"THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE": SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SON'S UNCREATEDNESS

δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο,
τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ…

By whom all things were made,
both the things in heaven and the things on earth…

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This study explores John's Prologue (1:1–3) as the primary exegetical foundation for the Nicene clause "through whom all things were made" (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο) by showing that the Logos—identified as the preexistent, divine Person of Jesus Christ—is both distinct from the Father and yet fully God. After surveying potential Greek philosophical and Jewish backgrounds (including the Aramaic Targums' Memra and Old Testament parallels), this article argues that John deliberately uses the "Word" category to emphasize the unique role of the Son as the Creator. John places the Word "in the beginning," and affirms "all things came into being through Him," insisting that "apart from Him nothing came into being," thereby excluding the Word from the created order. In so doing, John's Prologue agrees with Paul's affirmation in Colossians 1:15–17, that the Son is the uncreated God. These exegetical underpinnings vindicate the Nicene Creed's confession of Christ as the Creator and uncreated equal with God.

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As we mark the seventeenth centennial of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the church global continues to reaffirm the foundational Christological truths enshrined in the Nicene Creed. Among its most pivotal affirmations is the clause δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα

ἐγένετο—"through whom all things were made."[1] This succinct phrase, drawn almost verbatim from John 1:3,[2] not only honors the Son's creative activity, but it also intimates His essential uncreatedness, setting Him irrevocably apart from the created order.

Yet the enduring power of any creedal formulation rests upon its fidelity to Scripture. A confession may ring with theological resonance, but its ultimate strength or weakness is measured by the exegetical ground on which it stands. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to demonstrate from Scripture that the Son is the Creator of all things and is Himself uncreated. We will begin by exploring John 1:1–3 in depth, demonstrating how this text provides the backdrop for the Nicene Creed. As part of the discussion of John 1:1–3, we will examine John's use of the "Word" motif and what this might contribute to our understanding of Christ's role as Word and Creator. We will then follow up on this discussion with a brief examination of Colossians 1:15–17, showing how Paul's view corroborates and harmonizes with John's view of Jesus as the Creator. In so doing, we will see how the biblical portrait of the Son as Creator also compellingly attests to His eternal equality with the Father and His uncreatedness.

<center>The Divine Word in John 1:1–3</center>

The creedal phrase "through whom all things were made" (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο) is a variation of the wording of John 1:3, "All things came into being through Him" (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο).[3] Within the context of John's Prologue, this phrase serves to highlight the specialness of the Word and helps readers connect John's message with theological threads they were likely already familiar with.

Who Is the Divine Word?

John 1:1 opens the book by provocatively stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The immediate question for the modern reader is: Who (or What) is the Word?

John identifies this Word (*Logos* in Greek) as a person who, although His personhood is distinct from God the Father, is nonetheless God.[4] Not only is He explicitly labeled as divine by John (1:1), but He is said to exist with God prior to creation (1:2). The Word is further described as the agent through whom all of creation is accomplished (1:3). Although the identity of this individual is mysterious initially, John goes on to overtly identify the Word as Jesus Christ (1:14–17).

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[1] The AD 325 Nicene Creed follows this phrase with "things in heaven and things on earth" (τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ). This phrase is removed from the Constantinople version of the Creed in 381 (sometimes referred to as the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed"). For our purposes, we will refrain from extended comment on this phrase but will make brief mention in the section on Colossians 1:15–17, the likely foundation for this phrase.

[2] John 1:3a reads, πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο.

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all English Bible quotations are from the *Legacy Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Three Sixteen, 2022).

[4] This idea will be discussed more fully later.

Although John leaves no doubt as to the identity of the Word, what is often overlooked by modern readers is that first-century Jews were immersed in a culture where the Logos/Word concept had significant implications. We now turn to consider the thematic backdrop to the Word theme.

Understanding the Background of the Personified Word

Greek Background

Scholars have long debated the background of John's usage of the Logos/Word theme.[5] Some scholars have proposed that Greek philosophy provides the appropriate foundation for understanding John's use of Logos/Word terminology.[6] A sixth-century philosopher by the name of Heraclitus spoke of "Thought" that governed and ordered the universe.[7] According to Keener, "Six of the surviving 130 fragments of his work refer to the Logos, four in the technical sense of being eternal, omnipresent, the divine cause, and so forth."[8] Although initially thriving only in the theories of Stoicism, the concept of the ruling Logos became pervasive in Greek thought. In Gnosticism, the Logos becomes an intermediary between the divine and humanity.[9] Since the gnostic texts were composed after John composed his Gospel, it is not likely that full-fledged Gnosticism was the driving influence of John's Prologue.[10]

Nevertheless, John and his fellow Jews lived within (and were at times responding to) the culture of their day. Thus, some scholars have looked to this Greek philosophical background to try to understand the reasoning of John's appeal to Christ as the Word.[11] Although this is certainly possible—and it may be a partial explanation for describing Jesus as the Word—many scholars have recognized that a greater influence on John is his Jewish identity and the Hebrew Scriptures. It seems self-evident that, given the ample explanation within the Old Testament and Jewish

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[5] For a detailed survey of the options, see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:338–63.

[6] For a good survey of how early Christians used Greek philosophy regarding the Logos idea, see Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 34–45.

[7] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:341. Keener points to Diogenes Laertius 9.1.1, who provides the sources on Heraclitus (LCL 2:409–25).

[8] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:341.

[9] Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 255.

[10] For a detailed analysis of Gnosticism, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

[11] An oft-cited example of this is Philo. Philo uses the Greek term λόγος over 1400 times. In his writings the Logos is an intermediary between God and the world. Scholars have noted that Philo mixes his Jewish monotheism with a middle road between the Platonic and Stoic views of the Logos ideal. According to Schreiner, Philo describes the Logos as God's firstborn and His Son, and God creates through the agency of this Logos. For a full discussion, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 256–57; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:343–47.

culture itself, this would be the preferred backdrop for the Logos theme.[12] In the words of Keener:

> That John wrote in Greek very few have disputed; that some potential readers in the late first century might have construed his language in terms of popular philosophy is also reasonable. But, as we contend below, the semantic range of Logos easily encompassed the Jewish senses in a Jewish milieu, and it is the message which John directs to his intended audience (the "implied audience" of his text) that we seek to ascertain. A reading of the prologue merely on the terms of Hellenistic philosophy would be a reading counter to John's purpose, expressed in the allusions and development of his text.[13]

Jewish Background

If we agree with the rather unobtrusive proposition that "John most likely wrote with Diaspora Jews and proselytes in mind,"[14] then we can expect that John is writing with the knowledge that his audience is familiar with Jewish, and specifically Old Testament, traditions. Examining the Jewish evidence reveals that the Word of God held a special place in one's understanding of God's activity.

For example, some of the Aramaic Targums (2nd c. BC to AD 12th c.)[15] contain evidence that the Jews sometimes viewed the Word of Yahweh as a substitute for Yahweh Himself. *Targum Neofiti* (put into writing approximately AD 2nd–3rd c. but preserving beliefs from earlier times)[16] refers to the דייי ממרא ("the Word of the Lord") in place of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים ("God") in Genesis 1 (vv. 3, 4, 5, etc.). Although most scholars believe *Targum Neofiti* was likely written after the Gospel of John, it offers a perspective of the Word of the Lord that ultimately entered the targumic text and which doubtless existed much earlier in Jewish thought. Jobes notes that the דייי ממרא ("the Word of the Lord") was likely a "circumlocution to avoid referring to God directly, for a person's word is the ultimate personal expression of that person."[17] However, we should be cautious not to assume that the targumic use of "the Word of the Lord" is merely a periphrasis for the divine name. Evans notes three pertinent

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[12] "The term 'Word' appears to have been used by the evangelist at least in part in order to contextualize the gospel message among his Hellenistic audience. Yet John's theology of the 'Word' is steeped in the OT depiction of the word of God" (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 338).

[13] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:343.

[14] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 84.

[15] For dates of the various Targums, see Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*, Studies in Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), esp. pp. 81–82 for the Palestinian Targums and *Targum Neofiti*; and Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1A (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 43.

[16] Flesher and Chilton, *The Targums*, 81–82; McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, 44.

[17] Karen H. Jobes, *John Through Old Testament Eyes: A Background and Application Commentary*, Through Old Testament Eyes New Testament Commentaries, ed. Andrew T. Le Peau (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 32.

observations concerning the references to the Word of the Lord in the Targums that shed light on possible conceptual resonances with John.[18]

First, the Aramaic word *memra* (ממרא) sometimes functions as an independent agent in the Targums, mirroring how John appears to utilize the Logos theme.[19] Second, John's usage of the Word in John 1 need not precisely match the Targums to have a relationship. As Evans notes, "The simple fact that 'Word' appears as a periphrasis or name for God in Genesis 1–2 and elsewhere in reference to creation and to God's Shekinah dwelling among his people means that it could easily have been adopted by the Fourth Evangelist for his own use."[20] Thirdly, the way John constructs his Apocalypse may demonstrate awareness of the reasoning that may have preceded and undergirded the written form of the targumic text, which would bolster the idea that John's Gospel could have echoed similar thought.[21] Thus, while writing under the Spirit's guidance and producing a fully inspired and inerrant text, John may have employed familiar Jewish ideas to help his readers identify the significance of Christ.

All things considered, the conspicuous substitute of "the Word of the Lord" for God in *Targum Neofiti* seems to be evidence of a belief among the Aramaic-speaking Jewish population that the Word of Yahweh could be discussed in contexts of equality with God. Furthermore, although the Word as Creator is a notable theme in the Targums, it is not the only connection we find of the Word's personification or potential divinity.[22] Howell summarizes:

> Indeed, the Targums present the *Memra* as more than just a "word" or "decree." *Neofiti* Genesis 1–2 attributes the creation of the universe to the *Memra*. *Neofiti* Exodus 14:30 says that the *Memra* redeemed Israel from Egypt. Likewise, the *Memra* fought Israel's battles as they entered the promised land in *Targum Joshua* 10:14. In the Abrahamic narrative, *Onqelos* Genesis 15 suggests that the *Memra* was God's agent to communicate the covenant to Abraham and to mediate the covenant sign. In each of these cases, the *Memra* carries out a role beyond verbal speech or declaration from God. In fact, the *Memra* functions as God's agent in the Targums by doing the work that the Hebrew Bible ascribes to God.[23]

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[18] Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 127–29.

[19] As examples of this, Evans notes *Targ. Hab.* 1.12; *Targ. Amos* 4.11; *Targ. Isa.* 65.1.

[20] Evans, *Word and Glory*, 128.

[21] Evans points to Revelation 1:4, "the one who is and who was and who is coming," which matches the Word's self-identification in *Targ. Ps.-J.* Deuteronomy 32:39, "I am he who is and who was and I am he who will be." Evans also points to Revelation 19:13, where Christ is portrayed in His wrath as "the Word of God." These kinds of evidences may show that John echoed the theology or ideas which undergirded some of the Jewish interpretation in the Targums.

[22] See the excellent presentation by Evans, *Word and Glory*, 114–24.

[23] Adam Joseph Howell, "Finding Christ in the Old Testament Through the Aramaic MEMRA, SHEKINAH, and YEQARA of the Targums" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 39–40.

Howell notes that the *memra* (Word) in *Neofiti* Genesis 1 is linked with creation 19 times, 17 of which *memra* is the subject of the verb, showing an essential involvement in the process of creation. Interestingly, Howell also notes that, in *Neofiti*, the *Yaqara* (איקר), which is translatable as "glory" or "honor," is personified as the Creator in Genesis 1:17.[24] The *Yaqara* also blesses the sacred day in Genesis 2:3 as the culmination and conclusion of creation. The emphasis on glory as a personification of Yahweh could be an additional connection to John's Prologue, where in the context of his creation parallels, John notes, "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" (John 1:14, emphasis added).

The evidence from the Targums is quite compelling; however, some scholars are hesitant to view the Targums as evidence of Jewish thought in the first century AD.[25] Although there is solid evidence from Qumran for the existence of some written Targums prior to the first century,[26] scholars debate the dates for the Targums.[27] McNamara notes there is "strong evidence from rabbinic sources" that the written Targums of the Pentateuch existed at least in the late third or fourth century AD.[28] However, some have argued that *Targum Neofiti* specifically was in circulation hundreds of years prior, in the second century BC.[29] Regardless of the exact dating of the Targums generally, or *Neofiti* specifically, it is reasonable to conclude that *Targum Neofiti* at least gives voice to how some Jews likely interpreted the Old Testament and personified the Word of God.[30]

The evidence of *Neofiti* seems all the stronger when we compare its use of "the Word of Yahweh" with some of the Second Temple literature and Scripture itself.[31] Keener notes that the personification of the Word might be evidenced in extra-biblical

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[24] Howell, "Finding Christ in the Old Testament Through the Aramaic MEMRA, SHEKINAH, and YEQARA of the Targums," 48–49.

[25] See, for example, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:350. "Despite protestations that the Memra must be an early component of Aramaic targumic tradition, all our extant targumic evidence is too late to allow us to be certain that Memra was used in a particular manner in the first century."

[26] McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, 43. McNamara notes that 11QtargJob, a Targum found at Qumran, may date to as early as 200 BC. This demonstrates there were likely at least some Targums in existence during the time of John's writing. There was also a Targum fragment of Leviticus 16 found in Qumran (4QtgLev).

[27] For a concise (but helpful) survey of the dating of Targums, see Michael B. Shepherd, "Targums, The New Testament and Biblical Theology of the Messiah," *JETS* 51.1 (2008): 46–48.

[28] McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, 44.

[29] Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1960), 207. See also, Gabriele Boccaccini, "Targum Neofiti as a Proto-Rabbinic Document: A Systemic Analysis," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context*, ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 259. Boccaccini sees *Neofiti* as evidence of second century AD thought.

[30] In the words of Shepherd, "Thus, even though most of the known Targums in their final forms are later than the first century AD, many of them have something to say about the exegesis and Aramaic of pre-Christian times" (Shepherd, "Targums, The New Testament and Biblical Theology of the Messiah," 48). For a similar kind of discussion concerning the Targums and the messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15, see Iosif J. Zhakevich, "Genesis 3:15 in the Pentateuchal Targums and in the New Testament: Enmity as a Spiritual Conflict," *JBTS* 7.1 (2022): 119–34.

[31] For the purposes of this article, Second Temple literature refers to sources dated or composed to around the time period of the second temple (ca. 516 BC–AD 70).

literature as early as the second century BC in the work of *1 Enoch*.[32] Another similar Second Temple source is Sirach 24, which features the personification of Wisdom, drawing striking parallels with the actions of the Word in John 1.[33] In Evans' robust study of the issue, he lists a multitude of parallels between the LXX and Pseudepigrapha and John's Prologue.[34]

One pertinent example of these parallels is a text like Wisdom of Solomon 9:1, which says, "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things by thy word" (Θεὲ πατέρων καὶ κύριε τοῦ ἐλέους ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ σου).[35] Parallels like these demonstrate at least two realities: (1) the Word of Yahweh was often attributed creative power, and (2) the Word of Yahweh could be personified to fill in the role of Yahweh.

The personification of the Word of Yahweh appears to have been taken for granted by the mid-second century AD. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr argued adamantly that the Word was a real person and not an inanimate thing.[36] According to Justin's record of the discussion, the Jews agreed with his statements on personification.[37] If what Justin says is true, the Jewish populace was already familiar with (and accepting of) the idea of a personified Word, which would match with the evidence alluded to earlier. This is not surprising since the Old Testament itself seems to provide a theological foundation for this idea.

Old Testament Background

Scholars have noted multiple connections between John's Prologue and the Jewish Scriptures. For example, Köstenberger notes the following four major connections:[38]

> 1. The evangelist's deliberate effort to echo the opening words of the Hebrew Scriptures by the phrase "in the beginning."
> 2. The reappearance of several significant terms from Genesis 1 in John 1 ("light," "darkness," "life").
> 3. The introductory OT allusions to Israel's wilderness wanderings (John 1:14: "pitched his tent") and to the giving of the law (1:17–18).

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[32] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:351. Keener refers to 1 Enoch 14:24, but notes that 1 Enoch 15:1 "may suggest that the author merely represents God's word, like his voice, as a part of him."

[33] For a full discussion and listing of the parallels, see Evans, *Word and Glory*, 83–86.

[34] Evans, *Word and Glory*, 83–94.

[35] English translation is from *The Revised Standard Version* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1971). The Greek text is from *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996).

[36] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 264, §128; hereafter abbreviated *ANF*. Justin notes, "They call Him the Word, because He carries tidings from the Father to men."

[37] Martyr, "Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew," 1:264, §130.

[38] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 338.

4. Perhaps most decisively, the evangelist's adaptation of Isa 55:9–11 for his basic Christological framework.[39]

Similarly, when discussing the connections between John's Prologue and the theological concepts in the Hebrew Bible, Jobes notes:

"The Word" in Hebrew thought referred to the Lord's revelation of himself through the prophets (cf. "The word of the LORD came to…" that introduces prophetic statements). The allusions and references throughout the Prologue to Old Testament concepts and people, such as the covenant (1:17), the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), the Messiah (1:25, 41), Elijah (1:24), the tabernacle (1:14), the law and Moses (1:17), root John's presentation of Jesus squarely in Jewish history, not in Greek philosophy.[40]

Perhaps the most obvious connection between John's Logos theme and the Old Testament is Genesis 1–2 itself. Evans notes, "Even a casual reader of Scripture cannot help but hear the echo of Genesis 1–2 in the opening verses of the Johannine Prologue."[41] Evans helpfully parallels the LXX of Genesis 1–2 and John 1 as follows.[42]

LXX Genesis 1–2	John 1
"In the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ)" (v. 1a)	"In the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ)" (v. 1a; cf. v. 2)
"God (θεός) created the heaven and the earth" (v. 1b)	"and the Word was God (θεός) … all things came into being (ἐγένετο) through him" (vv. 1c, 3)
	"and the world came into being (ἐγένετο) through him" (v. 10).
"and darkness (σκότος) was upon the abyss … and God said, 'Let there be light (φῶς), and light (φῶς) came into being (ἐγένετο)'" (vv. 2–3)	"And the light (φῶς) shines (φαίνειν) in darkness (σκοτία), and the darkness (σκοτία) did not overcome it" (v. 5; cf. vv. 7–8)
"and let [the stars] be lights … to shine (φαίνειν) upon the earth" (v. 15)	
"And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living (ζᾶν) life'" (v. 24)	"In him was life (ζωή)" (v. 4a) / "concerning the Word of life (ζωή)" (1 John 1:1)

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[39] Köstenberger cites Benedict T. Viviano, "The Structure of the Prologue of John (1:1–18): A Note," *RB* 105 (1998): 182: "this passage of Isaiah [Isa. 55:10–11] almost certainly had *the* decisive effect on John 1:1–18" (emphasis in original).

[40] Jobes, *John Through Old Testament Eyes*, 31.

[41] Evans, *Word and Glory*, 77. Evans also goes on to draw comparisons with Exodus 33–34. These connections are less obvious, but are intriguing nonetheless.

[42] Chart adapted from Evans, *Word and Glory*, 78.

"And God said, 'Let us make a human (ἄνθρωπος) according to our image and likeness'" (v. 26)	"And the life (ζωή) was the light (φῶς) of humans (ἄνθρωποι)" (v. 4b)
"And God made the human (ἄνθρωπος), according to the image of God (κατ᾽ εἰκόνα θεοῦ) he made them" (v. 27)	"He was the true light (φῶς), which enlightens every human (ἄνθρωπος), coming into the world" (v. 9)
"And God formed the human (ἄνθρωπος) from the dust of the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life (ζωή), and the human (ἄνθρωπος) became (ἐγένετο) a living (ζᾶν) soul" (2:7)	

In addition to the above parallels in Genesis 1–2, Psalm 33 is another significant passage that has conceptual overlap.[43] The psalmist refers to the word of Yahweh multiple times in this psalm (33:4, 6, 9, 11), either directly (vv. 4, 6) or through inference (vv. 9, 11). Psalm 33:6 clearly depicts the word of Yahweh as the creative agent of the world, "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host." Jacobson notes:

> *The word of the* LORD is both a nearly tangible expression of the divine purpose and at the same time the very agent that ensures that the divine purpose (God's *every deed*, *kol maʿaśēhû*) is achieved. This is what the psalm means when it says the word is upright (*yāšār*)—that it does what it is intended to do, just as the morally upright are those who do what God has commanded.[44]

Intriguingly, the creative word of Yahweh is also linked closely to wisdom in the Old Testament and Jewish literature.[45] For example, in the extra-biblical Wisdom of Solomon 9:1–2 (RSV), we read:

> O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy,
> who hast made all things by thy word,
> and by thy wisdom hast formed man,
> to have dominion over the creatures thou hast made.

Here, the word of the Lord and His wisdom are paralleled in the work of creation. Proverbs 8:22–31 is also an oft-cited text in this discussion:

> Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of His way,
> Before His deeds of old.

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[43] Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 255; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:251; Evans, *Word and Glory*, 87.

[44] Rolf A. Jacobson, "Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. Edward J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 314.

[45] Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 256.

From everlasting I was installed,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no springs heavy with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;
While He had not yet made the earth and the *fields* outside,
Nor the first dust of the world.
When He established the heavens, I was there,
When He marked out a circle on the face of the deep,
When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became strong,
When He set for the sea its boundary
So that the water would not pass over His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the earth;
Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;
And I was a daily delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,
Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
My delight is in the sons of men.

Reading Proverbs 8 (and other texts like it), Keener, among other commentators, has noted that "virtually everything John says about the Logos—apart from its incarnation as a particular historical person—Jewish literature said about divine Wisdom."[46] Working from the LXX, Evans provides the following list that shows this close comparison:[47]

1. Sophia was "in the beginning" (Jn 1:1a; see §4 [Sir. 24:9], §19 [Prov. 8:23]).
2. Sophia "was with" God (Jn 1:1b; see §1 [Sir. 24:4], §20 [Prov. 8:27, 30], §42 [*1 En.* 42.1–3]). Similarly, God's *logos* abides in heaven (see §20 [Ps. 118(119):89], §21 [Wis. 18:15]).
3. The world was created "by Sophia" (Jn 1:3; see §22 [Prov. 8:30; Wis. 9:9]). Similarly, the world was created by God's *logos* (see §22 [Wis. 7:22; 9:2]).
4. In Sophia was "life" (Jn 1:4a; see §24 [Prov. 8:35; Wis. 8:13], §25 [Ps 35(36):10). Likewise, God's *logos* makes alive (see §24 [Ps 118(119):25, 107]).
5. Sophia gave "light" to the world (Jn 1:4b–5a; see §25 [Bar. 4:2]). Similarly, God's *logos* is light (see §25 [Ps. 118(119):105]), and His Torah enlightens humankind (see §27 [*T. Levi* 14.4; Job 33:30b]).

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[46] Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:352.
[47] Evans, *Word and Glory*, 93.

6. Sophia prevailed against darkness and evil (Jn 1:5b; see §26 [Wis. 7:29–30]). Similarly, God's spoken word at the time of creation brought light into being (see Gen. 1:2–3).[48]

Concluding Thoughts on the Identity of the Word

It seems quite clear from the evidence that the Old Testament has the needed theological categories to understand what John is doing in labeling Jesus as the Word of God. Although we should not dismiss the possibility that Greek thinking is at play as cultural context, the Jewish background should carry primary weight.[49] In the words of Carson, "Whether this heritage was mediated to John by the Greek version of the Old Testament that many early Christians used, or even by an Aramaic paraphrase (called a 'Targum'), the ultimate fountain for this choice of language cannot be in serious doubt."[50]

Why would John refer to Jesus as the Word? Arguably, it was the optimum picture to help people understand the depth of the revelation of God in the flesh.[51] Carson provides an apt summary of the beauty of John's choice of wording:

> God's "Word" in the Old Testament is his powerful self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation, and the personification of that "Word" makes it suitable for John to apply it as a title to God's ultimate self-disclosure, the person of his own Son. But if the expression would prove richest for Jewish readers, it would also resonate in the minds of some readers with entirely pagan backgrounds. In their case, however, they would soon discover that whatever they had understood the term to mean in the past, the author whose work they were then reading was forcing them into fresh thought.[52]

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[48] With all of these connections between Wisdom and the descriptions of the Word in John 1, why wouldn't John have opted for use of Wisdom (σοφία) instead of Logos? Keener proposes that John likely wanted to utilize a masculine noun (Wisdom is feminine) to fit with the incarnation of the man, Jesus (Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:354). That may be a factor, or it may also be for a variety of other reasons. However, both concepts do provide a helpful template for understanding the significance of the incarnation of Christ.

[49] Jobes, *John Through Old Testament Eyes*, 31–32; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 257.

[50] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 115.

[51] Keener agrees and notes, "John's choice of the Logos (embracing also Wisdom and Torah) to articulate his Christology was brilliant: no concept better articulated an entity that was both divine yet distinct from the Father. By this term, some Diaspora Jewish writers had already connected Jewish conceptions of Wisdom and Torah with Hellenistic conceptions of a divine and universal power. Finally, by using this term John could present Jesus as the epitome of what his community's opponents claimed to value: God's word revealed through Moses. Jesus was thus the supreme revelation of God; the Torah had gone forth from Zion" (Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:363).

[52] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 116.

Looking at John's Argument in John 1:1–3

Having a firm grip on the plausible background to John's choice of using the Word theme in John 1, we should remember that John's purposes become fairly evident by his own argument in John 1:1–3.

As already noted earlier, John begins his record with the phrase, "In the beginning" (Ἐν ἀρχῇ), an intentional allusion to how Genesis 1:1 starts the record of world history and God's creative work.[53] In John's argument, this temporal phrase situates the timing of the Word's existence, "In the beginning was the Word." The beginning referred to both in John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1 is absolute—the beginning of everything.[54] Thus, the Word (i.e., Jesus Christ) already existed prior to creation.[55]

We read that the Word was "with God," noting that He is to be differentiated from the Father, and yet that He in fact *is* God ("and the Word was God").[56] Although the definite article is missing in John 1:1 (the Word is not labeled as *the* God), this is the preferred way to emphasize Jesus's divine nature.[57] However, we need to stress, with Borchert, that "The meaning of John 1:1 is not merely that the Word has divine characteristics but that the Word participates in the reality called God. That Word was *true deity*, and John wanted there to be *no doubt* about it."[58]

The significance of the opening of John's Gospel cannot be overstated. It functions as a lens through which we are to read the entire book. In the words of Barrett, "John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true the book is blasphemous."[59]

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[53] "The statement recalls the first word of the Hebrew Bible, בראשית (berešiṯ), rendered in the LXX, as in the Gospel, ἐν ἀρχῇ. The association was the more evident to the Jews, since they referred to books of the Bible by their opening words, and so 'In the beginning' was the Jewish name for 'Genesis'" (George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary 36 [Dallas: Word, 1999], 7).

[54] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 113–14.

[55] It seems intentional that John 1:1 and 1:2 use "was" (ἦν) instead of "came to be" (ἐγένετο, cf. John 1:3). The use of ἐγένετο implies coming into being in many contexts. But the Word never experienced a time when He came into being, thus He simply "was" in the beginning of creation.

[56] The transition from John 1:1 to more personal terms, "He" or "this one" emphasizes the personal identity of the Logos. In the words of Schreiner, "The Logos for John is not merely a personification but a person, not merely one who existed with God for all eternity but one who has entered history as a human being" (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 257–58).

[57] See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 266–69. Wallace argues that the Greek phrase, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος is most likely to be understood as qualitative. He writes, "There is a balance between the Word's deity, which was already present in the beginning (Ἐν ἀρχῇ … θεὸς ἦν [1:1]), and his humanity, which was added later (σὰρξ ἐγένετο [1:14]). The grammatical structure of these two statements mirrors each other; both emphasize the nature of the Word, rather than his identity. But θεός was his nature from eternity (hence, εἰμί is used), while σάρξ was added at the incarnation (hence, γίνομαι is used).… The *idea* of a qualitative θεός here is that the Word had all the attributes and qualities that 'the God' of (1:1b) had" (269). Similarly, Greg Lanier, *Is Jesus Truly God? How the Bible Teaches the Divinity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 113. Lanier notes that a more "clunky" translation would be, "The Word was that which *theos* was."

[58] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, New American Commentary 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 104 (emphasis original).

[59] C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 156.

The Word's presence with God existed in the beginning (1:2). Knowing that Jesus is the Word (1:14–17), it is intriguing to hear Jesus's prayer later in John's Gospel, "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5, cf. 17:24). This prayer carries many of the same themes as John 1:1–2. Jesus asks to receive what is already rightfully His— what was His before creation—the glory that naturally belongs to Him as part of who God is.[60] In this way, the beginning and ending of John's Gospel stress the eternality and preexistence of Jesus.

The preexistence of Jesus as the Word is well established in John's writings through a variety of means.[61] But one of the most intriguing statements John makes is found in 1:3, "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." As noted earlier, this phrase, "All things came into being through Him" (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο), forms the basis for the Nicene statement, "through whom all things were made" (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο). In John 1:3, its core purpose is to deepen the association between the creation story in Genesis and the Word's creative activity.[62]

John presents the Word's relationship to creation in two perspectives: one negative and one positive. On the positive side, "all things came into being through Him." The Greek word for "came into being" (ἐγένετο) carries significant theological weight when understood in light of Genesis 1. As Klink observes:

> It is important to note that the verb "made" (ἐγένετο) is consistently used to describe creation in the LXX of Genesis 1, where it serves as a foundational term that expresses the creation power and activity of God. The use of this term in the prologue is employing a significant intentionality. It is also clear that the eleven occurrences of the verb (or a related term) in the prologue (see vv. 3, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18) in its variously translated forms, "made/came/became" (γίνομαι), is intentionally deploying the same functional meaning initiated by the use of the term in its twenty-three occurrences in Genesis 1 (see Gen 1:3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 23, 24, 30, 31). This term's grounding in Genesis will be carefully established in the prologue and utilized throughout the Gospel to take on a "creation" emphasis in order to declare the transformative power and work of Jesus Christ.[63]

John says all things without exception are created "through Him" (δι' αὐτοῦ). In Greek, διά + the genitive typically describes intermediate agency.[64] During the great debates about the divinity and preexistence of Christ that prompted the Council of Nicaea in 325, this preposition was appealed to as an argument by the Arians to prove

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[60] Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 715.

[61] For a discussion of the issue, see John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 236–37.

[62] Jobes, *John Through Old Testament Eyes*, 32; Lanier, *Is Jesus Truly God?*, 124.

[63] Klink III, *John*, 93–94.

[64] For a full discussion on the passive verbs and agency communicated through prepositions, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 431–39.

that the Word is inferior to God and simply a mediator of God's ultimate creative work.[65]

Although I would agree that διά + the genitive does indicate the mediating role of the Word in the context of John 1:3,[66] it by no means suggests inferiority of the Word with relation to God, inasmuch as verse 1 declares without equivocation that the Word *is* God. It is indeed a biblical pattern to point to the Father's ultimate role in creation with prepositions like ἐκ, and the Son's mediatorial actions with διά (cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2). But biblical authors also address the Father's role with the preposition διά (cf. Rom 11:36) and unequivocally affirm the Son's ultimate role in creation (cf. Col 1:16).[67] In essence, the prepositions emphasize functional relationships rather than indicating hierarchical status. Lanier has helpfully shown the interchangeability of prepositions as they apply to creation language for the Father and the Son.[68]

Creation is …	"from/by" (Gk. ἐκ/ἐν)	"through" (Gk. διά)	"unto" (Gk. εἰς)
John 1:3	-	Son	-
Rom 11:36	God/Father	God/Father	God/Father
1 Cor 8:6	God/Father	Son	God/Father
Col 1:16	Son	Son	Son
Heb 1:2	-	Son	-

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[65] Athanasius describes their view this way: "However, they say concerning Him, that 'God willing to create originate nature, when He saw that it could not endure the untempered hand of the Father, and to be created by Him, makes and creates first and alone one only, and calls Him Son and Word, that, through Him as a medium, all things might thereupon be brought to be.' This they not only have said, but they have dared to put it into writing, namely, Eusebius, Arius, and Asterius who sacrificed" (Athanasius of Alexandria, "Four Discourses against the Arians," in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892], 361); hereafter abbreviated *NPNF²*.

[66] Note, however, another possibility. Some scholars have argued that it may be possible that διά with the genitive can represent sole agency. See, for example, Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 70. Harris argues, "Sometimes, however, διά with the genitive expresses not the efficient means but the ultimate cause, not instrumentality but sole agency, as in Ro 11:36, where God the Father is designated the source (ἐκ), sole cause (διά), and goal (εἰς) of all things. Similarly, ὁ θεός, δι᾽ οὗ ἐκλήθητε (1 Cor 1:9); κληρονόμος διὰ θεοῦ (Gal 4:7); ἔπρεπεν γὰρ αὐτῷ … δι᾽ οὗ τὰ πάντα (Heb 2:10). It follows, as Zerwick observes, that when the role of Christ as creator (e.g., Jn 1:3, 10) or redeemer (e.g., Ro 5:9) is expressed by διά, the idea of his mediation may not be prominent."

[67] Although the ἐκ preposition is not used in Colossians 1:16, the creative work of Jesus is described with three prepositional phrases: ἐν αὐτῷ ("in Him"), δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ("through Him"), and εἰς αὐτὸν ("for Him"). I think Pao is correct when he says we should view the first prepositional phrase, ἐν αὐτῷ ("in Him"), "as a wider category that denotes a certain organic association, one that contains locative reference and possibly causal relationship as well" (David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 96). Taken together, these three prepositional phrases describing the creative work of Christ have to be viewed in the ultimate sense.

[68] Lanier, *Is Jesus Truly God?*, 68.

Therefore, it is best to acknowledge that although the mediatorial role of the Word is at play in John 1:3, it by no means and in no way suggests the Word's inferiority to God the Father, as will become clear in the following discussion.

Not only does John state the positive pronouncement, "All things came into being through Him," which in itself is a marvelous claim to the uniqueness and divinity of the Word, but he also stresses the negative, "and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (1:3b). The phrase "apart from Him" (χωρὶς αὐτοῦ) clarifies any confusion one might have about how absolute the role of the Word was in the creation process.[69] John already stressed that "all things" (πάντα) came into being through the Word's creative power, but now we are told, in no uncertain terms, that "apart from Him" nothing was created.[70] This second clause functions emphatically to stress the "inability of anything to come into existence without the Word."[71] Therefore, it is evident that if nothing was created apart from the Word's creative power, then He cannot have been created. John 1:3 is a strong affirmation of the Word's uncreatedness and equality with God.

Early Church Interpretation and Application of John 1:3

We can see why John 1:3 became such a utilized text in light of the Arian controversy. If the Word creates all things and nothing that was created was created without the Word, then the Word could not himself have been created. Athanasius states the case plainly as follows:

> And by Him, as John says, "all things were made," and "without Him was made not one thing." And this Word is Christ; for "there is One God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for Him; and One Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him." And if all things are through Him, He Himself is not to be reckoned with that "all." For he who dares to call Him, through whom are things, one of that "all," surely will have like speculations concerning God, from whom are all.[72]

A similar argument is made by "the Athanasius of the West," Hilary of Poitiers, in the fourth century:

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[69] Borchert, *John 1–11*, 107.

[70] There are two related technical issues here at the end of verse 3 that require comment. First is the question of whether verse 3 should end with the οὐδὲ ἕν or with ὃ γέγονεν. Beasley-Murray notes, "The majority of early writers, both orthodox and Gnostic, adopted the former alternative; but the use of the statement by the Arians and Macedonians to prove on that basis that the Holy Spirit was a created being led the orthodox to favor the second way of reading the sentence. Most moderns consider the former to be intended, on the grounds of rhythmical balance of the clauses; the 'staircase parallelism,' characteristic of vv 1–5, is then preserved" (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2). It does seem that ὃ γέγονεν most naturally goes with verse 3.

The second issue is why John moves from using the aorist tense (πάντα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο … καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν) to the perfect tense (ὃ γέγονεν). Carson explains, "The change in tense from *were made* to *has been made* is then the change in reference from the act of creation to the state of creation" (Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 118). In other words, John might be understood as saying, "Nothing that is currently in the status of having been created was created apart from the Word."

[71] Klink III, *John*, 94.

[72] Athanasius, "Four Discourses against the Arians," *NPNF²*, 4:317.

> Since by the faith of the Apostles and Evangelists these statements are referred in their meaning to the Son, through Whom all things were made, how shall He be made equal to the very works of His hands and be in the same category of nature as all other things? In the first place our human intelligence repudiates this statement that the Creator is a creature; since creation comes to exist by means of the Creator. But if He is a creature, He is both subject to corruption and exposed to the suspense of waiting, and is subjected to bondage.[73]

This same kind of argumentation was also used by Augustine:

> Now some unbelieving Arian may come forth and say that "the Word of God was made." How can it be that the Word of God was made, when God by the Word made all things? If the Word of God was itself also made, by what other Word was *it* made?[74]

> After saying, "And the Word was God," it is said also, "The same was in the beginning with God: all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." Not simply "all things"; but only all things that were *made*, that is, the whole creature. From which it appears clearly, that He Himself was not made, by whom all things were made. And if He was not made, then He is not a creature; but if He is not a creature, then He is of the same substance with the Father. For all substance that is not God is creature; and all that is not creature is God.[75]

> For if some things were made by the Father, and some by the Son, then all things were not made by the Father, nor all things by the Son; but if all things were made by the Father, and all things by the Son, then the same things were made by the Father and by the Son. The Son, therefore, is equal with the Father, and the working of the Father and the Son is indivisible. Because if the Father made even the Son, whom certainly the Son Himself did not make, then all things were not made by the Son; but all things *were* made by the Son: therefore He Himself was not made, that with the Father He might make all things that were made.[76]

As these early church sources indicate, John 1:1–3 has long been a passage used to defend the equality of the Son with the Father, demonstrating the uncreatedness and preexistence of the Son. This makes good sense because John's argument is that the Word, God's agent of creation, is truly God Himself. Indeed, "God the Creator

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[73] Hilary of Poitiers, "On the Trinity," *NPNF²*, 9:219.

[74] Augustine of Hippo, "Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel according to St. John," in *St. Augustine: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, vol. 7 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 10; hereafter abbreviated *NPNF¹*.

[75] Augustine, "On the Trinity," *NPNF¹*, 3:21.

[76] Augustine, 3:23.

and the Word through which (or whom) he created are inseparable, and according to John they share the same identity while at the same time being distinct."[77]

The Contribution of Colossians 1:15–17

Although John 1:1–3 is the primary text to draw on in our discussion of the exegetical basis for the Nicene Creed, several other pieces of evidence should be considered, which solidify the theological belief that the Son was preexistent and uncreated. However, due to space limitations, we will restrict our discussion to Colossians 1:15–17.

Colossians 1:15–17 is a passage that has significant implications for the role of Jesus as the uncreated Creator. This text is likely the backdrop to the Nicene clarifying statement about the Son being the Creator of all things, "things in heaven and things on earth" (τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ).[78] The related phrase is found in 1:16, "For in Him all things were created, *both in the heavens and on earth*" (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).

Although space limits us from a complete examination of Colossians 1:15–17, there is one particular issue that requires our attention here, around which we can formulate the entirety of our discussion. The issue is Paul's declaration of Christ as the "firstborn of all creation" (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως).

Unsurprisingly, the phrase "firstborn of all creation" was one of the two prominent texts that Arians relied upon to argue that the Son was created.[79] Logically, if the Son was created, then He could not be equal with God because He was a part of creation—and creature and Creator are not equal. How are we to understand this phrase?[80]

Although it is possible to understand "firstborn" as a temporal descriptor (cf. Luke 2:7; Heb 11:28), it also naturally came to be a metaphorical description of rank or supremacy.[81] This is easily understood, given the primacy of the firstborn son, who was granted rulership and authority in matters both internal and external to the family. We see this metaphorical use in pertinent Old Testament texts, such as Psalm 89:27, "I also shall make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." The Greek translation of Psalm 89:27 [88:28 LXX] uses the same word as Colossians 1:15 (πρωτότοκος).[82] In Psalm 89, it is David who is declared to be the firstborn, though

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[77] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 179.

[78] As noted earlier, this phrase is missing from the AD 381 Constantinople Creed. Some scholars have proposed that this phrase was put into the Nicene Creed primarily for rhetorical purposes. Leary says, "The addition of τά τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ in N, not retained in C, does not suffice to give the Creed a broad cosmic dimension and rather suggests an effort to fill up a felt lack with a hollow rhetorical flourish" (Joseph S. O'Leary, "Johannine Revelation, Nicene Witness," *Religions* 15 [2024]: 8). However, it makes more sense that given the battle against Arianism that was raging, the drafters of the Nicene Creed wanted to draw upon additional biblical language that referred unquestionably to Christ.

[79] The other was Proverbs 8:22, "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old" (RSV).

[80] For a comprehensive survey, see Larry R. Helyer, "Arius Revisited: The Firstborn over All Creation (Col 1:15)," *JETS* 31.1 (1988): 59–67.

[81] Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 95.

[82] Ps 88:28 in the LXX.

he was the youngest of his brothers. In this case, it cannot be temporal but a statement of authority and position.

This usage is similar to how Israel is labeled as God's firstborn (cf. Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9). An additional parallel is found in the Greco-Roman world, where Pao notes that "firstborn" can refer to "a legal term to refer to one who is the legal heir of his father's inheritance."[83] Thus, although it is grammatically possible that the term "firstborn" could refer to the temporal priority of a son, the surrounding context supports the idea that "firstborn" in Colossians 1 refers specifically to the preeminence, authority, and power of Christ.[84]

The broader context of Colossians 1:15–20 unmistakably emphasizes Christ's supremacy and authority. For example, "in Him all things were created" (v. 16a). Creation taking place "in Him" stands out, compared to the usual "through Him." This phrase, coupled with the concluding phrase of verse 16—"all things have been created through Him and for Him"—provides a triad of prepositional phrases describing Christ's creative work. All things are created (1) "in Him" (ἐν αὐτῷ), (2) "through Him" (δι᾽ αὐτοῦ), and (3) "for Him" (εἰς αὐτὸν).[85]

Although it is possible that "in Him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) could be translated instrumentally—meaning Christ is the means by which God creates the world—there is a difficulty in explaining why Paul would essentially say the same thing with the second prepositional phrase, "through Him" (δι᾽ αὐτοῦ). It seems better to view this first prepositional phrase as either the efficient cause (similar to the Greek preposition ἐκ), or, more likely, the sphere in which the work of creation takes place.[86] The significance of this nuance would be that "God's creation, like his election, takes place 'in Christ' and not apart from him."[87] Therefore, no part of creation can take place outside of Christ. He is the one who "actually brought the plans [of creation] into existence. Through his creative imagination and power, the created order exists."[88]

The second and third prepositional phrases, "through Him" (δι᾽ αὐτοῦ) and "for Him" (εἰς αὐτὸν), respectively function to emphasize agency and goal. Taken

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[83] Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 95. Pao expands, "As the heir, this person also inherits the power and authority of his father over his household."

[84] It is also important to consider the kind of genitive that is in use in the phrase, "firstborn of all creation" (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως). Helyer lists four possibilities: (1) partitive genitive, which is preferred among temporal proponents; (2) genitive of comparison; (3) genitive of place, denoting the sphere of the firstborn's authority; (4) an objective genitive. Helyer opts for an objective genitive, which I believe makes most sense, and the meaning would be that Christ's supremacy extends over all creation (Helyer, "Arius Revisited," 64–65). Wallace understands this genitive to be a genitive of subordination (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 103–4.)

[85] Some have understood these three descriptions as relating to Aristotle's discussion of causation. For a brief discussion, see Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 96. Pao, who disagrees with the idea, notes, "If so, then, these three phrases point to the three causes that are involved in the act of creation: 'in him' points to efficient causation, 'through him' to instrumental causation, and 'for him' to final causation." However, Paul's argument makes sense without attempting to tie it into Greek philosophy.

[86] Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, New American Commentary 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 217; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 61–62.

[87] Bruce, *The Epistles*, 62.

[88] Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 217.

together, we have a full-orbed view of Christ's creative role. Creation *only* takes place in the sphere of Christ's operation. There is no other alternative. Christ Himself is the instrument or agent of the work of creation. And finally, in a statement that has significant claims to divinity, the purpose of creation is to bring glory to Christ.[89]

Paul further describes Jesus as the one who is "before all things" (πρὸ πάντων). Although this phrase could be understood similarly to "firstborn" (v. 15), that is, stressing Christ's authority, Paul consistently uses this phrase to communicate temporality.[90] As such, this text is strong evidence for the preexistence of Christ and teaches that Jesus existed before creation.[91]

Furthermore, Paul states that "in Him all things hold together" (τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν). Not only are all things created by Christ—itself a profound assertion— but He is involved in the continual maintenance of the entire created order.[92] This is another demonstration of Christ's equality with God. For in Scripture, God is the one who sustains and upholds creation (cf. Neh 9:6; Pss 104:27–30; 145:15–16; 147:8–9; Acts 17:25–28).

Colossians 1:15–17 speaks in a significant way to the role of Christ as the uncreated Creator. With a message similar to that of John 1:1–3, Christ is depicted here as the uncreated Creator. All things not only have their genesis in the Son, but their continual existence is in Him as well. Therefore, although some have interpreted the term "firstborn of all creation" to mean that Christ was created, we ought to understand "firstborn" as a title, emphasizing the authority and supremacy of Christ. This meaning reflects the context more faithfully.[93]

Conclusion

We have examined John 1:1–3 and Colossians 1:15–17 in detail. These texts demonstrate that the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, is uncreated and is Himself the Creator. John's Prologue locates the Word in the beginning, prior to and independent of creation. John twice emphasizes—positively and negatively—that "all things" are created through Jesus (John 1:3). Paul's Christological hymn (Col 1:15–17) corroborates and amplifies this claim: the Son is the "firstborn of all creation," not as the first effect within creation but as its sovereign heir, the sphere, the instrumental agency, and the ultimate purpose of the entire cosmos. Such

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[89] In the words of Melick, "Everything exists to display his glory, and ultimately he will be glorified in his creation" (Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 218). The Old Testament regularly describes Yahweh being the Creator of all things and creation testifying of God's glory. For example, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps 19:1; cf. Ps 8:1; 29:9; 97:6; 145:10–12; 150:6).

[90] Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 98. Compare the usage in Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 2:7; 4:5; 2 Cor 12:2; Gal 1:17; 2:12; 3:23; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; 4:21; Titus 1:2.

[91] Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 220.

[92] "The Creator has not forgotten the creation. He daily maintains a balance in the universe" (Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 220). Similarly, see Hebrews 1:3, where the Son is described as one who "upholds all things by the word of His power."

[93] In the words of Bruce, "This cannot be construed as though he himself were the first of all beings to be created. On the contrary, it is emphasized immediately that he is the one by whom the whole creation came into being" (Bruce, *The Epistles*, 59).

language is intelligible only if the Son shares divinity with God (something Colossians 1:19 states emphatically).

These textual conclusions vindicate the theological formulation of the Nicene creed—δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο—"through whom all things were made." If all that has come to be did so through the Son, then the Son cannot be numbered among the things that came to be. He is the eternally unoriginated source who brings all creation into existence. Not abandoning His creative work, the Son continually sustains it (cf. Col 1:17; Heb 1:2–3), a role that emphasizes His equality with God.

Doctrinally, the Son's status as uncreated deity carries significant ramifications. He participates in actions ascribed to Yahweh in the Old Testament, and He shares in the privileges and the honor reserved for Yahweh. Most importantly, He is worthy of the same undivided doxology that rightfully belongs to God alone.