

Philo's Concept of the Word

Philo (c. 10 B.C. to 45 A.D.) was an important leader of the Jewish community in Alexandria during the first century. He wrote extensively about the books of Moses in the Greek language and from the perspective of Hellenistic philosophy.¹

1. Philo was, above all else, a devout monotheist, who worshipped the one God of Israel.

*... there is nothing like unto God ... God is alone: a single being: not a combination: a single nature ... there is **nothing equal to God**, and nothing superior to him ...therefore God exists according to oneness and unity (Allegorical Interpretation II.1-3).*

2. The Word is like God's son, a supreme angel, and the first-born.

*... 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 word, 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 Word, and man according to God's image, and he who sees Israel.** (Allegorical Interpretation II.146).*

3. The Word is neither created nor uncreated, but in between these two realities.

*To **His Word** (logos), **His chief messenger** (archangelos), highest in age and honor, the Father of all has given the special prerogative, **to stand on the border and separate the creature from the Creator.** This same Word both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted morality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject. He glories in his prerogative and proudly describes it in these words, "And I stood between the Lord and you" (Deut. 5:5), that is **neither uncreated as God, nor created as you, but midway between the two extremes**, a surety to both sides; to the parent, pledging the creature ...; to the child, warranting his hopes that the merciful God will never forget His own work. "For I will proclaim peace to creation from Him who has determined to destroy wars, namely God, who is ever the guardian of peace (Who is the Heir of Divine Things, 205-206).*

4. The Word is the image of God, in the closest position to God, like God's charioteer.

*... **the divine word** which is above these does not come into any visible appearance ... but is itself an **image of God, the most ancient of all the objects of intellect in the whole world, and that which is placed in the closest proximity to the only truly existing God, without any partition or distance between interposed between them** ... the word is, as it were, the charioteer of the powers [mercy and justice], and he who utters it [i.e., God utters the Word] is the rider, who directs the charioteer how to proceed with a view to the proper guidance of the universe ... (On Flight an Finding, 101).*

5. The pattern for the image of God was based on the "second god," who is the Word.

*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 god** (deuteros theos), who is **the Word** of the supreme Being; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear it the type of **the divine Word**; since in his first Word, God is superior to the most rational possible nature (Questions and Answers on Genesis II, 62).*

¹ The English translations are from C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo. Complete and Unabridged*. (Originally published 1854; New Updated Version. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993.