

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Word of Yahweh

by Dan Trygg

“After these things the word (<u>rhēma</u> – LXX) of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.’”	Genesis 15:1
“But that night the word (<u>rhēma</u> – LXX) of Yahweh came to Nathan...”	2 Samuel 7:4
“Isaiah had not yet gone out of the middle court when the word (<u>rhēma</u> – LXX) of Yahweh came to him:”	2 Kings 20:4
“...God's word (<u>rhēma</u>) came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.”	Luke 3:2
“Samuel had not yet known Yahweh, ...the word (<u>rhēma</u>) of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him.”	1 Samuel 3:7
“The word (<u>rhēma</u> – LXX) of God came upon Jeremiah, ... To whom the word (<u>logos</u> – LXX) of God came”	Jeremiah 1:1-2
“The word (<u>logos</u> – LXX) of Yahweh came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest...”	Ezekiel 1:3

We have been studying the use of the Greek words rhēma and logos to describe different nuances in communication that were in the original language, but are not apparent to us in English. Both of these words mean “word”, but they have slightly different nuances in flavor. The logos refers to more the “thought, idea or message of the word”, while rhēma refers more to a “saying, a spoken word, a personal directive”. The logos refers more to the *content* of the communication, while rhēma refers more to the *type of expression*, a spoken utterance. The logos refers what are the *objective facts, the information*, while rhēma refers more to the *personal, subjective communication for a particular circumstance*. These nuances are not absolute. These words have significant overlap, ...but these distinctive flavors are helpful for us to consider. They help us to observe that **God not only has revealed theological information and truth about Himself (logos), He also speaks personal words (rhēma) that pertain only to us, in our circumstance, or that are instructions for what we are to do or say in a situation.**

In my study of these words, I began to look back into the Old Testament, and I noticed some interesting insights there, too. **Now, there is an interesting conundrum regarding the OT. The original text was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. That is the inspired text. In about 250 BC, Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, translated the Hebrew OT into Greek. This translation is called the Septuagint (signified by the abbreviation, LXX). It would be of little consequence to biblical studies, except that it was the dominant translation in the first century, especially among Jews who lived outside of Judea. It was the bible of the first century church, ...and it was often quoted by Jesus and NT writers. This complicates things a bit, because the LXX Greek is not necessarily inspired, like the original Hebrew is, but God seems to have used it to communicate additional insights. Normally, I would not go to the LXX to build my theology, but it can be instructive or helpful in some of the areas where it is cited by the NT authors, or as a background for studying the NT Greek words. Many NT words have a strong background in the LXX that cannot be ignored.**

So, it is not surprising to find that *both* rhēma and logos occur many times in the LXX OT. **What seems to stand out to me, as I ponder some of these passages, is the wide variety of ways in which God spoke to people.** We see in Genesis 15:1 that a rhēma-word came to Abram in a vision. It was a personal word, a specific word for Abram, but it came in a vision. A vision is like a dream, but you are awake. You may be in an altered state of consciousness (Acts 10:10), but you are fully aware of what is happening, and it looks like it is happening in front of you or all around you. **It is called a “vision” because it is visual, but here God spoke a very personal word to Abram. It was for him, in his circumstance.** It was meant to encourage him, and affirm him in his trust in Yahweh. In the context, Abram had led a company of allies to rescue the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who had been taken captive by raiders. When offered a portion of the spoils, he declined to accept any. He wanted it to be clearly evident that any prosperity he may gain would be only from Yahweh, ...and that no one could attribute any wealth or greatness he may gain from the spoils of this battle. Afterwards, Yahweh communicated to him in this unusual, personal manner. He gave Abram a vision, where He affirmed to him that it was HE who was Abram’s protector, and Abram will be compensated greatly for his stand of faith. The remainder of the chapter is a powerful covenant God makes with him.

In 2 Samuel 7, David shares with his friend, Nathan the prophet, his desire to build a temple for Yahweh. Nathan affirms David’s desire, saying, “Do all that is in your heart, for Yahweh is with you” (7:3). However, **that night a rhēma-word came to Nathan**, instructing him to go back to David and tell him that he was *not* the one to build a house for Yahweh, ...instead, God was going to build a house (enduring dynasty) for David, because of his desire to honor Him. This became the encounter where God promised that one of his sons would build a house in which Yahweh would dwell, and that He would bring a king from David’s descendants who would reign forever. This rhēma-word seems to have come quietly but clearly to Nathan in the night. He was awake. **It was neither a dream, nor a vision, but it was a clearly spoken personal word of direction to Nathan, which he was then to deliver to David.**

In 2 Kings 20, Hezekiah the king of Judah was mortally-ill. Isaiah the prophet came to him and told him that Yahweh had said that he was to put his affairs in order, because he was about to die. Hezekiah had been a good and godly king, and he turned his face to the wall, and cried out to God for mercy, reminding Him of his obedience and faithfulness. In verse 4, **Isaiah was still walking out of the palace grounds, ...he was in the middle court area..., when a rhēma-word from Yahweh came to him, telling him to go back and tell Hezekiah that God had heard his prayer,** and was going to heal him, and add fifteen years to his life. He would also defend him and Jerusalem from their enemies. Here, we can see that Isaiah was not at all thinking that God would heal Hezekiah. He had *just* delivered a message saying that he was going to die, ...nevertheless God was somehow able to speak a personal word of direction to him to go back and deliver a very *different* message, ...a message of healing. **The rhēma-word came while he was walking, ...not meditating, or praying, or in a vision, or in a dream, or even in a quiet place. Nevertheless, it was clear enough to recognize and act upon.**

In Luke 3:2, the text says that "...a rhēma-word of God happened/came-to-be upon John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." This is all the information we know about John the son of Zacharias, from the time of his birth to this point. His father, Zacharias, was a priest, ...so John was probably schooled and trained to also be a priest. We don't know if he ever served in that capacity, however. Luke 1:80 says that he was being in the wilderness places until the day of his public manifestation to Israel. This "showing forth" was prompted by this rhēma-word, ...this personal word of commission, instruction and direction from the Lord. **We have no information given as to how this word was expressed to John, but he clearly perceived it, and acted upon it.**

The passage from 1 Samuel 3 gives us some helpful information. It is a brief insight into Samuel's learning to discern rhēma-words. **The language clearly differentiates between *experiential-knowledge versus intellectual-knowledge*, ...and *being oblivious to rhēma-words versus perceiving them*.** Obviously, since he had grown up in and around the tabernacle at Shiloh, he had been instructed in the things of God. He knew facts and information. He knew the stories of Israel's history, and he knew the things he was supposed to do and observe to please God, ...but **he did not yet know God, experientially, ...and God's rhēma-words were "hidden" or obscured from his perception.** This is *not* an unusual experience. A man who was as great a prophet as Samuel began in this very same place as so many of us find ourselves in. We don't really *expect* God to speak to us, or we don't accurately *perceive* it when He does. **By saying that these rhēma-words were "covered" or "hidden", we see that we must ask God to "uncover" or "reveal" or "make plain" the personal messages He has for us.** And then, like Samuel, we must be watchful and expecting Him to speak to us, ...and we must respond to Him when we become aware of His calling out to us.

After seeing all these examples of rhēma-words, we have a couple of examples of logos-words that seem very similar. In Jeremiah 1:1,2 in the LXX, the prophet says that "The rhēma-word happened/came-to-be upon Jeremiah... to whom a logos-word of God came to him...". **We see here both words used in a side-by-side fashion. It would seem to communicate that God personally spoke (rhēma) to him, and this became a message (logos) he was to communicate to others.** As you read on, you see that is exactly what took place. God very personally communicated to Jeremiah somehow in words (vss. 4-8), but this expanded into either a theophany (a "God appearance"), or a vision, because he "sees" God reaching out to touch his mouth (vs. 9), followed by two visions ("What do you see?" – vss. 11,13). Sandwiched in between and after these brief "seeings" are words of explanation or interpretation from God. So much of this passage is about God's call to Jeremiah. **The words are both very personal, and also represent his mission and message to the people of Israel.** The crazy thing is that these distinctions are *not* delineated in the Hebrew, at all, ...so we have to deal with this question about "What place and value should we give to the LXX?"

Then, we come to Ezekiel, where the word, logos, is used for the "message of Yahweh came to" him. Verse 1 plainly tells us that **he "saw visions of God"**. When you read on, you see that he describes mostly what he *saw*, not what he *heard*. In the second chapter, God begins to speak to him, and commissions him to "speak My words (logos) to them". It seems that the use of logos is preferred by the translator of Ezekiel in the Greek. **But God used a number of different word pictures and symbolic actions that Ezekiel was to "act out" to communicate a message to the people.** Certainly, God instructed him as to what to do, but the use of rhēma is not used in this book at all, in reference to communication from God to the prophet.

The value of this brief survey of some of the examples of rhēma-words and logos-words in the LXX is that it lays a foundation for the usage of these words by NT writers, who read and studied this Greek translation as their "bible". We can see that a rhēma-word is *not* just a spoken-word, though it certainly can be. **It can be a personal communication coming to us from a number of different avenues, ...visions, dreams, inner thoughts. These personal messages can come to us at any time, ...when we are expecting or even seeking them, ... or even when we are *not*, as when we are just going about our daily business. In fact, often God speaks to us, and we *don't* perceive it. We need to be asking for Him to *make us aware of His communications*, as well as to *uncover their meanings*.**