

Greece / Language

Read John 1:1-18.

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus introduced His disciples to the outside world. The Old Testament had been written in Hebrew. Greek is the language of the New Testament. Each of the Gospels spoke to a specific audience. John's account was for the whole world, written in a language almost everyone spoke.

Talking Points

- God raised three nations (Greece, Israel, and Rome) during the 400 years between Malachi and the birth of Jesus. God used each one to prepare the world for the arrival of His Son.
- Greece was the first of those powers. Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire. The Persians ruled over Israel at the close of the Old Testament period.
- The Greeks dreamed of uniting the world through their culture and language. They established centers (gymnasiums) of education in all the subjugated countries of their empire.
- By God's design, the Greek language became the dominant language of the known world at that time. By the time of Jesus, the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek.
- The New Testament was originally written in Greek.

Background

Alexander the Great introduced the Jews of Judea to Greek religion, philosophy, and culture. The Greek language was the "lingua franca" of that time. Everybody spoke Greek, including Jesus.

The Greek and Jewish worlds had an incredible impact on one another. Synagogues in Israel adopted some of the teaching strategies of Socrates. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was nothing like the pagan gods of Greece. Greeks were curious. Josephus records that Alexander recognized the uniqueness of the Temple system in Jerusalem. He admired the Jews.

John's Gospel would speak to the Greek worldview, borrowing Greek concepts they would understand. The idea of "logos" was one of those concepts.

In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word (Logos) was with God, and the Word (Logos) was God (John 1:1).

John was not a Greek philosopher. At the time of his writing (Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, & 3rd John, Revelation), he was an elderly Jewish fisherman teaching what Jesus taught

in the Greek-speaking world. You may have heard, "You can take a cowboy out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of the cowboy." That idea applies to John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. God took John out of Israel to the Greek-speaking world. He did not take Israel out of John.

Judaism & Greek Philosophy

Woven into the fabric of the prologue to John's Gospel (John 1:1-18) is a very Jewish way of thinking in the 1st Century.

Davar = Memra = Logos = Word
Hebrew Aramaic Greek English

John's gospel was written in Greek. However, the everyday common language of Israel's Jews was Aramaic. John was a Jew from Israel. The rabbis of the 1st Century identified Memra (Aramaic) as the mechanism by which God made Himself known. The religious leaders of John's time taught six truths concerning the Memra.

- The Memra is distinct from God and the same as God.
- The Memra is the agent of creation.
- The Memra is the agent of salvation.
- The Memra is the agent of revelation.
- The Memra is how God became visible.
- The Memra is how God signed His covenants.

All six of the truths taught by the rabbis concerning the Memra found their realization in the person of Messiah Jesus! Those truths concerning the Memra formed an outline for John's Gospel.

Jew & Gentile, No Distinction

Before time began, God intended that Jews and the world's nations find their common identity in Jesus. John walked with Jesus, talked with Jesus, and ate with Jesus. John lived with Jesus for three and a half years. He wanted everyone to know Jesus as he did. His passion took him out of Israel as a witness of Jesus among the nations.

Bible Conversations

- Think about the unity experienced by Adam, Eve, and the Lord in the Garden of Eden. What happened to Adam and Eve as a married couple and the One whose image they bore when they decided to "be like God?"
- Read Genesis 11:1-9. Before the Tower of Babel, everyone spoke the same language. Seventy nations speaking different languages were the result of mankind's rebellion. What must it have been like to suddenly not understand the people you were working alongside?
- There is a balance to be found between seeking unity and embracing diversity. How might you be out of balance?

- The Gospel is for everyone. It is, at the same time, both exclusive and inclusive. How did Jesus make everyone feel comfortable and uncomfortable in His presence?
- What exclusive claims does the Bible make about the person of Jesus Christ?