

Genesis 1 and John 1

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Sponsored by Biblealearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Logos, Creation, Genesis, Intertextuality, Light, Darkness, Midrash, Exegesis

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. David Turner examines the theological intertextuality between Genesis 1 and the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18). He surveys key parallel concepts such as "in the beginning," "the Word" (God's speech), "the act of creation," "life," and the dualism of "light and darkness". By analyzing these themes in their Old Testament, Second Temple, and New Testament contexts, Dr. Turner highlights how the Johannine prologue functions as an implicit midrash on Genesis 1 and Exodus 33–34. Ultimately, he argues that John's Gospel presents Jesus as the preexistent Logos who is the divine agent of both the original creation and the new creation's spiritual renewal.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genesis 1 and John 1

- A. Completion of chapter-by-chapter studies and transition to Johannine biblical theology
- B. Main goal: exploring the intertextuality between John 1 and Genesis 1 and the doctrine of creation and recreation
- C. Theological exegesis vs. strictly historical exegesis
 - 1. Challenge of theological exegesis to strictly historical and neutral-value exegesis
 - 2. Influenced by the New Testament's authoritative use of Old Testament scriptures
- D. Genre and stylistic distinctiveness of John's Gospel
 - 1. Stylistically simple but symbolically dense (Luke Timothy Johnson)
 - 2. Defined as a "spiritual" or symbol-laden Gospel (Clement of Alexandria, Don Carson)
- E. Critique of Concordism
 - 1. Definition of Concordism (John Walton): Reading modern scientific theories back into ancient texts
 - 2. Double problem: Downplays the historicity of scripture and underestimates the ephemeral nature of current scientific theories
- F. Canonical and Jewish Milieu of the Prologue
 - 1. Prologue is intended to be read as a canonical whole with the fourth Gospel
 - 2. Jewish and biblical milieu vs. Gnostic and philosophical milieu

3. Primary background texts: Genesis 1 and Exodus 33 and 34
4. Prologue as an implicit midrash
5. Plausible literary intermediaries: Jewish wisdom texts (Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Wisdom 7-10, Baruch 3-4, Philo's logos, Targumic memra)

II. Survey of Key Intertextual Issues

A. "In the Beginning" (En Arche / Bereshit)

1. Old Testament occurrences and nuances of reshit (51 times)
 - a. Nuances: beginnings of kingdoms, years, reigns, sin, strife, wisdom, knowledge, firstborn vigor, firstfruits, first of harvest (Israel), choice parts
 - b. Primeval beginning of the world: Genesis 1:1 and Proverbs 8:22 as the only indisputable Old Testament uses
2. New Testament occurrences and nuances of arche (55 times)
 - a. Hierarchical or angelic authorities (Paul, e.g., Romans 8:38, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1, Titus 3:1)
 - b. Temporal beginning of actions or states (Mark 1:1, Luke 1:2, John 8:25, John 15:27)
 - c. Creation of humanity (ap' arches, Matthew 19:4)
 - d. Beginning of the world / creation (ap' arches kosmou in Matthew 24:21; ap' arches ktiseos in 2 Peter 3:4)
 - e. The devil as a murderer (ap' arches, John 8:44)
 - f. Christological foundations (Hebrews 1:10 quoting Psalm 102:25; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 3:14)

B. The Word and God's Speech (Ho Logos)

1. Creation by word in Genesis 1
 - a. Formulaic divine speech acts ("God said, let there be" / kai eipen ho theos genetheto / vayomer elohim yehi)
 - b. God's speech in naming and blessing creatures
 - c. Human speech acts in naming (Adam naming animals and woman)
2. God's Word in the rest of the Old Testament
 - a. Synonymous parallel agents of creation (Psalm 33:6, 9)
 - b. Prophetic revelation and deliverance (debar adonai in Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Psalm 107:20)
 - c. Sovereign agent of God's purpose (Isaiah 55:10-11)
 - d. Overlap with Torah (law) and Hokmah (wisdom, Proverbs 3:19, 8:22-31)
3. Logos in the New Testament and the Fourth Gospel
 - a. Nuances of human/divine communication
 - b. John's specific use of logos for the preexistent Jesus (John 1:1, 1 John 1:1, Revelation 19:13, Hebrews 4:12)
 - c. Jesus as the ultimate personification of God's self-expression who reveals/explains the Father (John 1:18, John 14:9)
 - d. Preexistence and relationship to historical figures (Moses, Abraham, Thomas's confession)

C. The Act of Creation (Bara / Asah / Ginomai)

1. Old Testament terminology

- a. Bara (to create, 54 times): Original creation and future/personal transformation (Psalm 51:7, Isaiah 4:5, 41:20, 65:17-18)
- b. Asah (to make, >2500 times): Ongoing providential and creative work following divine speech (Genesis 1:7, 11, etc.)
- c. Sequence of speech leading to existence (Yehi or / Vayehi or)

2. New Testament terminology

- a. Poieo (common translation of asah and bara in the Septuagint)
- b. Ktidzo (salvation as new creation in Galatians 6:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians, Colossians; notably absent in Johannine writings)
- c. Ginomai (uniquely used in John 1:3 and 1:10 to describe the creative act, echoing haya and ginomai in the creation account)

D. The Word and Life (Zoe / Nephesh Heya)

1. Old Testament background

- a. Creation of living creatures (nephesh heya / psukon zoson in Genesis 1)
- b. God breathing the breath of life into humans (Genesis 2:7)
- c. Qualitative and covenantal life (Deuteronomy 8:3, 30:6, 30:20, 32:47)
- d. God as the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9)

2. New Testament development

- a. Simple physical life (psuche or bios)
- b. Transcendent, eternal life in Christ (zoe)
- c. Present experience of eternal life as being raised from the dead (John 5:21, 24-25)
- d. Jesus' "I Am" life statements (Bread of Life, Resurrection and Life, Way/Truth/Life)
- e. The juxtaposition of life and light (John 1:4, 8:12, 1 John 1:1-7)

E. Light and Darkness (Phos / Skotos)

1. Old Testament and Genesis 1 background

- a. Day one creation of light replacing primeval darkness (Genesis 1:2-5)
- b. Light as a symbol of God's sustaining care (Job 38:19, Psalm 74:16-17, 104:2)
- b. God giving light to Israel (Exodus 10:23, 13:21)
- d. Light as a metaphor for understanding, providence, and moral goodness vs. evil

2. New Testament and Johannine development

- a. Metaphorical usage in the Synoptics and epistles
- b. Punctuation debate of ho gegonen in John 1:3-4
 - i. Associated with creation ("without him nothing was made that has been made")
 - ii. Associated with incarnation ("what happened in him was life")
- c. Jesus as the incarnation of light in a fallen world of darkness
- d. Ethical dualism of light and darkness (John 3:19-21, 8:12)

III. Synthesis: A Johannine Biblical Theology of Creation

A. The Logos and Original Creation

- 1. Preexistent Word as the direct, personal creator
- 2. Rejection of the Word as an inferior deity or creator separate from the Father and Spirit

B. The Logos and the Renewal of Creation

1. The Word as both asarchos (apart from flesh) creator and ensarchos (incarnate) revealer
2. Johannine theology of new creation/renewal of creation
3. Implicit narrative presentation of new creation (unlike Paul's explicit epistolary prose)
4. Creation overtones and scholarly views
 - a. Seven-day structure in John 1:19ff mimicking Genesis 1
 - b. Paradise motif (Mary Magdalene mistaking Jesus for the gardener in the garden tomb, John 20)
 - c. Kostenberger and Brown on creation renewal in the Book of Signs, Passion Narrative, and Resurrection
 - d. Significant intertextual echo: Jesus breathing on the disciples in John 20:22 echoing Genesis 2:7

IV. Conclusion on Genesis 1 and John 1

- A.** Solid portrayal of the Word as the creator of everything
- B.** The role of John 1 is not to provide arguments for scientific theories or creation timelines (anti-concordist)
- C.** Establishing the primeval setting to understand the entire fourth Gospel
- D.** Trajectory of creation theology: Genesis 1-2 → Isaiah 65-66 → John 1 → 2 Peter 3 → Revelation 21-22
- E.** Jesus as the agent of both the original creation and the new, renewed creation