

Christ Existed Before All Creation: A Response to Jehovah's Witnesses

Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski¹

John begins his Gospel by saying that the Logos “was” (*ēn*) in the beginning (vv. 1b, 2). John does not mean that the Logos began to exist but that he was already existing “in the beginning.” The word *ēn* (the imperfect tense form of the Greek “to be” verb) has the nuance of “was already existing” (cf. NLT, “already existed”) in this context for two reasons. The first is the studied contrast in John 1:1–5 between *ēn* (“was”), which occurs six times, and *egeneto* (“became,” “came to be”), which appears twice (1:3) and is a key word used twenty-one times in the Greek translation of the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1–2:4. The contrast between the way the two verbs are used in context indicates the eternal preexistence of the Logos. In contrast to everything that “came to be,” the Logos simply “was.”²

The second reason is the context of existing “in the beginning” (*en archē*). As Richard Hays points out, “The opening words of John’s Gospel echo the first words of Israel’s scripture: ‘In the beginning . . .’ Although the echo consists of only two words (*en archē*), its volume is amplified by the placement of these words at the outset of the narrative, corresponding to their placement as the opening words of Genesis.”³ This is not the only allusion to Genesis 1 in the prologue, since both passages go on immediately to talk about creation and light (Gen. 1:1, 3–5; John 1:3–5, 9). As James Dunn notes, John’s statement that “the Logos was (not ‘came to be’) in the beginning” means that “we have moved beyond any thought of the Logos as created, even the first created being,” that one might find in earlier Jewish texts about Wisdom, for example.⁴

According to John, *everything* that came into existence—the world itself—did so through the Logos (John 1:3, 10). Verse 3 is emphatic: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being” (1:3 NASB). John states the point positively (“all things came into being through Him”) and then negatively (“and apart from Him not even one thing came into being”), thereby making clear that his statement is to be taken in the most comprehensive way possible.

Notice how these two statements—that the Logos “was in the beginning” (John 1:1b, 2) and that everything that has come into being without exception did so through the Logos (1:3)—fit together. When taken together, they clearly put the Logos on the uncreated side of the divide between the uncreated (God, the Creator) and the created (creation, the world). These statements affirming the Word’s existence before creation and his involvement in bringing about the existence of all creation reveal him to be eternal and uncreated—two essential attributes of God.

At this point John’s teaching conflicts especially with the Christology of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who view the Logos as the preexistent but created archangel Michael who later became Jesus. It should be noted that Bart Ehrman, who argues that Paul viewed Christ as a preexistent but created angel, agrees that John did not accept that view. Ehrman concludes that John held that the Logos was eternal and was in some sense God.⁵

¹ Edited excerpt from *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense* (Kregel, 2024), 227–30.

² E.g., Morris, *Gospel according to John*, 65–66; Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:369.

³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 308.

⁴ Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 240.

⁵ Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 274–79.

To circumvent the clear teaching of John 1:1–3 that the Logos was uncreated, Jehovah’s Witnesses try to limit the creative work of the Logos in that passage to the physical world. They understand John’s opening words, “In the beginning” (1:1, 2), to refer to the beginning of the physical world only, with the spiritual world of angelic beings (including the Logos) having been created prior to that “beginning.”⁶ One serious problem with this interpretation is that verse 3 is as explicitly comprehensive as the language could be. *Everything* that has “come into being” did so through the Logos; *nothing* “came into being” that did not do so through him.

It is true that Genesis 1 does not give an explicit account of the creation of the angels or other spiritual beings populating the spiritual or supernatural realm. However, both Jews and Christians during the New Testament era definitely included all such spiritual beings in the category of “all things” that God had created (e.g., Ps. 148:2–6; 2 *Baruch* 21:6; *Jub.* 2:2; 2 *Enoch* 29:3; Col. 1:16). Greg Stafford, a former Jehovah’s Witness defending their Christology, assumes that the angels who shouted with joy when God established the earth (Job 38:4–7) must have been created before the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1, and concludes that Christ was also created before that beginning.⁷ However, Job 38:7 entails only that the angels (“sons of God”) were present when God completed forming and establishing the earth; it does not indicate or imply that the angels existed before the initial creation of the physical universe.

When we compare John 1:3 to Colossians 1:16, we find confirmation that the “all things” created through the Logos in John include all spiritual or heavenly beings (translating literally):

All things [*panta*] came into being through him [*di’ autou*]. (John 1:3a)
Because in him were created all things [*ta panta*], in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things [*ta panta*] were created through him [*di’ autou*] and for him. (Col. 1:16)

Stafford admits that Colossians 1:16 encompasses the creation of the “invisible” beings (the angels) through the Son, but then claims that “Paul does not here directly refer to the ‘beginning’ of Genesis 1:1.”⁸ This claim is defensible only in the narrowest, most pedantic sense that Paul does not actually use the word “beginning” in Colossians 1:16. That Paul’s language derives from the creation account in Genesis 1 is quite plain (again translating literally):

In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth [*ton ouranon kai tēn gēn*]. . . . And God saw all things [*ta panta*] that he had made. (Gen. 1:1, 31 LXX)
Because in him were created all things [*ta panta*], in the heavens and on the earth [*en tois ouranois kai epi tēs gēs*]. (Col. 1:16)

We have solid reasons, then, to understand John 1:1–3 to mean that the Logos existed eternally and is uncreated.

⁶ For a defense of this position, see Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 3rd ed., 370–77. Ironically, Stafford was not a Jehovah’s Witness when he published this third edition. Yet it remains the most sophisticated defense of the Watchtower doctrine.

⁷ Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 373, see also 189 n. 102, 222, 302, 338, 384.

⁸ Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 384.