

THE TEXT John 1:1-5, 14

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Genesis 1:1-4, 26

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

and the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

(26) Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Beginnings

John 1 and Genesis 1

This is a season of new beginnings. December 21 is an end to the shortening of days and the beginning of their lengthening. December 22 is the beginning of the season of winter. December 25 is a day set aside by many to celebrate the beginning of the present age, as a new baby is born who takes away the sins of many. January 1 is the beginning of a new calendar year.

The Scripture also celebrates beginnings. Two such passages should immediately come to your mind. In fact, one of them is a commentary on the other. The very first words of the Bible teach "**In the beginning God...**" John 1:1 comments on Moses' inspired words by saying, "**In the beginning was the Word.**"

Most of you here know these words forwards and backwards, and perhaps you are so familiar with them that they no longer strike a chord in your soul. You have grown accustomed to them. You have believed them for so long that you now only think of them in relation to others who deny their words. Perhaps the only time you really ever look at them now is in relation to battling with evolutionists or Jehovah's Witnesses or something like that.

There is nothing wrong with this in and of itself. After all, evolutionists deny that God did anything *at the beginning*, because their entire system is one of *natural* selection, not providential guidance or supernatural miracles. And if you know anything about Jehovah's Witnesses, you know that they have taken John 1:1 as a text to show that Jesus is not THE God, but merely "a god" - a lesser being than Jehovah. But is this really the reason why Moses and John were inspired to write these words? Were they concerned with combating 19th - 20th century pseudoscience or bizarre American cults? Of course not. If they were not concerned with such things, we miss the point when we make this the primary purpose of the text.

John and Genesis record words that were written for you in order to teach you about God and his only Son our Lord Jesus Christ. These words are primarily revelations of God's one eternal plan to do with

the universe what he wants to do with it: by glorifying himself in creation and in the sending of his Son to whom all creation points.

When someone attacks these truths, we are called upon to give a defense for our faith. We must show them from the Scripture why they are wrong. Giving a defense of the faith is the Greek word *apologia* - from which we get Apologetics. Defending the faith is important, but it isn't the main point. Nevertheless, I want to address a couple of apologetic points for a moment. John 1:1 is familiar to most of you. The whole verse says, "*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.*"

Cults have often attacked this verse. The Jehovah's Witnesses do one tiny thing that disrupts the entire meaning of this verse. They add the tiny word "a" before the last noun, God: "*and the word was a god.*" It is important for you to be able to answer the heretic here. In order to do this, it is important for you to take a little grammar lesson. The Greek reads in this order, "*And God was the Word.*" Greek, like all languages, has several cases that nouns are spoken in. The *nominative case* is the case that the *subject* is in. When the subject takes a verb that equates two things (like the word "is"), then another noun also appears in the nominative case. This is the predicate nominative.

If you are like me, predicates are sort of hard to get a grasp on. In the short sentence "John is a man" you have two nouns (John and man) equated by the verb "is." John is the subject. Man is the predicate. Both are nominative nouns. In English, subject and predicate are distinguished by word order (the subject comes first). In the sentence "John is a man" John *MUST* be the subject because of word order. This is not true in Greek. Greek is able to put the predicate first for emphasis. In John 1:1 you have two nouns (God and word). One is the subject. The other is the predicate. Which is which?

The way you tell is to see which noun takes the article. The article is the word "the." When the Greek says "and God was *the* word," 'word' gets the article 'the.' Jehovah's Witnesses do not like this simple rule of Greek grammar because it destroys their theology. Thus, they stick with English, not Greek rules. You see, if you translate the Greek as if it were English you would say, "And God was the Word." Since God does not get a definite article ('the') you might be tempted to add the indefinite article ('a') before God. When you change the word order to put the word first, you get their mistinterpretation: *And the word was a god.*

The Watchtower Society (JW's) takes their view of God and then makes the Scripture say what it wants it to teach rather than letting the good rules of interpretation and grammar teach them what God has said. They believe that Jesus Christ is a lesser being than Jehovah - who alone is God. They are not Trinitarians, thus when they say that Jesus is "a god" they are teaching that he is less than Jehovah.

John's language could not be any clearer. This is what led Martin Luther to say "the lack of an article is against Sabellianism (a heresy that teaches that the person of the Word is the person of the Father - "God" verses "the Word", the two are distinguished by the article); the word order is against Arianism (modern day JW's). GOD, you see, is the word. But the word is not the Father. The word is God on all levels in his being ('is'). But the word is a different person from God. He is different than God (for the word was *with* God). Yet, he is God (and the word *was* God).

Yet, as much fun as responding to heretics can be, we miss the point if we think that John had Arianism in his mind when he wrote this verse. The important thing for us to do is to try to figure out why John wrote what he wrote. This is where we need to learn to interpret Scripture with Scripture, for John's

prologue is a divinely inspired commentary on *Genesis*. You will not see the importance of this unless you are looking for it! So let us say again; John opens his *Gospel* with the words, "In the beginning." This calls our attention back to the opening words of the Bible. And this ought to give us a clue as to why John is writing these words. He is going to show us how Jesus Christ has always been focal point of history, even back on the first day of the universe.

These words teach that there was a beginning of something, but it wasn't the beginning of God (or the word). God has no beginning. He is before the beginning. Another reason why cultists do not interpret John 1:1 rightly is because they refuse to let *Genesis* 1:1 impact its meaning! In these two verses we see parallel ideas. "In the beginning GOD" and "In the beginning was the word." *Genesis* tells you of God's absolute control over creation. And God's existence is the foundation of all that is created. He made all of creation out of nothing. Likewise, the NT teaches the same thing, only it specifically talks about Jesus Christ. "[The Lord Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (*Col 1:15-16*).

In *Colossians*, Paul's language talks about the image of God, creation, the heavens and the earth. Paul is doing what John is doing: taking us back to *Genesis*. Again, we must let Scripture interpret Scripture. Arians are fond of saying that the word firstborn proves that Jesus was created. When the words of God through John are added to the mix and all of these texts are taken together, we understand that we cannot take the word "firstborn" to mean that Jesus Christ was a created being. Rather, "he was with God in the Beginning" (*John* 1:2). That is, before the beginning of creation, there was God and there was the word. Now, if Jesus was before the beginning of creation, then he cannot be a created being. And the Jehovah's Witnesses are wrong. But if Jesus is before the creation and is indeed the creator, then we must bow down before him; for in his hands he holds the power of life and death, "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (*Heb* 1:3). In other words, we are to be Jehovah's Witnesses, except we are to understand that Jesus IS Jehovah!

You must understand that the worship of Jesus Christ is not an optional thing in your life. Whether you feel like admitting him as Lord or not, whether any of this creation stuff particularly strikes you as real or important is quite irrelevant. Jehovah (Yahweh) tells us, "By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear" (*Isa* 45:23). The NT clearly teaches that Jesus is Jehovah for it applies Isaiah to Jesus, "At the name of *Jesus* every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (*Philippians* 2:10-11). The fact that these verses are parallel ought to make it clear to you that it is not wishful thinking that is in mind as if Paul is saying "hopefully" every knee many bow... It is an absolute certainty that every knee will bow as Isaiah has said. And this is only bolstered by the fact that Jesus is the Creator who does whatever he wants with his creation, including man who is but a mist and vapor and an insignificant speck in the universe in terms of his power or might against God.

Let us look at macro-evolutionary theory for a moment as well. The simple fact that God created through his/the Word implies that we are not here by random acts of chemical explosions or mindless formations where chance "creates" order. God created. The Word spoke all things into existence. The Spirit hovered over the deep like an eagle protecting her young. Quite honestly, we need look no further for proof that the modern day dogma of macro-evolutionary natural selection is wrong than this verse. Chance and purpose are incompatible. If God created, then a random accident that just so happened to bring about life is not an option. Order does not come from chaos, it comes from order.

With that said, there is something we must beware of. For many of us are not satisfied to let these simple words defeat the skeptic. And we do not want to leave well enough alone. Thus, sometimes I am afraid that many of us ironically give into the same modern idols of rationalism, scientism, and autonomous - self-interpreted thinking that the unbeliever has when we engage in arguments against them. We do this by turning the main point of a text into a very minor one, and making a relatively minor point into a major one.

This is why it is very rare in our day to hear *Genesis 1* or *John 1* preached as covenantal history. We would much rather use it to bash others than we would to learn about our God. Let me explain that a bit more, because this is a very important message that Christians need to hear. I fear that some of you will hear me wrong when I say that the Bible is a book of God's revelation about himself to us in covenant. You will hear me say that this means its history is not true or that its scientific claims are not true or whatever. That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that the Bible isn't a science book and it is not a history book. It isn't given for uninformed, worldwide readers to gain a history lesson from it - though it is real history. It is given to God's people who need the Spirit to even understand it properly so that they might see that the powerful and terrible God that created the universe loves them and saves them and has a plan for them through his Son Jesus Christ.

This is not a minor point. It is THE point. In my discussions with people over the years on this topic, I fear that too many fail to grasp it. So let me get at this yet another way. I do not doubt any Christian's sincerity in wanting to show wrong thinkers to be wrong. Nevertheless, we can fall into a hidden pit here if we are not careful. If defense is all you ever play, then you will never come to a better understanding of yourself in relationship to God. And you will never have a robust faith to offer others. It is far too easy to define ourselves by what we are not rather than what we are. "We are not evolutionists." "We are not Arians." "We are not old-earthers." "We are not Sebellians." In doing this we may miss the point. For those who are defined only by what they are not never actually have anything to offer to the world as to what they actually ARE! But these texts are given to tell us who we are.

Have you ever noticed that God is not introduced to us in *Genesis*? That's because Moses assumed that the people already knew who he was! Israel had seen his miracles, his deliverance, and his law. They already knew God because he had covenanted with them. What they needed to see about God was not how he created, but *why* he created! Moses writes *Genesis 1* for the purpose of teaching his people that God has always covenanted with man and that in the history that was to unfold around them in the wilderness, they were to become the new Adam! *Genesis* explains that God created in order to provide for man a place that was hospitable and orderly so that he might carry out his "image-bearing" functions for a God who was mighty above all gods and greatly to be praised. *Genesis* is not raw-data history, it is covenantal history.

You see, Moses is explaining for the people that it has always been God's ways to be in relationship with man in this way. That's the point. Have you missed it? I pray not. Israel as a nation is *v\]]new*. But a covenant people that God shows love to is no new thing at all. For Israel sees in the *Genesis* beginning *her own beginnings* both as she is to become a new Adam and though fallen that God has promised a redeemer that will come through Eve and then through Israel.

And this is the same point that John is making as well. John goes back to *Genesis* and the creation. As we will see, John says that what was created physically at creation is now seeing a great redemptive fulfillment in Jesus Christ. What this means is that God created the visible realm to be a reflection of

the invisible realm. We do not understand this because we live after the fall. But things as you see them now were not always like this.

In the beginning the physical order and the spiritual order were in perfect harmony. Everything in the physical realm had an unfallen, non-cursed counterpart in the spiritual realm just as the tabernacle had a spiritual heavenly and eternal counterpart. Everything that Adam saw around him was a doorway into the nature of God. It was not marred by any sin. And he could understand it perfectly. Yet, this goes both ways. For you will recall that God told Adam many things. The voice of God spoke and communicated spiritual truths about the physical realm. Adam was not left alone to discover truth for himself. He learned truth from the very mouth of God himself. God thus interpreted the physical surroundings for Adam in a way that allowed Adam to see the spiritual meaning behind all of the physical creation. So special revelation (the word) and general revelation (nature) worked together perfectly in the beginning.

And why not? The Word, John tells us, created nature! After the fall, men are simply not able to interpret their physical surroundings in a way that will lead them to God. They can't because they have lost the intimate relationship that Adam had with God. They have lost the meaning that God gave to Adam, because it has to be transmitted personally and individually. They have lost the ability to see it because it is now marred and covered with filth and corruption from sin. And they have finally lost even the desire to find out the truth. Thus, they exchange the truth for a lie and worship and serve the creation rather than the creator. IN a word, they are in darkness. And this too goes back to creation.

John goes back to Genesis to teach us that which we cannot know from inspecting or searching. "The word was with God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning." You don't see this from digging a hole in the ground or from traveling to Neptune. You only see it because God has decided to tell it to you.

Beginning in verse 3, John begins to unveil even more of Genesis for us. "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). John here comments that Jesus Christ is the One who Genesis 1 is speaking about. We have already seen this to be true from other places in the Bible. So let us continue.

John 1:4 now says, "He was life, and the life was the light of men" (NASB). Is this a new thought by John? Does his commentary on Genesis end at verse 3? Are these images of life, life, and light just new ideas that he wants to explore for his own personal reasons? Notice, in these three words we have allusions to days 1 (light), 3 (life), 4 (light), 5 (life) and 6 (life and man). Recall that days 1 and 4 saw light as prominent. Day three saw the first life (vegetation) created. Days five and six saw the first bird and animal life created. And day six saw the man created. Obviously, John is still thinking about the creation story.

This one verse is as if the days of Genesis are here compacted into one great day! Thus, John is probably thinking about Genesis 2:4, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day (singular) that the LORD God made earth and heaven." And so John is teaching us a very deep theology upon which we must ponder long and hard.

It first says that the Word was life. A very basic fact is that you cannot get life from non-life. Life (the Word) created life. True Life emanates from the Word. Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the LIFE." But now John adds a strange phrase, "the life was the light of men." As he is reflecting upon

Genesis by the power of the Holy Spirit, John is now teaching us not only about life but light. And so we now get a commentary on the meaning of the creation of light.

The light of days 1 and 4 teach us, then, about *the Word*. The physical creation in this way reflects a spiritual reality. For John says, the Life of the Word WAS light!" But clearly this does not mean that Jesus himself was the light source of day one for that light source was created by the life! Whatever you believe the light source of day one to be, clearly day four was the physical light of the sun, moon, and stars. Thus, at the very least, we learn here that God created the physical lights in order to teach us about the Great Light - Jesus Christ, the light of the world! God created light for the sake of Adam so that he might see his God.

It is here that those who are trapped in the worship of creation will not understand. They will think that we are confusing God as being the Sun - because this is what these idol worshippers believe. God is not the sun. He created the sun. Nevertheless, the sun teaches us about God! For it is the very light that John says the word is in an analogous/analogical/metaphorical way.

It is difficult for some to make this connection. They think that somehow John is just bringing light up as some random metaphor, just as they can see no further than that Moses writes down Genesis to be for us a history lesson. But when you understand that the Apostle is commenting here upon Genesis, you understand that light, life, the beginning, things coming into being - these are not random ideas at all! And now you are beginning to be able to understand Genesis with NT eyes! You are not left in the dark shadows that OT saints had to live in. For you can now see God's purpose in creation where it used to be hidden. You do not have to merely react to others in your reading of Scripture. You can glory in God himself and appreciate the Scripture in deeper and more meaningful ways personally!

Next, John informs us "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5). This is more creation/Genesis imagery from John. And here we learn that God had even more purpose than merely creating light to be physical teachers to the attributes of their creator. In Genesis 1:4-5 we learn something perhaps a bit stunning to you as you reflect upon what John is saying, "God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."

John now shows us why God created darkness in the first place. Understand, God didn't need to create this universe with darkness, did he? Of course not. We are not Buddhists who believe in Yin/Yang - equal forces of light and dark that compete against each other and that have a little piece of each other mixed in. But John does give us the spiritual meaning for darkness. Darkness for John is evil, wicked people. "The darkness has not understood the light (the word, the life). So he says elsewhere, "men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The light (the word) shines in the darkness like the stars shine at night, yet the darkness (wicked people) do not understand what it means!

Now, this teaches us a very important lesson regarding the nature of evil. We need to go to the source of John's teaching again to understand this: Genesis. We know that there were no darkened people until after the fall. Adam was created during the day and was in perfect fellowship with God until he sinned. Nevertheless, darkness or night existed as a physical reality that the Scripture almost immediately picks up on as a negative thing (and it is interesting that God says the light is good, the land, the seas, the water, the sky, vegetation, the birds, the animals, and humans. But he never says the darkness is good!)

The first mention of darkness outside of creation is the story of Abraham. A "dreadful darkness" came upon him (Gen 15:12). In Egypt, on the plagues was a plague of darkness that was complete and total and it could be felt (Ex 10:21 ff). Many more examples could be given. But suffice it to say that the darkness of Genesis 1:4 becomes the darkness of humanity in John 1:5. And we learn in other places that their understanding is dark (Eph 4:18), that light does not have any fellowship with darkness (2 Cor 6:14), that Jesus has rescued us from the dominion of darkness (Col 1:13), that men do wicked deeds at night (1 Thess 5:17), that Jesus was betrayed at night (John 13:30), and that hell is a place of blacked darkness (1 Pet 2:17).

Why does God use darkness as the universal symbol of evil if he did not originally intend darkness to reflect this in the first place? Is evil some unforeseen future reality that God did not know was coming? And why would God attach any of his creation to be a metaphor for evil if this were not originally his intent in bringing it into existence?

Yet, you see the problem. If God has always intended for darkness to be a metaphor for evil, does this mean that God is the author of evil? Since I am not sure exactly what this phrase is meant to suggest when people ask it (though I tend to think that people are trying to say that God IS evil for authoring it), I will let Genesis do the talking. Please pay careful attention to the words. God created the light by the power of his word. "God said let there be light and there was light." Yet, notice how the darkness got here. In order to get darkness, the darkness is not "created" positively by the spoken power of the word. Rather, God *separated* (it is divided from, taken away from) the light from the darkness. Darkness is not a created thing in the same way as is the light. Rather, darkness is the absence of light.

God is light. Therefore, wherever light does not shine, darkness prevails. Before creation, there was no such thing as darkness in any sense, except as it was known to one day exist in the mind of God. There is nothing that compels God to cause his light to shine everywhere in the physical universe. God is free. He is not held captive to anything outside of himself. If he chooses not to let light shine, this is not wicked for by definition God is Good and in him there is no darkness at all. And God did just this on the very first day of creation. Interestingly, on day four, God puts luminaries in the sky to bring a little order to the night (to be rulers) - thus in our age even the night has a little light. Night is not pure darkness at any time in this age, for even the night is governed by light until the second coming of our Lord.

The same must hold true for evil because darkness is God's predesigned physical illustration of evil! Understand that God is not random. He makes things with purpose, even the darkness. I believe that those who believe that God knows the future are forced to admit that God separated the darkness from the light in anticipation of future dark events - events in the garden, events on the night of Christ's crucifixion, and events on the last day when "The sun will be turned to darkness." Does this not teach us that God truly is incomprehensibly all knowing and all powerful? And since we can trust that he is all good and in perfect control of the evil deeds of man and nature, it ought to give us even more reason to place our trust in him, for God alone brings purpose to evil and darkness. And this explanation alone allows God to be God without compromising his goodness or his power.

But we have not yet touched on the most important verse in John 1. This is not a verse of darkness, but of more light - though it is veiled from our eyes. John says "the Word become flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John points you back to the light - the glory of God as is seen in the incarnation. Though the darkness does not comprehend the light, God still shines the light nonetheless.

Even here the theme of Genesis continues. For when the word becomes flesh we are taken back again to creation. What is flesh? Primarily man is flesh. And God created man in his own image. Colossians informs us more on this creation event, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Christ is the image of God and we are the image of Christ. And in the incarnation temporal man meets the eternal Christ."

In Christ, we behold the glory of God. This glory is hidden and clothed in human flesh. And it takes faith to trust that Jesus is God precisely because God's glory is hidden in a man. John's point though is that trusting in this Christ is trusting in the God of Genesis and creation. Conversely, not trusting in Christ is to not trust in the God of Genesis and creation, for they are the same God.

Therefore, my friends, you are encouraged to look to Christ for you hope and your salvation. You are encouraged to see him in Genesis and in John, for he is the same God of both. He is full of grace and truth. Apart from him there is only wrath and lies. His dwelling among us is his coming in covenant again, just as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In this time of year when many things are being made new, you must look again in a new way at your creator and at your savior.

On the fourth day of Creation we are told, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years." God created the lights to serve as signs. Signs point forward. As John has shown, these signs are not merely physical, they are spiritual as well. For the lights of creation can only be understood properly through the Great Light that created them. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. As Simeon told the virgin Mary "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Jesus is a sign for you as the lights are to all mankind.

He is the fulfillment of the light signs that will last as long as there are seasons and years. But one day, these lights will fade away as all signs do when the destination is finally arrived at. The gospel commands you to place your trust in the Fulfillment of the Ages, the God-man Jesus Christ. It commands you to make this your life long pursuit, because a one-time trust is like living in the daytime only to have the sun set into darkness. But the gospel is powerful to give the very faith that it commands. Have you trusted Christ? Do you truly believe his words? Do not let yourself leave here today if you have not. Today is the day of salvation. The night of the age that is this fallen, sinful creation is fading away and the dawn of the new creation is soon here. Please! Believe in God's promises and that they are given to you. Children and adults, professing believers and hardened cynics - trust in Christ. Otherwise, you will be left in darkness, not comprehending the light, and left to suffer an eternity in endless, intolerable night without even one star, a night that can be felt.