesy, to speak for God, speak God forth, and speak God into people (1 Cor. 14:1, 5, 31).

### The Word in God's Economy: God as the Word in the Life of Jesus

As was mentioned above, the New Testament begins with the eternal *logos* Word who was with God and who was God becoming flesh and tabernacling among us (John 1:1, 14).

The Lord set up a principle for human life when He responded to the devil's temptation concerning doing a miracle related to eating, by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word [*rhema*] that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). This word indicates that the Lord Jesus took the word of God in the Scriptures as His bread and lived on it. It also illustrates a difference between the words for *word*. The written word of the Scriptures contains the divine thought. The "words quoted by the Lord from Deuteronomy were *logos*, the constant word in the Scriptures. But when He quoted them, they became *rhema*, the instant word applied to His situation," and He overcame the temptation to perform a miracle to take care of His hunger (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 4:4, note 4).

The Lord Jesus spoke both the *logos* and *rhema* words. Some, like Kittel, state, “The work of Jesus consisted to a large extent in the proclamation of the message, i.e., the spoken word...[yet] there seems to be no distinction between” the two words (Debrunner 105). However, we maintain that there is a distinction between the two words, especially when the two words occur in the same verse, in almost identical contexts, or in close proximity. We believe that the translator or writer is not trying to vary his style or to demonstrate his knowledge of Greek synonyms but to indicate some fine and meaningful distinction between the words.

The two words occur in the same verse four times in the New Testament; for example, he who rejects the Lord and does not receive His *rhema* words (utterances) has one who judges him; the *logos* word (concept) that He has spoken will judge him in the last day; since He does not speak from Himself, but His *logos* word (concept) is of the One who sent Him (John 12:48-49).<sup>5</sup>

*Rhema* and *logos* also occur a number of times in almost identical contexts, even in close proximity; for example, the scribes and Pharisees were trying to lay hold on some *logos* word (concept) of Jesus to deliver Him up, but they were not even able to lay hold of a saying (*rhema*) of His in the presence of the people (Luke 20:20, 26).

A few places in the New Testament mention remembering the word(s) of the Lord. In Acts 20:35 Paul encourages remembering the *logos* words of the Lord, in reference to the statement that it is more blessed to give than to receive. In John 15:20 the Lord mentions remembering His *logos* word that a slave is not greater than his master, which was previously uttered in 13:16. In both of these verses the *logos* word is a general concept or thought, even a maxim or proverb. Two places that mention remembering *rhema* words are Luke 24:8, in which the disciples remembered the *rhema* utterances of the Lord Jesus concerning His being delivered up to be crucified, and Acts 11:16, in which Peter remembers and applies the *rhema* utterance of the Lord Jesus in Acts 1:5 concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit in his report of what transpired in Cornelius’s house. These *rhema* utterances were related to specific events rather than general concepts or thoughts. The recipients of the *rhema* word applied them to specific events in their lives after the fact, namely, the realization of the Lord’s death and resurrection and the baptism of the Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius.

A few times *logos* and *rhema* occur in close proximity. In John 6 the Lord Jesus draws a distinction between *logos* and *rhema* when He presents Himself as the bread of life and talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood to have life in ourselves. The disciples replied that this was

a hard *logos* word, or concept (v. 60). The Lord goes on to adjust their concept by telling them that it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing, and the *rhema* words which He has spoken to them are spirit and life (v. 63). He equates the *rhema* word with the life-giving Spirit. We need to ingest, not His physical flesh but His instant spoken words as our true spiritual food, our “manna,” the bread from heaven. When many turned away from Him, the Lord asked Simon Peter if he would also go away, to which he responded, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words [*rhema*] of eternal life” (v. 68). Simon Peter realized that eternal life is embodied in the Lord’s *rhema* words.<sup>6</sup>

In speaking the *logos* word the Lord Jesus presented the divine concept or thought to people (Matt. 13:19; 7:24); this speaking is equivalent to His message or teaching (v. 28; Luke 4:32). The *logos* word, though distinct from His utterance or speaking, may be the content or concept of His speaking. This is indicated by the Lord’s words in John 8:43: “Why do you not understand My speaking [λαλιᾶ]? It is because you cannot hear My word [λόγος].” As Bruce states, “They did not understand his outward speech (*lalia*), which the ear could pick up, because they did not hear the word (*logos*), the message it expressed, which could be apprehended by the enlightened mind” (201).<sup>7</sup> When the Lord spoke a *rhema* word, He applied an utterance to people in their situation. For example, when He spoke to Peter concerning Peter’s denial of Him, and Peter recalled these *rhema* words when the Lord looked at him after he had denied the Lord (Matt. 26:75; Luke 22:61).

The written Word contains and preserves both the *logos* (concept) and the *rhema* (utterance). God’s word becomes available through the writing, translation, printing, and distribution of the Word. The black and white letter is the means for people to access both the divine concept (Christ as the living Word) and the divine utterance (Christ as the Spirit applied to people). The constant written word becomes a source for the instant spoken word. We need to experience the Bible (the written Word of God), Christ (the living Word of God), and the Spirit (the applied word of God). God’s message is applied to us through the Spirit’s anointing in our spirit and through other believers, who speak for the Lord, speak forth the Lord, and speak the Lord into us (prophesying).

## Conclusion

The Triune God is a communicating Being. Hypostatically one of the Son’s designations is the Word, which is the expression of His thought, or concept. Whereas God does communicate with humanity through His appearing (theophanies) and speaking and through becoming a man, He uses the written word as an accurate and enduring

means of communication. He is intrinsically involved in the speaking and writing of His word. The written word is God-breathed, containing the essence and nature of God as Spirit. God in the Son is the living Word (*logos*), the embodiment of His concept or thought. When we come to the written word, we should come to Christ as the living Word and not separate the Bible from God Himself in our experience. Two thousand years ago God in Christ the Son became a man who embodied God's concept or thought. The Son spoke God's instant *rhema* words, applying His speaking to people's particular situation and need. As the indwelling Spirit, He still speaks *rhema* words to us and desires that we would incorporate His word into us in order to speak for Him and speak Him into others for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the organism of the Triune God.

by Roger Good

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A few verses mention the process of writing ῥῆμα words down, i.e., the recording of utterances (Job 19:23). Very rarely does ῥῆμα occur with βιβλίον in the Septuagint. Deuteronomy 28:58 says, "If you are not certain to do all the words [ῥῆμα] of this law written in this book..." Mostly λόγος is associated with βιβλίον, e.g., "Moses finished writing the words [λόγος] of this law in a book" (31:24).

<sup>2</sup>Twice in the New Testament λόγος also proceeds out of one's mouth (Luke 4:22; Eph. 4:29). In these instances the emphasis could be on the thoughts or concepts as expressed by words out of the mouth.

<sup>3</sup>*Dabar*, the main Hebrew word for *word*, also has the two elements of conceptualization and articulation, or as Procksch says, "the dianoetic and the dynamic element. Dianoetically, דָּבָר always contains a νοῦς, a thought"; along with this dianoetic element is the dynamic element or power "felt by the one who receives the word" (Debrunner 92). It is appropriate that both *logos* and *rhema* are used to translate it in the Septuagint, since they express these two aspects of communication.

<sup>4</sup>The psalmist goes on to extol the law, the testimony, the precepts, the commandment, and the judgments of Jehovah as a greater testimony to God and His economy than creation, more to be desired than gold and sweeter than honey to the taste (Psa. 19:7-10).

<sup>5</sup>The other verses are Matthew 12:36, Acts 10:44, and Hebrews 12:19. Both *logos* and *rhema* occur in the same verse a total of thirty-seven times in the Greek Bible. Most translations, including commentaries, do not bring out a distinction between the words in their translation, nor do they make any comment on their significance. However, F. F. Bruce, concerning John 12:48, says,

The 'words' (*rhēmata*) of Jesus are summed up in his 'message' (*logos*), and with this message, the sum and

substance of eternal truth, the final word of adjudication would lie.

'If anyone keeps my word (*logos*)', Jesus had already said in this Gospel, 'he will never see death' (8:51); the corollary is that those who refuse to keep his word will never see life (cf. John 3:36). The word of judgment on the last day, therefore, is not different from the word of life already sounded forth. The message which proclaims life to the believer is the message which proclaims judgment to the disobedient. To bestow life, not to execute judgment, was the purpose of the Son's coming into the world; nevertheless, judgment is the inevitable effect of his coming for those who turn their backs on life. (275)

<sup>6</sup>Other examples of *logos* and *rhema* found in close proximity occur in John 8, 15, and 17, which relate to the incorporation of the word in the believers and will be covered in the next article.

<sup>7</sup>The differences between *logos*, *rhema*, and *lalia* are that *logos* emphasizes the concept, or message, of what is spoken; *rhema* emphasizes the application of the articulation, or utterance of a concept or message to a particular situation; and *lalia* emphasizes the "fact of uttering articulated speech" without necessarily indicating its content (Trench 287-289).

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