





# "in the beginning"

*A Comparison of  
Genesis 1 and John 1*

**Upper right:**  
Akkadian cylinder  
seal with impres-  
sion depicts the  
creation of veg-  
etation; from the  
Agade period  
(2350-2200 B.C.).

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO DAVID  
ROGERS/LOUVRE/PARIS (268/28)

**Right:** Hittite  
relief depicting  
the tree of life  
between two  
half man/half bull  
creatures. From  
Carchemish; 10th  
cent. B.C.



**C**HRISTIANS often have difficulty understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Even preachers sometimes unintentionally relegate the Old to a lesser status than the New by preaching almost exclusively from the latter. Both Testaments comprise God’s full revelation. Both are needed for understanding divine truth: the Old is foundational—the New, fulfillment. This article examines that relationship by comparing and contrasting Genesis 1 and John 1.

**From the Book of Genesis**

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It provides the theological foundation on which the great themes and doctrines of the Bible are built. Chapter 1 is the account of creation.

Genesis 1:1 says: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is not the theological explanation of God we might expect. It is a simple, clear, concise statement of God’s existence in eternity. It says God is eternal. He was already there in the beginning. He brought all things into existence.

The Hebrew word for “created” is *bara* (בָּרָא). Scripture uses it exclusively for the activity of God. *Bara* in the context of Genesis communicates the idea of creation from nothing.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning the eternal God brought the material universe into existence from material that had never before existed. The expression “heavens and earth” represents the totality of creation. In the beginning the eternal God created every thing that exists—from the most simple to the most complex.<sup>2</sup>

After the broader statements of verses 1-2, Genesis begins a systematic account of creation in verse 3. One of the striking details of that account is God spoke everything into existence. Some form of “God

said” is in the account of each day of creation, appearing twice in relation to the third day and four times in the account of day six. This is especially significant in relation to John’s use in his opening verse of the Greek word for “Word”: *Logos*. His using this word also impresses in our minds a greater awareness of the mighty power of God.

Two additional features of particular interest in relationship to John 1 are “light” and “life.” On day one of creation, “God said, ‘let there be light.’” The sun and moon and stars, bodies we think of as light sources, are not mentioned until the fourth day. People have offered differing interpretations of what this light is. Two factors influence our understanding. One, this light precedes the mention of “lights” in verse 14, and even after the need for sun, moon, and stars has ended, light continues (Rev. 22:5). My personal conviction is that the light source of Genesis 1:3, which shines into the darkness of verse 2, is the glory of God Himself.<sup>3</sup>

A final aspect of physical creation to mention is the creation of life. Beginning in verse 20 through the end of the chapter, we find a systematic account of the creation of all living things.<sup>4</sup> The crowning achievement recorded in Genesis 1:26-31 is man. God created man in His image.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond those aspects of creation, Genesis also records the beginning of human history, particularly redemptive history. The Hebrew word “beginning” imparts the idea of “the starting point of a period of time.” By implication it also anticipates a point in the future when this period of time will be consummated or completed.<sup>6</sup> At its outset, Genesis prepares us for God’s redemptive message throughout the rest of Scripture, the ultimate consummation of human history, and the fulfillment of God’s divine plan of redemption explained more completely in the New Testament.

**LESSON REFERENCE**  
BSFL: Genesis 1; John 1





## From the Gospel of John

That brings us to the Fourth Gospel where we are instinctively drawn to the phrase “In the beginning” (1:1). John intentionally used this phrase to call our attention to Genesis 1. John immediately began the process of identifying the God of the Old Testament, the God of the beginning, with the Word.

John used the Greek term *Logos*. Its meaning would have been familiar to both Hebrew and Greek readers.<sup>7</sup> And, while John relied to some extent on both Hebrew and Greek understanding, he used the term in a distinct way to identify the second Person of the Trinity. It conveys the idea of both revelation and action. It also calls attention to the concept of God speaking creation into existence.

First, John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word.” Just as Genesis 1:1 emphasized the eternal existence of God, John stressed the eternal existence of the Word. In the beginning the “Word” already existed. The Word was not a part of what was being created. This affirms an important theological truth about Jesus, whom John identified as the Word first in 1:14. Jesus was not a created being. Genesis 1:1 clearly showed a distinction between God and creation. Likewise, John 1:1 shows a distinction between the Word and creation.

The second statement is “the Word was with God.” A more literal translation would be “the Word was towards God.” John was referring to the relationship of the Word to God. No opposition exists between the Word and God. They are in complete harmony and fellowship. The inference is the Word, while distinct, is not separate from God.

The final statement is the



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**Left: This part of the Babylonian creation epic describes the god Anshar calling the gods together for a banquet, to celebrate Marduk's appointment as champion of the gods following his defeat of Tiamat, primeval Chaos.**

pinnacle of what John said about the Word. “The Word was God.” John communicated with precision and clarity. The Word was not a god; the Word was not an emanation from God; the Word was, in fact, very God. John was emphatic—Jesus who is the Word become flesh is, in fact, the God of the beginning.

John was monotheistic in his understanding of God. He did not see a contradiction between monotheism and his affirmation concerning the Word. Later in his Gospel, John further developed the Trinitarian formula and the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In contrast to what John wrote concerning the concept of the Trinity, we do not find a full blown Trinitarian concept of God in Genesis. It is, however, suggested in several ways. The first suggestion comes through the use of the Hebrew word *Elohim* as the name for God in Genesis 1:1. *Elohim* is actually plural. However, its use is that of a plural word with a singular meaning.<sup>8</sup> The second suggestion of the Trinity comes through the introduction of the Spirit of God in verse 2. And the final hint comes in the use of the plural pronouns “Us” and “our” in connection with the creation of man (1:26).

Following His statements concerning the relationship of the Word and God, John gave a short discourse of the relationship of the Word and creation (v. 3). The Word is the agent of creation. John did

not include a systematic account of creation as in Genesis 1, but he stated unequivocally nothing that exists came into being apart from the Word. He is the Creator.

John again called attention to Genesis 1 with his use of the concepts of light and life (John 1:4,5,9). Jesus, the Word become flesh, was not only the source of all life in the world through creation, but also He is the true source of spiritual life. He is the true Light, the glory of God in the world to bring salvation and deliverance.

The remainder of John 1 expands on the idea of God's entry into the world through the Word—the Word, Jesus Christ, who is God, who brought all creation into existence, who is the true Light of the world. The Word became flesh. As in the beginning, the glory of God again broke into the darkness, the darkness of a world marred by sin.

The comparison of these two chapters reveals the divine unity of the Bible. The gospel of Jesus Christ, revealed through John's Gospel, clearly originated “In the beginning” of Genesis 1:1. **B**

1. The Latin term used to refer to creation from nothing is *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing” God created. See Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 441-443.

2. For a more detailed discussion of Genesis 1:1-2, see Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis in The New American Commentary*, vol. 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 136-144.

3. *Ibid.*, 145. For a different interpretation of “light” in verse 3 see John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis-Numbers in The Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 26.

4. The account of creation in Genesis 1 refutes atheism, macroevolution, pantheism, materialism, and fatalism. See Kenneth O. Gangel and Stephen J. Bramer, *Genesis in Holman Old Testament Commentary*, Max Anders, gen. ed., vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 16.

5. For more in-depth discussion of man in the image of God, see Matthews, 164-172.

6. Sailhamer, 20.

7. For a more detailed discussion of the etymology of *Logos*, see Jimmy Dukes, “John's Use of *Logos*” in *Biblical Illustrator* 29:1 (Fall 2002): 17. Also Leon Morris *The Gospel According to John in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 115-126.

8. For further explanation of divine plurality in Genesis, see Matthews, 162-163.

R. D. Fowler is pastor, Bethel Baptist Church, Lincoln, Nebraska.



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