

# The Logos and Its Function in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria

Greek Interpretation of Hebrew Thought  
and Foundations of Christianity

## Part Two

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*Editor's Note: The first part of this article gave an account of Philo of Alexandria's (20 BCE-50 CE) understanding of the Logos. Philo was a Hellenized Jew who produced a synthesis of Greek ideas and traditional Judaism. He authored at least 35 books. Judaism had little concern for preserving Philo's views, while some Christians fell under his influence. Philo did not present a single view of the Logos. This two-part article examines twelve descriptions of the Logos given by Philo. Part one covered the first five: the Utterance of God; the Divine Mind; Agent of Creation; Transcendent Power; Universal Bond.*

### 6. Immanent Reason

The reasoning capacity of a human mind is a portion of the all-pervading Divine Logos. "It is the mind alone which the Father who begat it deemed worthy of freedom, and, loosening the bonds of necessity, allowed it to range free, and of that power of volition which constitutes his most intimate and fitting possession [God] presented it [the mind] with such a portion as it was capable of receiving."<sup>1</sup> Philo emphasizes that man "has received this one extraordinary gift, intellect, which is accustomed to comprehend the nature of all bodies and of all things at the same time."<sup>2</sup> Humanity resembles God in the sense of having free volition:

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<sup>1</sup> *Deus* 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Deus* 47.

For in the case of other plants and other animals, we cannot call either the good that is caused by them deserving of praise, or the evil that they do deserving of blame; for all their motives in either direction, and all their changes, have no design about them, but are involuntary. But the soul of man, being the only one which has received from God the power of voluntary motion, and which in this respect has been made to resemble God, and being as far as possible emancipated from the authority of that grievous and severe mistress necessity, may rightly be visited with reproach if she does not pay the honour to the being who has emancipated her.<sup>3</sup>

This concept, that it is chiefly in intellect and free volition that humans differ from other life forms, has a long history which can be traced to Anaxagoras and Aristotle.<sup>4</sup> Philo called “men of God” those people who made God-inspired intellectual life their dominant issue. Such men “have entirely transcended the sensible sphere, and migrated to the intelligible world, and dwell there enrolled as citizens of the Commonwealth of Ideas, which are imperishable, and incorporeal . . . those who are born of God are priests and prophets who have not thought fit to mix themselves up in the constitutions of this world.”<sup>5</sup> Philo wrote the following in reference to the Old Testament expression that God “breathed into” (equivalent of “inspired” or “gave life to”) inanimate things:

For there must be three things: that which breathes in is God, that which receives what is breathed in, and that which is breathed in. Now, that which breathes is God, that which receives what is breathed in is the mind, and that which is breathed in is the spirit. What then is collected from these three things? A union of the three takes place, through God extending the power, which proceeds from himself through the spirit, which is the middle term, as far as the subject.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Deus* 48.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429a, 4.16-18.

<sup>5</sup> *Gig.* 61.

<sup>6</sup> *LA* 1.37.

Though the spirit is distributed among men it is not diminished:

But now, the spirit which is upon him is the wise, the divine, the individual, the undistributable, the good spirit, the spirit which is everywhere diffused, so as to fill the universe, which, while it benefits others, it is not injured by having a participation in it given to another, and if added to something else, either as to its understanding, or its knowledge, or its wisdom.<sup>7</sup>

The nature of the reasoning power in men is indivisible from the Divine Logos, but “though they are indivisible themselves, they divide an innumerable multitude of other things.” Just as the Divine Logos divided and distributed everything in nature (i.e. it gave qualities to undifferentiated, primordial matter), so the human mind by exertion of its intellect is able to divide everything and everybody into an infinite number of parts. And this is possible because the mind resembles the Logos of the Creator and Father of the universe: “So that, very naturally, the two things which thus resemble each other, both the mind which is in us and that which is above us, being without parts and invisible, will still be able in a powerful manner to divide and distribute all existing things.”<sup>8</sup>

How, then, is it natural that the human intellect, being as scanty as it is, and enclosed in no very ample space, in some membrane, or in the heart (truly very narrow bounds), should be able to embrace the vastness of the heaven and of the world, great as it is, if there were not in it some portion of a divine and happy soul, which cannot be separated from it? For nothing which belongs to the divinity can be cut off from it so as to be separated from it, but it is only extended. On which account the Being which has had imparted to it a share of the perfection which is in the universe, when it arrives at a proper comprehension of the world, is extended in width simultaneously with the boundaries of the universe, and is incapable of being divided; for its power is ductile and capable of extension.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Gig.* 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Her.* 234-236.

<sup>9</sup> *Det.* 90. (Cf. *Gig.* 27; *LA* 1.37).

Uninitiated minds are unable to apprehend the Existent by itself; they only perceive it through its actions. To them God appears as a Triad — Himself and His two Powers, creative and ruling. To the “purified soul,” however, God appears as One:

When, therefore, the soul is shone upon by God as if at noonday, and when it is wholly and entirely filled with that light which is appreciable only by the intellect, and by being wholly surrounded with its brilliancy is free from all shackle or darkness, it then perceives a threefold image of one subject, one image of the living God, and others of the other two, as if they were shadows irradiated by it . . . but he claims that the term shadow is just a more vivid representation of the matter intended to be intimated. Since this is not the actual truth, but in order that one may when speaking keep as close to the truth as possible, the one in the middle is the Father of the universe, who in the sacred Scripture is called by his proper name, I am that I am; and the beings on each side are those most ancient powers which are always close to the living God, one of which is called his Creative Power, and the other his Royal Power. And the Creative Power is God, for it is by this that he made and arranged the universe; and the Royal Power is the Lord, for it is fitting that the Creator should lord it over and govern the creature. Therefore, the middle person of the three, being attended by each of his powers as by body-guard, presents to the mind, which is endowed with the faculty of sight, a vision at one time of one being, and at another time of three; of one when the soul being completely purified, and having surmounted not only the multitude of numbers, but also the number two, which is the neighbour of the unit, hastens onward to that idea which is devoid of mixture, free from all combination, and by itself in need of nothing else whatever; and of three, when, not being as yet made perfect as to the important virtues, it is still seeking for initiation in those of less consequence, and is not able to attain to a comprehension of the living God by its own unassisted faculties without the aid of something else, but can only do so by judging of his deeds, whether as creator or as governor. This then, as they say, is the second best thing; and it no less partakes in the opinion which is dear to and devoted to God. But the first-mentioned disposition has no such share, but is itself the

very God-loving and God-beloved opinion itself, or rather it is truth which is older than opinion, and more valuable than any seeming.<sup>10</sup>

So the one category of enlightened people is able to comprehend God through a vision beyond the physical universe. It is as though they advanced on a heavenly ladder and conjectured the existence of God through an inference.<sup>11</sup> The other category apprehends Him through Himself, as light is seen by light. For God gave man such a perception “as should prove to him that God exists, and not to show him what God is.” Philo believed that even the *existence* of God “cannot possibly be contemplated by any other being; because, in fact, it is not possible for God to be comprehended by any being but himself.”<sup>12</sup> Philo adds, “Only men who have raised themselves upward from below, so as, through the contemplation of his works, to form a conjectural conception of the Creator by a probable train of reasoning”<sup>13</sup> are holy, and are His servants.

Next Philo explains how such men have an impression of God’s existence as revealed by God Himself, by the similitude of the sun (Philo borrowed this analogy from Plato<sup>14</sup>). As light is seen in consequence of its own presence so, “In the same manner God, being his own light, is perceived by himself alone, nothing and no other being co-operating with or assisting him, or being at all able to contribute to pure comprehension of his existence; But these men have arrived at the real truth, who form their ideas of God from God, of light from light.”<sup>15</sup>

As Plato<sup>16</sup> and Philo had done, Plotinus later used this image of the sun: “The illumination which is diffused from Him who remains immobile, is as the light in the sun which illuminates everything around.”<sup>17</sup> Philo differentiated two modes for perceiving God, an inferential mode and a direct mode without mediation: “As long therefore as our mind still shines around and hovers around, pouring as it were a noontide light into

<sup>10</sup> *Abr.* 119-123.

<sup>11</sup> *Proem.* 40.

<sup>12</sup> *Proem.* 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> *Proem.* 43.

<sup>14</sup> *Mut.* 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Proem.* 45-46.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 507 C.

<sup>17</sup> Plotino *Enneadi* Porfirio *Vita di Plotino*. Traduzione con testo greco a fronte. Introduzione, note e bibliografia di Giuseppe Fraggin (Milano: Rusconi, 1992/1996). English translation: *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen Mac Kenna and abridged with introduction and notes by John Dillon, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991, 5.1.6.

the whole soul, we, being masters of ourselves, are not possessed by any extraneous influence.”<sup>18</sup> Thus this direct mode is not in any way a type of inspiration or inspired prophecy: it is unlike “inspiration” when a “trance” or a “heaven-inflicted madness” seizes us and divine light influences us, as it happens also “to the race of prophets.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus the Logos, eternally created (begotten), is an expression of the immanent powers of God and at the same time it emanates into everything in the world.

### 7. Immanent Mediator of the Physical Universe

In certain other places in his writings Philo accepted the Stoic theory that the immanent Logos is the power or Law binding the opposites in the universe and mediating between them, thus directing the world. For example, Philo envisions that the world is suspended in a vacuum and asks how it is that the world does not fall down, since it is not held by anything solid. Philo then gives this answer:

The Logos extending himself from the center to its furthest bounds and from its extremities to the center again, runs nature’s unvanquished course joining and binding fast all its parts. For the Father when he begat him constituted him an unbreakable bond of the universe. It is therefore reasonable that all the earth will not be dissolved by all the water contained within its bosom-like hollows; nor fire be quenched by air; nor, on the other hand, air be rekindled by fire. The Divine Logos marshals himself between, like a vowel amid consonants, that the universe may produce a harmony<sup>20</sup> like that of literary art, for he mediates the threatenings of the opponents through conciliatory persuasion.<sup>21</sup>

Thus Philo saw God as only indirectly the Creator of the world: God is the author of the invisible, intelligible world which served as a model for the Logos. Philo says Moses called this archetypal heavenly power by various names: “the beginning, the image, and the sight of God.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Her.* 264.

<sup>19</sup> *Her.* 265.

<sup>20</sup> A favorite word of the Stoics.

<sup>21</sup> *Plant.* 9-10. (Cf. *Plant.* 7-10; *LA* 1.37; *Her.* 188; *Deus* 176; *Det.* 90; *Gig.* 27; *QE* 2.68, 118; *Fug.* 110; *Op.* 143).

<sup>22</sup> *LA* 1.43.

Following the views of Plato and the Stoics, Philo believed that:

in all existing things there must be an active cause, and a passive subject; and that the active cause is the Logos of the universe, thoroughly unadulterated and thoroughly unmixed, superior to virtue and superior to science, superior even to abstract good and abstract beauty, while the passive subject is something inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own, but having been set in motion, and fashioned, and endowed with life by the intellect, became transformed into that most perfect work, this world.<sup>23</sup>

He gives the impression that he believed that the Logos functions like the Platonic “Soul of the World.”<sup>24</sup>

### **8. The Angel of the LORD, Revealer of God**

Philo describes the Logos as the revealer of God symbolized in the Scripture by an angel of the LORD:<sup>25</sup> “But to those souls which are still in the body he [God] must appear in the resemblance of the angels, though without changing his nature (for he is unchangeable), but merely implanting in those who behold him an idea of his having another form, so that they fancy that it is his image, not an imitation of him, but the very archetypal appearance itself.”<sup>26</sup>

Referring to Genesis 31:13, Philo states: “We must understand this, that he [God] on that occasion took the place of an angel, as far as appearance went, without changing his own real nature.”<sup>27</sup> Philo claims that the angel who appeared to Hagar in Genesis 16:8 was “the word (Logos) of God.”<sup>28</sup> The Logos is the first-born and the eldest and chief of the angels:

And even if there be not as yet any one who is worthy to be called a son of God, nevertheless let him labor earnestly to be adorned according to his first-born Logos, the eldest of his angels, as the

<sup>23</sup> *Op.* II. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> *Aet.* 84.

<sup>25</sup> *Somn.* 1.228-1.239; *Cher.* 1-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Somn.* 1.232.

<sup>27</sup> *Somn.* 1.238.

<sup>28</sup> *Fug.* 5.

great archangel of many names, for he is called the Authority, and the name of God, and the Logos, and man according to God's image, and he who sees Israel. For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, "We are all one man's sons" (Gen. 42:11). For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the sons of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of his eternal image, of his most sacred Logos; for the image of God is his most ancient Logos.<sup>29</sup>

According to Philo, man's highest union with God is limited to union with the Deity's manifestation as the Logos. God's transcendence prevents our having access to God's essence. The notion of God's transcendence could already be found in Plato's concept of the Good as the One above the Being,<sup>30</sup> but the credit for the concept goes to Speusippus (408-339 BCE), Plato's successor as the head of the Academy.<sup>31</sup> The idea was also developed by Neopythagoreans Eudorus of Alexandria (fl. 30 BCE) and Moderatus of Gades (fl. second half of the first century CE). Anaximander (d. ca 546 BCE) postulated *apeiron* (ἄπειρον), the Unlimited, as the first principle, not a natural substance, from which many worlds are becoming. The neo-Platonists postulated this first principle supranoetic above a pair of the opposites, Monad representing the Form and the Dyad representing Matter.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhat like that neo-Platonist doctrine, Philo emphatically insisted on a doctrine of God's transcendence which held to a distinction between God's essence and God's existence, and which taught our complete inability of cognizing the former. This position is rather alien to biblical and rabbinical traditions. In the Bible, God is represented in a "material" and "physical" way: "God breathed into man's face both physically and morally."<sup>33</sup> And, "The mind is vivified by God, and the irrational part of the soul by the mind; for the mind is as it were a god to the irrational part of the soul, for which reason Moses did not hesitate to

<sup>29</sup> *Conf.* 146-147.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 509 b.

<sup>31</sup> Speusippus, frag. 34, in Paul Lang *De Speusippi Academici Scriptis. Accedunt Fragmenta*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965. Speusippo, *Frammenti*, edizione, traduzione e commenti a cura di Margherita Isnardi Parente, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1980. Leonardo Tarán, *Speusippus of Athens. A Critical Study with a Collection of the Related Texts and Commentary*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981.

<sup>32</sup> Simplicius, *In Phys.*, 181, 10 ff.

<sup>33</sup> *LA* 1.36,39.



call it the god of Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).”<sup>34</sup> But Philo asserts that we may not know the exact nature of God:

None of those things which are capable of entertaining belief can entertain a firm belief respecting God. For he has not displayed his nature to any one; but keeps it invisible to every kind of creature. Who can venture to affirm of him who is the cause of all things either that he is a body, or that he is incorporeal, or that he has such and such distinctive qualities, or that he has no such qualities? Or who, in short, can venture to affirm any thing positively about his essence, or his character, or his movements? But he alone can utter a positive assertion respecting himself, since he alone has an accurate knowledge of his own nature, without the possibility of mistake.<sup>35</sup>

God’s qualities are most generic and there can be no distinction in Him between genus and species since God “exists according to the indivisible unit.”<sup>36</sup> God belongs to no class; He has properties, but they are not shared with others. His essence is, therefore, one and single. “Now there is an especial attribute of God to create, and this faculty it is impious to ascribe to any created being. But the special property of the created being is to suffer.”<sup>37</sup>

God’s essence, though concealed, is made manifest on two secondary levels. One is the level of the intelligible universe of the Logos which is God’s image: “For as those who are not able to look upon the sun itself, look upon the reflected rays of the sun as the sun itself, and upon the halo around the moon itself; so also do those who are unable to bear the sight of God, look upon his image, his angel Logos, as himself”:<sup>38</sup>

For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, “We are all one man’s sons” (Gen. 42:11). For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the soul of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of his eternal

<sup>34</sup> *LA* 1.40.

<sup>35</sup> *LA* 3.206; *LA* 3.26; *Deus* 53,56.

<sup>36</sup> *Gig.* 52.

<sup>37</sup> *Cher.* 77.

<sup>38</sup> *Somn.* 1.239.

image, of his most sacred Logos, for the image of God is his most ancient Logos.<sup>39</sup>

The second level is the level of the sensible universe which is an image of the Logos: "It is manifest also that the archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the Idea of Ideas, the Reason of God."<sup>40</sup>

The essence of God remains forever undisclosed; only its effect, images or shadows may be perceived. Since the essence of God is forever beyond any possibility of human experience or cognition, including the mystic experience of vision, the only attributes that may be applied to God in His supreme state are those of the *via negativa* or the *via eminentiae*. But there is also a third way which consists of depriving the object of knowledge of any sensible attribute:

For of men some are attached to the service of the soul, and others to that of the body; now the companions of the soul, being able to associate with incorporeal natures, appreciable only by the intellect, do not compare the living God to any species of created beings; but, dissociating it with any idea of distinctive qualities (for this is what most especially contributes to his happiness and to his consummate felicity, to comprehend his naked existence without any connection with figure or character), they, I say, are content with the bare conception of his existence, and do not attempt to invest him with any form.<sup>41</sup>

He is beyond being, like Plato's Good.<sup>42</sup> It may be inferred, however, from the fact that God alone *is* (ὄντως ὄν = one that is), that His being is of an order altogether different from anything else: "For of virtues, the virtues of God are founded in truth, existing according to his essence: since God alone exists in essence, on account of which fact, he speaks of necessity about himself, saying, 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3:14), as if those who were with him did not exist according to essence, but only appeared to exist in opinion."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Conf.* 147-148.

<sup>40</sup> *Op.* 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Deus* 55. (Cf. Alcinous, *Did.*, 185.14).

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 509a, b.

<sup>43</sup> *Det.* 160.

## 9. Multi-named Archetype

Philo's Logos has many names: "And even if there be not as yet any one who is worthy to be called a son of God, nevertheless let him labour earnestly to be adorned according to his first-born Logos, the eldest of his angels, as the great archangel of many names; for he is called the Authority, and the name of God, and the Logos, and man according to God's image, and he who sees Israel."<sup>44</sup> He is also called Wisdom:

Accordingly Wisdom is represented by some one of the beings of the divine company as speaking of herself in this manner: "God created me as the first of his works, and before the beginning of time did he establish me" (Prov. 8:22). For it was necessary that all the things which come under the head of the creation must be younger than the mother and nurse of the whole universe.<sup>45</sup>

He is the "beginning," the "image," and the "sight of God":

For he [Moses] called that divine and heavenly wisdom by many names, and he made it manifest that it had many appellations; for he called it the beginning, and the image, and the sight of God. And he exhibits the wisdom which is conversant about the things of the earth (as being an imitation of this archetypal wisdom), in the plantation of the Paradise . . . .<sup>46</sup>

"Earthly wisdom is also the copy of this as an archetype." Moreover, terrestrial virtue of the human race is "a copy and representation of the heavenly."<sup>47</sup>

Man was created as perceptible to the sense, and in the similitude of a Being appreciable only by the intellect, but he who in respect of his form is intellectual and incorporeal, is the similitude of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Conf.* 146. Just like the Logos-Zeus of the Stoics (*SVF*, 1.537; *D.L.* 7.135; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 9.2.31); or Isis (Plutarch, *De Iside et de Osiride*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwynn Griffiths, Cardiff: University of Wales, 1970, 372 E; Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book: Metamorphoses, book XI*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwynn Griffiths, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, XI.5).

<sup>45</sup> *Ebr.* 31.

<sup>46</sup> *LA* 1.43, 45-46.

<sup>47</sup> *LA* 1.43, 45-46. (Cf. *Ebr.* 92; *Mut.* 125; *Somn.* 2.254; *QG* 3.40).

archetypal model as to appearance, and he is the form of the principal character; but this is the Logos of God, the first beginning of all things, the original species or the archetypal idea, the first measure of the universe.<sup>48</sup>

### 10. Soul-Nourishing Manna

God sends “the stream” from His Wisdom which irrigates God-loving souls; consequently they become filled with “manna.” Manna is described by Philo as a “generic thing” coming from God. It does not come from God directly, however: “the most generic is God, and next is the Logos of God, the other things subsist in word (Logos) only.”<sup>49</sup> According to Philo, Moses called manna “the most ancient Logos of God.”<sup>50</sup>

And God also causes us hunger, not that which proceeds from virtue, but that which is engendered by passion and vice. And the proof of this is, that he nourishes us with his own Word (Logos), which is the most universal of all things, for manna being interpreted, means “what?” and “what” is the most universal of all things; for the Logos of God is over all the world, and is the most ancient, and the most universal of all things that are created.

Next Philo explains that men are “nourished by the whole word (Logos) of God, and by every portion of it . . . Accordingly, the soul of the more perfect man is nourished by the whole word (Logos); but we must be contented if we are nourished by a portion of it.”<sup>51</sup> And “the Wisdom of God, which is the nurse and foster-mother and educator of those who desire incorruptible food; . . . immediately supplies food to those beings which are brought forth by Her . . . but the fountain of divine wisdom is borne along, at one time in a more gentle and moderate stream, and at another with greater rapidity and a more exceeding violence and impetuosity.”<sup>52</sup> This Wisdom as the Daughter of God is “a true-born and ever-virgin daughter” and “has obtained a nature intact and undefiled both because of her own propriety and the dignity of him who begot her.” Having identified the Logos with Wisdom, Philo runs into a grammatical

<sup>48</sup> *QG* 1.4.

<sup>49</sup> *LA* 2.86.

<sup>50</sup> *Det.* 118.

<sup>51</sup> *LA* 3.175-176.

<sup>52</sup> *Det.* 115-117, 160; *Her.* 191; *Fug.* 138.

problem: in the Greek language “wisdom” (*sophia*) is feminine and “word” (logos) is masculine; moreover, Philo saw Wisdom’s function as masculine. So he explained that Wisdom’s *name* is feminine, but her *nature* is masculine:

Indeed all the virtues have women’s designations, but powers and activities of truly perfect men. For that which comes after God, even if it were the most venerable of all other things, holds second place, and was called feminine in contrast to the Creator of the universe, who is masculine, and in accordance with its resemblance to everything else. For the feminine always falls short and is inferior to the masculine, which has priority. Let us then pay no attention to the discrepancy in the terms, and say that the daughter of God, Wisdom, is both masculine and the father, inseminating and engendering in souls a desire to learn discipline, knowledge, practical insight, notable and laudable actions.<sup>53</sup>

### **11. Intermediary Power**

The fundamental doctrine propounded by Philo is that of Logos as an intermediary power, a messenger and mediator between God and the world.

To his chief messenger and most venerable Logos, the Father who engendered the universe has granted the singular gift, to stand between and separate the creature from the Creator. This same Logos is both suppliant of ever anxiety-ridden mortality before the immortal and ambassador of the ruler to the subject. He glories in his gift and proudly describes it in these words: “And I stood between the Lord and you” (Deut. 5:5), neither unbegotten as God, nor begotten as you, but midway between the two extremes, serving as a pledge for both; to the Creator as assurance that the creature should never completely shake off the reins and rebel, choosing disorder rather than order, to the creature warranting his hopefulness that the gracious God will never disregard his own work. For I am an ambassador of peace to creation from the God who has determined to put down wars, who is ever the guardian of peace. Therefore the sacred Logos, having given us instruction

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<sup>53</sup> *Fug.* 50-52.

respecting the division into equal parts, leads us also to the knowledge of opposites, saying that God placed the divisions “opposite to one another” (Gen. 15:10); for in fact nearly all the things that exist in the world are by nature opposite to one another. And we must begin with the first . . . <sup>54</sup> God is the cause, not the instrument, and what was born was created indeed through the agency of some instrument, but was by all means called into existence by the great first cause.<sup>55</sup>

And the Logos is the suppliant for men, God’s ambassador sent to men:

And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Logos a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both and separate that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Logos is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; and is also the ambassador, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race. And the Logos rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, “And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you” (Num. 16:48); neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities, like a hostage, as it were, to both parties: a hostage to the Creator, as a pledge and security that the whole race would never fly off and revolt entirely choosing disorder rather than order; and to the creature, to lead it to entertain a confident hope that the merciful God would not overlook his own work. For I will proclaim peaceful intelligence to the creation from him who has determined to destroy wars, namely God, who is ever the guardian of peace.<sup>56</sup>

Philo described the Logos as God’s son, a perfect being who procures forgiveness of sins and blessings: “For it was indispensable that the man who was consecrated to the Father of the world [the high priest] should have as a paraclete, his son, the being most perfect in all virtue, to procure forgiveness of sins, and a supply of unlimited blessings.”<sup>57</sup>

Philo transformed the Stoic’s impersonal and immanent Logos into a being who was neither eternal like God nor created like creatures, but

<sup>54</sup> *Her.* 205-206. (Cf *Somn.* 2.188).

<sup>55</sup> *Cher.* 125.

<sup>56</sup> *Her.* 205-206.

<sup>57</sup> *Mos.* 2.134.

begotten from eternity. This being was a mediator giving hope to men and “was sent down to earth” (ἐπὶ γῆν καταπέμπτos). God, according to Philo, sends “the stream of his own wisdom” to men “and causes the changed soul to drink of unchangeable health; for the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God, which being both sublime and the first of things he quarried out of his own powers.” After the souls are watered they are filled with the manna which “is called something which is the primary genus of every thing. But the most universal of all things is God; and in the second place is the Logos of God.”<sup>58</sup> Through the Logos of God men learn all kinds of instruction and everlasting wisdom.<sup>59</sup> The Logos is the “cupbearer (οἰνοχόος) of God . . . being itself in an unmixed state, the pure delight and sweetness, and pouring forth and joy, and ambrosial medicine of pleasure and happiness.”<sup>60</sup> This wisdom was represented by the tabernacle of the Old Testament which was “a thing made after the model and in imitation of Wisdom” and sent down to earth “in the midst of our impurity in order that we may have something whereby we may be purified, washing off and cleansing all those things which dirty and defile our miserable life, full of all evil reputation as it is.”<sup>61</sup> “God therefore sows and implants terrestrial virtue in the human race, being an imitation and representation of the heavenly virtue.”<sup>62</sup>

## 12. “God”

In three passages Philo describes the Logos even as God:

a.) Commenting on Genesis 22:16, Philo explains that God could only swear by Himself since

He alone has any knowledge concerning his actions; . . . which is not possible for any one else to do . . . For no man can rightly swear by himself, because he is not able to have any certain knowledge respecting his own nature, but we must be content if we are able to understand even his name, that is to say his Logos, which is the interpreter of his will. For that must be God to us imperfect beings, but the first mentioned, or true God is so only to wise and perfect man.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *LA* II.86.

<sup>59</sup> *Fug.* 127-129.

<sup>60</sup> *Somm.* II.249.

<sup>61</sup> *Her.* 112-113.

<sup>62</sup> *LA* 1.45.

<sup>63</sup> *LA* 3.207.

b.) What then ought we to say? There is one true God only: but they who are called Gods, by an abuse of language, are numerous, on which account the holy Scripture on the present occasion indicates that it is the true God that is meant by the use of the article, the expression being “I am the God (*ho theos*)”; but when the word is used incorrectly, it is put without the article, the expression being, “He who was seen by thee in the place,” not “of the God” (*ton theon*), but simply “of God” (*theon*); and what he here calls God is his most ancient Logos, not having any superstitious regard to the position of the names, but only proposing one end to himself, namely to give a true account of the matter; for in other passages the sacred historian, when he considered whether there really was any name belonging to the living God, showed that he knew that there was none properly belonging to him, but that whatever appellation any one may give him, will be an abuse of terms; for the living God is not of a nature to be described, but only to be.<sup>64</sup>

c.) Commenting on Genesis 9:6, Philo states:

Why is it that he speaks as if of some other god, saying that he made man after the image of God, and not that he made him after his own image? Very appropriately and without any falsehood was this oracular sentence uttered by God, for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Logos of the supreme Being; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear in it the type of the Divine Logos; since in his first Word God is superior to the most rational possible nature. But he who is superior to the Logos holds his rank in a better and most singular pre-eminence, and how could the creature possibly exhibit a likeness of him in himself?<sup>65</sup>

Philo himself, however, explains that to call the Logos “God” is not a correct appellation.<sup>66</sup> Also, through this Logos, which men share with God, men know God and are able to perceive Him.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Somn.* 1.229-230.

<sup>65</sup> *QG* 2.62.

<sup>66</sup> *Somn.* 1.230.

<sup>67</sup> *LA* 1.37-38.



### Summary of Philo's Concept of the Logos

Philo's doctrine of the Logos is blurred by his mystical and religious vision, but his Logos is clearly the second individual in one God as the hypostatization of God's creative power — Wisdom. The supreme is God and next is the Wisdom or Logos of God.<sup>68</sup> Logos has many names, as did Zeus,<sup>69</sup> and multiple functions. Earthly wisdom is but a copy of this celestial Wisdom. It was represented in historical times by the tabernacle through which God sent an image of divine excellence as a representation and copy of Wisdom (Lev. 16:16; *Her.* 112-113). The Divine Logos never mixes with those things which are created and thus destined to perish, but attends the One alone. The Logos is apportioned into an infinite number of parts in humans; thus we impart the Divine Logos. As a result we acquire some likeness to the Father and the Creator of all.<sup>70</sup>

The Logos is the bond of the universe and the mediator extended in nature. The Father eternally begat the Logos and constituted him as an unbreakable bond of the universe that produces harmony.<sup>71</sup> The Logos, mediating between God and the world, is neither uncreated as God nor created as men. So in Philo's view the Father is the supreme being and the Logos, as His chief messenger, stands between Creator and creature. The Logos is an ambassador and suppliant, neither unbegotten nor begotten as are sensible things.<sup>72</sup>

Wisdom, the Daughter of God, is in reality masculine because powers have truly masculine descriptions, whereas virtues are feminine. That which is in second place after the masculine Creator was *called* feminine, according to Philo, but her *priority* is masculine; so the Wisdom of God is both masculine and feminine.<sup>73</sup> Wisdom flows from the Divine Logos.<sup>74</sup>

The Logos is the Cupbearer of God. He pours himself into happy souls.<sup>75</sup> The soul comes from the divine breath of the Father/Ruler. It is the invisible and immortal part.

<sup>68</sup> *Op.* 24; *Hermetica* II.14.

<sup>69</sup> *SVF*, I. 537; Cleanthes *D.L.* 7.135, 147; *LA* 1.43,45,46.

<sup>70</sup> *Her.* 234-236.

<sup>71</sup> *Plant.* 9-10.

<sup>72</sup> *Her.* 205.

<sup>73</sup> *Fug.* 50-52.

<sup>74</sup> *Fug.* 137-138.

<sup>75</sup> *Somm.* 2.249.

**Philo's scheme of realities:**

	Creative Power	
FATHER	----->	DIVINE MIND
	Ruling Power	LOGOS, WISDOM
Other Powers		SON (first-born)
FORMS		DAUGHTER OF GOD
		IDEA of IDEAS
		MANNA
		IMAGE of GOD
		MESSENGER
		MEDIATOR
		MODERATOR
		SUPPLIANT
		AMBASSADOR
		CUPBEARER OF GOD
		TOASTMASTER
		eternally generated
		most ancient
		permeating the world
		agent creating the world
		organizing the world
		imparting mind to humans
THE SENSIBLE WORLD		
		younger Son (or Grandson) of God