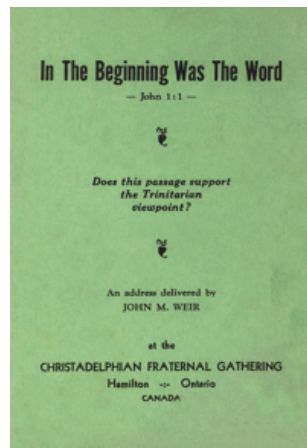


In The Beginning Was The Word

— John 1:1 —

*Does this passage support
the Trinitarian
viewpoint?*



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In The Beginning Was The Word

Please read John 1:1-34
 Luke 1:26-38
 1 John 1:1-10
 John 2:7-14 and verse 24.

A Christian is defined as a follower of Christ: and when I say a “follower” I mean one who strives to obey his commandments and imitate his perfect example. We would therefore expect to find all Christians in full agreement as to what Jesus *did*, and as to what his “Code of Instructions” consisted of; but do we? Unfortunately, NO! we do not. I purpose therefore to introduce my subject *by showing why misunderstanding and consequent disagreement about Bible teaching is not only possible, but probable.*

The Bible is in one sense a human book, inasmuch as the divine treasure has been given to us in earthen vessels. The All-Wise Creator has revealed himself through human eyes and ears, intellects and hearts, tongues and pens. He has put many of his lessons into long-drawn-out history, covering many centuries of time and vast areas of territory. God did not begin by giving man a complete revelation bound in book form. But rather, at sundry times and in divers manners He spake unto the fathers through the prophets, and lastly he has spoken unto us through His Son. The various messages were written by human observers, in human language. The divine oversight, guidance and inspiration did not interfere with the individuality of each writer. It guaranteed TRUTH, but left the peculiarities of the human penman unimpaired. Further, until such time as the last message had been given, those which had been received required to be laboriously copied by hand from time to time and handed down from generation to generation. Here again, while the divine purpose required that the truth must be preserved, it did not prevent the introduction of errors by the copyists and the translators. But, as a corrective, other scholars were divinely raised up at various times, who devoted their lives to the tracking down and uncovering of these errors. Consequently, though at times the truth became beclouded or veiled, it was never permitted by God to become totally obscured.

The Bible record is full of multitudinous references to races, localities, structures, manners, customs, literatures and religions. It is brim full of human nature at its best and also at its worst. It was given in ancient languages now practically dead. Therefore translation has been necessary. From tongue to tongue the book has gone. Revision follows translation and after revision, new revision. Research in the Orient, discoveries of monumental tablets, inscriptions, ancient manuscripts, and the steady progress made in the deciphering of these ancient records, all serve to confirm the general teaching of the Bible as we now have it, while at the same time they enable us to detect and correct minor errors of transcription and translation which tend to becloud the sacred message. The Bible is God’s book, but he has used man in the recording and transmitting of it. By this process man is immensely helped. His faculties are exercised and developed, and he will continue to be helped as the exact wording of the original message in the most ancient tongues is still further clarified.

The Bible is not, and does not claim to be, a systematic and carefully classified series of plain and applied principles. It is not like a dictionary or hand-book conveniently

arranged for reference. Many of the lessons which it contains are purposely concealed by God. They are couched in the language of figure, parable and symbol, intermingled with the plain declaration of fact, and consequently must be sought out if the hidden mysteries are to be uncovered. It will be manifest therefore, on account of the nature of the message and the hazards through which it has passed in the transcription and translation, that the Bible is certain to present many difficulties which have to be patiently studied and carefully harmonized. This requires prayerful application, an open mind, and a willingness to avail one self of the labors of scholars—men whom God has used as his instruments in furnishing us with the various versions of the English Bible of today, and with the many optional renderings recorded in the margins and elsewhere for our assistance, together with carefully prepared lexicons and concordances. Chief among these versions are the following:

The Authorized Version—The one most familiar to us. It was translated and made available to the English speaking masses about A.D. 1611, and has held undisputed sway for nearly three centuries and endeared itself to all English speaking Christians.

The American and English Revised Versions followed, A.D. 1870 to 1884. These were made at the same time, one in America, the other in England. By mutual agreement they exchanged notes and those renderings preferred by the American committee and which the English committees did not adopt, were recorded, by request, as an appendix to the published version. Of the 5788 changes made by the revisors, only about a quarter of them modify the subject matter, and of these only a small fraction can be considered as of first rate importance—a Wonderful confirmation of *the substantial accuracy of the Bible as we now have it in English!!*

The Variorum Version is next in importance. This “is the Authorized Version edited with various renderings and readings from the best authorities”, which help us clarify difficult or obscure passages which seem to be at variance with the rest of Bible teaching.

The Emphatic Diaglott Version of the New Testament by Benjamin Wilson is also worthy of mention here. It is unique in that it exhibits two parallel columns: The one giving the English translation in connected readable form; the other, the Greek text with an interlinear word for word English translation without any effort whatever at phrasing.

And finally, we have *Moffatt’s Version* by Moffatt, *The Emphasized Bible* by Rotherham and many other versions, too numerous to here name.

With all these and many other sources of information available we should be greatly helped in our effort to properly interpret the divine message.

Manifestly, in Bible study we should adopt some systematic plan of enquiry. What is the principle that is going to guide us in our efforts at harmonization? I do not think we could do better than adopt the principle advocated by a noted Bible student and writer. I will give you it in his own words. He says: “I hold it for a most infallible rule in exposition of sacred scripture, that, when a literal interpretation will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst. There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changeth the meaning of words as alchemy

doth, or would do, the substance of metals, making of anything what it listeth and bringing in the end all truth to nothing”. In addition to this “rule” or principle of exegesis, let us keep always in mind that God never contradicts himself. If different portions of scripture appear to conflict, then either there has been some error introduced by a scribe or translator, which can probably be eliminated by substituting some optional rendering, or, which is perhaps more probable, we are not interpreting the passage properly in the light of its context. Frequently both factors will be involved.

Our subject title is taken from the opening portion of the first chapter of John’s Gospel, which is a much misunderstood introduction. I say much misunderstood because Bible students are very much divided in their interpretation of it. Many claim that it teaches the doctrine of the Trinity and its companion doctrine, the pre-existence of Christ, as “God the Son”, while others are equally emphatic in claiming that it furnishes no support whatever for either of these doctrines, provided it is properly translated and understood. Again, many claim that the Apostle John takes as his starting point the Genesis creation, while others contend that the “beginning” he had in mind was the beginning of the gospel dispensation. It will be our purpose, keeping in mind the principle of exegesis already stated, to show what the apostle had in mind, as evidenced by the context, both immediate and remote.

John states that his object in writing his gospel narrative was: “That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name”. (John 20: 31). No mention is made here of the doctrine of the Trinity, nor of the pre-existence of Christ. Hence, an interpretation which disallows both of these doctrines need not conflict with the avowed object of the apostle’s writing.

“In the beginning was the Word”—John 1:1. What beginning—for there are many beginnings spoken of in the Bible? To which of these many beginnings does John refer? You will note that the record from which this passage is quoted claims to be “The Gospel according to John”. Similarly, we have three other records, each of which makes a parallel claim; viz, The Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark and the Gospel according to Luke. As they all profess to be telling the same story, we are justified in expecting that they will all commence at approximately the same starting point, and will similarly all end together. Luke prefaces his record thus:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order, a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou has been instructed.” (Luke 1:1 to 4).

Luke here claims to have been an eye-witness and minister of the word “from the beginning”, and to have had perfect understanding “from the very first”. The beginning here referred to cannot be the Genesis beginning of creation, as it must have had its starting point at some time during Luke’s lifetime. After his preface, Luke starts in immediately to prepare the setting for his presentation of the gospel, with the story of the divine promise of the birth of John the Baptist, following it immediately with a

very minute description of the generation of Jesus of Nazareth, cousin to John the Baptist—a beginning from which the whole civilized world now reckons time. *Truly a very notable beginning!*

Mark is very brief in his introduction: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee”. (Mark 1:1-2). Here too, we have the beginning definitely linked with the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the advent of John the Baptist, foretold to be his herald and forerunner. *The same starting point or beginning as Luke’s!*

Matthew opens his version of the Gospel by tracing the genealogy of Jesus—not from Adam, but from Abraham—doubtless with a view to showing that, according to the Jewish official records, Jesus was the direct descendant of Abraham, traced down through Isaac, Jacob and David, and that he was the legal heir, born to the overturned throne of Israel. Having completed this, his preface, he, like Mark and Luke, concentrates his attention upon the starting point of his theme—*The generation of Jesus Christ and his introduction to Israel by his forerunner, John the Baptist.*

Thus we have demonstrated that all three records of the “gospel”, those according to Matthew, Mark and Luke have the same starting point or “beginning”. Not one of them contains any hint that “the beginning” of the gospel narrative is identical with the creation of the world. *Why then should the gospel according to John adopt any different “beginning” than that of the others?* We should therefore consider very carefully, and have unquestionable evidence, before we accept the view that John had reference to any other beginning, than the beginning of the generation of Jesus Christ. We therefore conclude (for the time being at least) *that John had in mind the beginning of the generation of the Man, Christ Jesus, and his presentation to Israel by John the Baptist.*

That John in his writings had this beginning in mind is further borne out by his 1st Epistle, which also starts with a pre-amble that bears many points of resemblance. The first reference in each is to “a beginning”. In each case the “beginning” is definitely linked up, by the context, with the generation of Jesus Christ. Further, frequent reference is made in the epistle to this “beginning”, where John, addressing the believers, repeatedly asserts that they—the people to whom he was writing—had “heard from *the beginning*” and that they had *known* Jesus from “*The beginning*”.

Hence it must have been a beginning which commenced during their lifetime. It is true, in connection with 1st John 2: 13 & 14, the translators of the Authorized Version have inserted the words “that is” into the text thereby suggesting the thought of an earlier beginning, but there is nothing in the context to require it. No doubt they thought they were making the passage clearer, but actually they obscure it. However, the inserted words are printed in italics to indicate to us their *absence* from *the original text* and so may, quite properly, be omitted. We *conclude then*, that “the beginning” here referred to is the *same* beginning as that referred to in the opening sentence of his Gospel, and that this beginning *is the beginning of the generation of Jesus and his presentation to Israel by the Baptist.*

We will now proceed to the next thought. “In the beginning was the word” (John 1:1).

It is often assumed by many that the Greek word “logos”, here rendered “The Word” definitely indicates a person, to wit, “God the Son”—the second person in the so-called Godhead. But does it? This *is something that requires to be proven— not assumed*—before it can be properly used by anyone as evidence. We turn therefore to the Lexicons and Concordances which have been prepared by recognized scholars of highest standing, to find out what this term actually signifies.

LOGOS we find occurs 317 times in the accepted Greek Version of the New Testament scriptures. It is variously rendered into English: WORD—215 times; SAYING—50 times; SPEECH—8 times; ACCOUNT—8 times, and the remaining 36 is divided between 20 different English words. Most, if not all, of the occurrences plainly show that *utterance of speech* is implied by the term. Thus, SPEECH, SAYING, ACCOUNT, and even the term WORD itself, implies that a thought or thoughts have been transmitted by means of utterance or action. Hence it is generally recognized that the term LOGOS usually conveys the idea of a SPOKEN WORD or THOUGHT, rather than the word or thought itself. It may, however, also be used to signify the thought itself, e.g., we have the English word INTENT used as the equivalent of the Greek word LOGOS in Acts 10:29 where Peter says to Cornelius: “I ask you therefore for what *intent* you have sent for me?” i.e. for what reason or purpose? or, what was his object in sending for him? or, what was the thought he had in mind in sending for him? These are all different ways of saying the same thing. Having determined the scriptural significance of the term LOGOS, and having concluded that the “beginning” referred to was the beginning of the generation of the Man, Christ Jesus, we are ready to proceed.

We now find ourselves confronted with the question: — *It the opening verses of John’s gospel do not refer to the Genesis creation, how can we demonstrate their applicability to the time of the begetting of Jesus Christ?* To which we reply: Retain the Greek term LOGOS untranslated and John 1:1-2 will read thus— “In the beginning was the LOGOS and the LOGOS was with God and the LOGOS was God. The same in the beginning with God.” Verse 14, supplementing the same thought, continues— “And the LOGOS was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth”.

What LOGOS or “spoken word” was there at the time of the generation of the Man, Christ Jesus, that was made flesh? And how can it be spoken of as being God, if we do not believe the doctrine of “the Trinity”? Turn to Luke 1st chapter—to that portion which has been read in your hearing by the Chairman. You will there find that, what had only been a matter of promise prior to this time, was now to become an accomplished fact. The LOGOS or SPOKEN WORD; i.e., command or instruction, is uttered or given by God to the angel Gabriel. Gabriel forthwith visits Mary and delivers to her God’s message, and Jesus is in due course born. What description could be more precise, more emphatic, or more *enlightening* than John’s way of stating the case!— “And the LOGOS (spoken word or command) was made flesh and dwelt among us”. The *description is perfect!* and the time is *definite!*

While this is evidently “The Logos” which John had in mind, it is not the only Logos (i.e. spoken word) uttered by God, and which had to do with the future generation of the Man Jesus and his mission. Away back in Eden and on many and various occasions since, God has spoken, unfolding the plan of Salvation and promising the

coming of a Seed which was to “bruise the Serpent’s head” (Genesis 3:15), and through whom “all nations would be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) which seed, Paul tells us in Gal. 3:8 and 15 referred to Christ. Thus in this sense, and this sense only, can the Logos of John 1st Chapter be projected back to Eden. *The actual literal occurrence happens as, and at, the time described by Luke, and is the beginning of the generation of the Man, Christ Jesus!*

Now, how can this LOGOS; i.e. SPOKEN WORD OR COMMAND, be spoken of as being *with God* and as *being God*? There is no difficulty here, if *we* will disabuse our minds of pre-conceived opinions, and allow ourselves the same latitude of expression which we use continually in our every day conversation. For example, there is not one of us but who has said “I have an idea”, or “I conceived the idea”. Now, what is the thought here? Is it not (a) that the idea after it has been formulated in your mind, is regarded or *spoken of by you as an entity in your possession?* and (b) *that the idea was a creation of your own, out of your own mind or self?* In other words: Before the idea was formulated, its identity was *merged* with yours. After the idea was formulated, its identity was *with you*, and *when the idea is explained and acted upon*, it takes definite and often tangible form and is visibly manifested to others. Now, substitute the term LOGOS for IDEA, and the Parallel will be obvious. In this way it is easy to understand how the LOGOS could be spoken of by John as being God, as being *with God*, as being *made flesh* and as dwelling among men in visible, tangible, fleshly form.

But it will be further objected: Does not verse 3 unmistakably refer to the Edenic creation, when it says: “All things were *made* by *him*; and without him was not anything *made* that was made”? On the surface it would appear so, *but does it really?* The whole force of the objection is dependent upon the words “*made*” and “*him*”, for there is nothing in the immediate context which has the slightest suggestion of the Edenic creation, other than the phrase “In the beginning”, and that has already been explained. This would suggest the possibility of translation difficulties, due to misconception on the part of the translators. Any good Greek Lexicon will confirm the assertion that the Greek word GINNOMAI, here translated MADE, WAS MADE and WERE MADE, may be and is translated in the Authorized Version by one or other of at least 40 different English equivalents. Among the four most frequently used are: “Be made”—69 times and “BE DONE”—62 times, approximately the same frequency. As authority for this statement we would refer you to the “Index Lexicon” to Young’s Analytical Concordance, revised by Professor Stevenson, B. D., of Edinburgh University.

Note particularly! In the Authorized Version “Ginnomai” is very nearly as often translated “done” as “made”—not merely once or twice—but many times. This shows that it was quite common usage to so translate it. For example, in verse 28 of the same chapter: “These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.” Therefore we are *fully justified* in substituting the word “done” for “made” where it occurs in verse 3.

The Greek word translated “*him*” in the same verse is AUTOS, but authorities also agree that this word may quite properly be represented in English by the impersonal pronoun “it”, provided, of course, that it harmonizes with the context. For example: In Matt. 10:11 we read: “And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in

it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence”. The pronoun “it” here unquestionably refers to a city and so the impersonal form of the pronoun MUST be used by the translator. So also in John 1:3. The Greek pronoun AUTOS refers to the LOGOS or SPOKEN WORD, which, considered apart from the personality of God the Father, is impersonal and so in English *should be* translated by the impersonal pronoun “it”.

Incorporate these legitimate variations of translation, and the English translation of verses 3 and 4 becomes: “All things were done by *it*; and without *it* was not anything done that was done. In *it* was life; and the life was the light of men”. Thus it will be seen that there is no real difficulty in fully harmonizing these verses with the conclusion previously arrived at, viz., *that the Apostle John was talking about the events which transpired at and following the begetting of the Man, Christ Jesus.*

There only remains what appears to be one more obstacle to the acceptance of our conclusion. This is to be found in Verse 10: “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. “ It will be asked: Does not this definitely commit us to the Edenic Creation of the world? It would at first seem so, but let us investigate.

Here we have the same Greek word “GINNOMAI”, translated “MADE”. We cannot here translate it “DONE”, for that does not fit in with the context. Is there, then, anything we can do about it? Look at verses 6 to 9 which immediately precede. You will observe that their central theme is the coming of one who is figuratively spoken of as “The Light”. The language is so pointed, that it leaves no reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ is the one referred to as “The light of the world”—not in a physical sense—but in a mental sense.

With this thought in mind we look over the 40 or 50 English equivalents of the Greek word “GINNOMAI”, and we find one instance where the English equivalent “was showed” is used. Let us refer to it. Acts 4: 22—”For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing *was shewed*”. Not merely *was done*, but was also manifested to others. Or in other words, the public were *enlightened* by the miracle performed; and so we find the “Emphatic Diaglott Version” uses the word ENLIGHTENED as the English equivalent of the Greek word GINNOMAI in this instance. Thus the verse becomes: “He was in the world, and the world was enlightened by Him, and the world knew him not. “Translated in this way verse 10 constitutes an impressive climax to the immediately preceding verses, and is evidently what the apostle John had in mind when he wrote his Gospel.

We conclude, *then*, that the Gospel of John, as given to us in the original language, agrees with the other three gospel narratives. *All four* have as their starting point the generation of the Man, Christ Jesus. *All four* introduce in connection therewith, the advent of John the Baptist as his forerunner, as foretold by the prophets. And *All four* introduce only enough about prior events to form a suitable and co-related background for the advent of the Man, Christ Jesus.

Further, and finally: We conclude that when carefully and consistently examined, John’s introduction to his gospel record does not support the Trinitarian viewpoint.

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