

PROVERBS 8:22—GOD’S WISDOM: AN ACQUIRED ATTRIBUTE OR GOD’S CREATED SON? THE “FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION”

(REVELATION 3:14—COLOSSIANS 1:15)

In this, and preceding centuries, much controversy has surrounded the subject of the identification of the Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22 ff. Is this the Son of God speaking to us, or do we have just a personification of an attribute of the Creator, Jehovah, being described? We will consider the verses in question as to their meaning and the Biblical and historical understanding of them.

What has caused some of the controversy and misunderstanding mentioned above? An examination of various renderings and expositions of these verses will give us some insight into the question. In *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966), the reading is: “Yahweh created me when his purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of his works.” The footnote to this relates:

Thus [“created me”] the Greek, Syr[iac], Targ[ums], c[on]f[er]Si [Ecclesiasticus, one of the books of the Apocrypha] 1:4,9; 24:8,9, translate the Hebrew verb (*qanani*). The translation ‘acquired me’ or ‘possessed me’ (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) was adopted by St Jerome ([Latin] Vulg[ate].) doubtless with an eye to the heretic Arius who maintained that the Word (=Wisdom) was a created being.

It is most significant that this Roman Catholic translation should reject the rendering of the *Latin Vulgate* (which for hundreds of years was the official Bible version of the Roman Catholic Church) of the Hebrew *qanah* as “possessed me,” and adopt the meaning “created me.” This is in keeping with the understanding of Arius and others before and after him, that the Word of God teaches the Son of God is “the Word (=Wisdom)” who, is indeed, “a created being.”

This is not the only Roman Catholic translation to produce such a deviation from the *Vulgate*. In the *New American Bible* (1971 and 1991), the verse is rendered: “The LORD begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago;” The footnote to this reads:

8, 22-31: Wisdom is of divine origin. It is here represented as a being which existed before all things (22-26) and concurred with God when he planned and executed the creation of the universe, adored it with beauty and variety, and established its wonderful order (27-30). Here that plurality of divine Persons is foreshadowed which was afterward to be fully revealed when Wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ became incarnate.

We agree, two (not three) divine *Persons*, the Father, Jehovah, and the Son, the future Jesus Christ, are mentioned. We find here two divine *Persons*, not, one Divine One, the Father, and one attribute—the quality of wisdom.

In *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), we find our verse rendered: “Yahweh created me, first-fruits of his fashioning, before the oldest of his works.” The footnote to this is the same as in *The Jerusalem Bible* quoted above, with this additional information:

The expression ‘first-fruits of his fashioning’ (lit. ‘first-fruits of his way’ or ‘of his ways’ according to the versions) is linked to the title ‘first born of every creature’ given to Christ by Paul, Col 1:15 and the title ‘principle of God’s creation’, Rv 3:14.

This wording also shows Wisdom to be a creation of the Almighty and the footnote identifies Wisdom to be the Son. Of course, when the Son of God is called the “first born of every creature” (Colossians 1:15) by Paul, Christ is included in the class of those who experienced a calling into life by the Creator, a beginning of existence, not someone who had existed from all eternity.

One who took the opposite view, contradicting his co-religionists concerning the Wisdom of Proverbs 8, was Bruce Vawter, C.M., a Roman Catholic commentator. He begins his article with these statements of his aims:

WHAT I propose to argue in this paper is (1) that both Job 28 and Proverbs 8 speak of a “wisdom” which is neither God’s Creation nor his natural attribute but rather a possession which he (unlike man) has acquired. Following on this position it will be further argued (2) that the *q̄n̄n̄* of Proverbs 8:22, frequently translated “created me” (or the like), has to do instead with a divine acquisition of wisdom that then played a part in creation. Substantive to this argument will be the contention that in no single instance in the OT or in relevant cognate literatures are we compelled by the evidence to ascribe to the verb *q̄n̄* in any of its forms the sense “create.” Finally, it will remain (3) to suggest how and to what effect according to Prov 8:22 Yahweh took possession of wisdom as “the first of his way(s).”¹

We focus our attention on Vawter’s attempt to support his views on the purpose of Jehovah taking possession of wisdom.

If, then, according to Prov 8:22 Yahweh once took possession of wisdom before he began to create, what role did wisdom play in this subsequent creation: in what sense is wisdom called *r̄m̄ ’šît darkô*? [“first of His way(s)”]...The inherent meaning of *r̄m̄ ’šît*, that which makes it so appropriate to mean “first fruits” in a cultic acceptance, is that which

¹ “PROV 8:22 WISDOM AND CREATION”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Philadelphia, Vol. 99/2, 1980, pp.205-16.

marks it as the logical or chronological prior, qualitatively the most important or best of a series that will presumably follow....I say merely that the Hebrew *rml'sit* seems to cover about the same semantic spread as the Latin *principium* ["a beginning," "origin"]; and there is no reason it should not, since the words seem to correspond with a common mode of human thought. If so, and then if the *qenâ* of Prov 8:22 really meant something like "created" or "begot," the *rml'sit* of this verse would have to be a "first fruits" or "firstborn" or the like....I do not propose to speculate further about the provenance of this wisdom concept or about its assimilation to the other wisdom concepts of Israel, and certainly not about its use (or misuse) in the later Jewish quasi-deification of a pre-existent wisdom = Torah or the Christology of Col 1:15-20....In sum, we are here presented with the concept of a pre-existent wisdom or at least of a wisdom not of the ordinary created order, in Proverbs 8 personified and in Job 28 not obviously so, in Proverbs 8 utilized in creation and in Job 28 not obviously so; in either case a wisdom which is not a native attribute of God but a reality accessible to him alone and acquired by him.²

Are we to understand, then, that the God Most High came in into possession of a certain wisdom, which He previously did not have? In addition, did Jehovah at some future times, acquire more types of wisdom previously "not a native attribute of God?" Such thoughts are completely out of harmony with the Biblical concept of an all-knowing all-wise Creator. —Job 3:19; 36:4; Isaiah 40:14; Jeremiah 10:12.

It is of more than casual interest that such theses proffered by Vawter did not impress the translators of the next English Roman Catholic translation of the Sacred Scriptures, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), as worthy of acceptance!

On another side of consideration of this subject, that of a Protestant investigator, Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, we find these statements:

The passage in the Old Testament to which Jehovah's Witnesses (and Arians of every age) appeal most frequently is Proverbs 8: 22ff³⁰ The translation usually is the following, or something similar to: "Jehovah made me [that is, Wisdom, interpreted as the Son] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." This rendering understands the verb *h'n*q* to be used here with the meaning "to create." The true translation of this passage, however, according to a learned study by the

² *ibid.* pp. 214-5

eminent Semitic scholar, C. F. Burney, must be, “The LORD begat me as the beginning of his way...”³⁰ The context favors this rendering, for the growth of the embryo is described in the following verse (verse 23) where the verb appears, as a footnote in Kittel's Hebrew Bible suggests, to be from the root $\text{Eb}^{\wedge}\text{m}^{\text{`}}$ “knit together,” as in Job 10: 11 and Psalm 139: 13), and the birth of Wisdom is described in the two following verses (24 and 25). Thus, in context, the verb $\text{hn}^{\text{`}}\text{q}^{\text{`}}$ in verse 22 appears with certainty to mean “got” or “begot”.... In any case, however, irrespective of the meaning of the Hebrew verb in Pro. 8: 22, it is clearly an instance of strabismic [“cross eyed”, “squinted”, i.e. “distorted”] exegesis, if one may coin the phrase, to abandon the consistent New Testament representation of Jesus Christ as uncreated and to seize upon a disputed interpretation of a verse in the Old Testament as the only satisfactory description of him. The proper methodology, of course, is to begin with the New Testament, and then to search in the Old Testament for foregleams, types, and prophecies which found their fulfillment in him....³⁰ “In the proverbs of wisdom he [the Son] speaks of himself as wisdom and calls attention to his being a creation of the eternal heavenly Father,” *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* (Brooklyn, 1951), p. 37. ³¹ C.F. Burney, “Christ as the ARCH [ARCHE, “beginning”] OF Creation,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXVII (1926), 160-177.³

Dr. Metzger did not inform his readers of the rendering from the *Moffatt* translation of our subject verse, found in the Watchtower publication in the same paragraph he quoted: “The Eternal formed me first of his creation, first of all his works in days of old.” In the same paragraph, citation is made of the Smith and Goodspeed “AT”, as well as the J.B. Rotherham renditions of the verse, which are respectively: “The LORD formed me as the first of his works, The beginning of his deeds of old”; “Yahweh had constituted me the beginning of his way, Before his works At the commencement of that time.”

C.F. Burney, in his article, stated:

[T]he verb kana [Burney's spelling] always seems to possess the sense ‘get, acquire’, never the sense ‘possess, own’ simply, apart from the idea of possessing something which *has been acquired* in one way or another. This clearly appears from examination of the usages of the verb in Hebrew, and through comparison of the cognate languages...To this evidence for

³ “Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ”, *Theology Today*, Vol.10, April, 1953, p. 80, reprinted as a pamphlet in 1954.

Hebrew usage of the verb *hmq* it is important for our purpose to add the proper name *hñ`q`l=ã# Elk'lana*, which can hardly mean anything else than '(He whom) God has begotten *or* created'....Whether *kana* here has the sense 'beget' or 'create' is ambiguous....In face of this evidence we must surely conclude that the ground-meaning of *kana* is that of *acquiring* something not previously possessed, (emphasis added) which may be done by *buying* or *making* it, in the case of a child by *begetting* it, in the case of wisdom by *accumulating* it through mental application.⁴

Surely, to contend that Almighty God had to acquire wisdom by mental application, is at variance with the data given to us about Him in His Word.

Jehovah acquired that which He *did not previously possess*, His Son, Wisdom, by begetting or creating him, giving him life. There is no instance in Scripture in which that which is noted as being 'begotten,' 'firstborn of,' 'produced' or 'created,' did not have a beginning of existence!

Dr. Metzger claimed that there is "consistent New Testament representation of Jesus Christ as uncreated." Yet, he offered no examples of such! We will offer instances of statements by Christ himself, and the writings of the apostles Paul and John, confirming that the Son of God did have a beginning of existence.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on his should not perish, but have eternal life."—*American Standard Version*.

At John 6:57, the Lord Jesus Christ said: "As the living Father sent Me, and *I live because of the Father*, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me." (italics added). (*NASV*) An uncreated does not live because of anyone else, the Son does.

The words of Christ at John 10:17-18 are: "The Father loves me because I lay down my life, to receive^[5] it back again. No one takes it away from me; I am laying it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to receive it back again; this charge I have received from my Father."—*Revised English Bible*.⁶

⁴ This reviewer sent a 31-page critique of Dr. Metzger's article to him on October 16, 1992. In a letter from Dr. Metzger dated October 29, 1992, he stated: "I wish to acknowledge the arrival of the extensive comments which you drew up on my pamphlet about "Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ." As it happens I am about to depart on a speaking tour, and consequently there is no time for me to make what would be an equally extensive response to your material." As of June 17, 2002, this reviewer has had no further communication from Dr. Metzger.

⁵ That "receive" (passive voice) is the correct translation of the Greek *lambaVnw* and the forms thereof (*labi'n* being the form used here), see: Luke 6:34; John 14:17; Acts 3:3-4; 26:18; Hebrews 10:26 and *Thayer's Lexicon*, 371. The foregoing show that the *Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978), is in error, when on page 245, *labi'n* is identified as being only in the active voice.

⁶ See also: Andrews Norton, *A Translation of the Gospels*; Andy Gaus, *The Unvarnished New Testament*; Rotherham; *Young's Concise Commentary*; William Barclay, *The New Testament*; *The Twentieth Century New Testament*; *The Bible in Today's English Version* (*Good News Bible*); *New English Bible*; Richard Francis Weymouth, *The New Testament in Modern Speech*; *New World Translation*.

In his saying: “receive it back again,” the Son of God is disclosing that he had *received* his life at some previous time (Micah 5:2) and that he would *receive it once again* at his resurrection.

Colossians 1:15, informs: “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.” (*NASV*) We reiterate, that which noted as being ‘first-born’ had a beginning of existence.

Revelation 3:14 quotes Jesus as declaring: “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.’ ” (*Revised Standard Version*) Every occurrence of the phrase ‘the beginning of the’ (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς ἀρχῆς, arche, “beginning” with the genitive case) signifies, ‘the start of,’ ‘the commencement of,’ ‘the first of,’ not, ‘the originator of’ nor ‘beginner of.’ On this see: Matthew 24:8; Mark 1:1; John 2:11; Philippians 4:14 and in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, Genesis 10:10; 49:3; Deuteronomy 21:17; Hosea 1:2 (Osee) 1:2.

To add to this, we call attention to the words of Origin: “we believe nothing to be uncreated but the Father.”⁷

Tertullian wrote:

Because God is in like manner a Father, and He is also a Judge; but He has not always been Father and Judge, merely on the ground of His having always been God. For He could not have been the Father previous to the Son, nor a Judge previous to sin. There was, however, a time when neither sin existed with Him, nor the Son; the former of which was to constitute the Lord a Judge, and the latter a Father.⁸

To write, as Dr. Metzger did: “In any case, however, irrespective of the meaning of the Hebrew verb in Pro. 8: 22...to abandon the consistent New Testament representation of Jesus Christ as uncreated...”, is of no scholarly weight. We remind all, that Dr. Metzger offered no evidence from the Christian Greek Scriptures (*Matthew* to *Revelation*) for his claim. We affirm that the words used in all of the Bible are those which the Creator, Jehovah, wished to be used, and the meaning of those words—along with other scriptures on the same subject—must be taken into consideration when attempting to ascertain the meaning of His Word.

⁷ *Commentary on John*, Book II, chapter 6; *THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS*, (hereinafter, *ANF*), Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), Vol. X (10), p. 8. The *ANF* was originally published in 1867, since then it has had many reprintings, the contents have been rearranged during such, therefore, we include the month and year of the edition from which we quote.

⁸ *Against Hermogenes*, chapter III; *ANF*, Vol. III, August, 1980, p. 478.

Using this method, His truth can be understood. However, neither source of knowledge must be ignored or be relegated to a relatively lower degree of importance.

The understanding of our subject before and during the fourth century C.E., is described by Martin Werner, D.D., Professor of systematic theology, history of doctrine and history of philosophy, University of Bern, Switzerland:

With the Angel-Christology Arianism was also given certain other theses against which the Church in its *new* and antagonistic theology [the Trinity doctrine] sharply contended. These theses in previous expositions of doctrinal history have been set forth in a completely unjustified manner exclusively as the doctrine of Arius. These theses concerned here are, namely that the Logos [the Word] was a creature (ktisma) and God alone was to be reckoned as *agenetos*; [“ungenerated”] that he, [the Logos-Christ] [ex ouk onton, “from not being”] was created before Time, and that it can thus be said: *en ptoe, hote ouk en, kai ouk en prin genetai*; [“at sometime, he was not, and he did not exist before he came to be”] that the Son-Logos is, accordingly, in relation to the being of God, to be defined as *allotrios* [“alien to”] and *anomois* [“unlike”]. Col. i,15 was naturally taken as scriptural evidenced for the creatureliness of Christ, but the crucial Old Testament passage of Pro. viii, 22 ff., which was so highly valued by tradition, was also utilized. According to this *old* Post-Apostolic tradition, the two concepts of ‘create’ and ‘beget’, which were used here in juxtaposition, were understood as synonyms in the sense of ‘create’...Arius...secured a whole series of proof-texts against the thesis of the substantial identity of the Son with the Father, which was maintained by the Athanasian *neo-orthodoxy*...The Arians, truly conscious of their unity the *old tradition of the Church* did not fail in establishing the unscriptural nature of the *new Nicene formula* (emphases added) of the *homoousia* [“same substance”] of the Son and his ‘generation’ from the *ousia* [“substance”] of the Father.⁹

From the *Latin Vulgate* the rendering “possessed me” found its way into the *King James Version* and other English Bible translations. What is the thought of this verse inherent in the Hebrew and Greek Septuagint? A study of the Hebrew *qanah* will aid us in our quest for God’s truth. A lexical definition will be illuminating; note:

[G]et, acquire...a. of God as originating, creating...Gn 14^{19, 22} Dt 32⁶
(Isr.), Y[Ps] 139¹³...Pr 8²² (hmbh) q.v.¹⁰

⁹ *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, London: ADAM & CHARLES BLACK, 1957, pp.155-7.

¹⁰ *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, pp. 888-9.

A commentary says:

22. Read, ‘The LORD formed me as the beginning of his creation’:
cp. Col 1¹⁵ Rev 3¹⁴.¹¹

How is qanah used in Scripture? A brief study discloses the following:

Genesis 4:1: “And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, “I have gotten [*qanah*] a man with the help of Jehovah.”—*ASV*.

Genesis 14:19: “[A]nd he [Melchizedek] blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator [*qanah*, margin, “or, Possessor”] of heaven and earth.”—*NIV*.

Genesis 14:22: “But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD God Most High, Creator [*qanah*] of heaven and earth.”—*NIV*.

Deuteronomy 32:6: “[I]s this the way you repay the LORD foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator [*qanah*], [“he-created you”—*The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, John R. Kohlenberger III] who made and formed you.”—*NIV*.

Joshua 24:32: “And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought [*qanah*] for a hundred pieces of silver.”—*NIV*.

2 Samuel 12:3: “[B]ut the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought [*qanah*].”—*NIV*.

Proverbs 1:5: “Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire [*qanah*] skill.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 4:5, 7: “Get [*qanah*] wisdom; get [*qanah*] insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.”; “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom and what-ever else you get, [*qanah*] get [*qanah*] insight.”—*NRSV*.

One common thought runs through these usages of qanah; the person or thing acquired came to be a possession of the parent, Creator or owner by being born, created or bought. Previous to these events the person or thing did not belong to the parent, Creator or buyer. This fact demonstrates the incorrectness of such statements as:

...the word qanah. This word is used frequently in Proverbs, never with the meaning “create,” but always “get” or “buy,” that is, get with money (Prov. 1:5; 4:5, 7; 8:22; 15:32; 16:16; 17:16; 18:15; 19:8;

¹¹ J.R. Dummelow, *THE ONE VOLUME BIBLE COMMENTARY* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1978, p. 382.

20:14; 23:23). This is also its consistent meaning in the some seventy instances in which it is used elsewhere in the Old Testament.^{12 13}

We will consider each of the cited scriptures in this quotation to determine if they “always” speak of acquiring something with money. The English words rendered from ‘*qanah*’, or forms thereof, will be italicized.

Proverbs 8:22: “The LORD *created* me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 15:32: “Those who ignore instruction despise themselves but those who heed admonition *gain* understanding.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 16:16: “How much better to *get* wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 17:16: “Why should fools have a price in hand to *buy* wisdom, when they have no mind to learn?”—*NASV*.

Proverbs 18:15: “An intelligent mind *acquires* knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 19:8: “To *get* wisdom is to love oneself; to keep understanding is to prosper.”—*NRSV*.

Proverbs 20:14: “Bad, bad,” says the *buyer*, then goes away and boasts.”—*NASV*.

Proverbs 23:23: “*Buy* truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction and understanding.”—*NRSV*.

Out of these 11 verses how many speak of buying wisdom, instruction, understanding or knowledge with money? Perhaps two. The rest speak of acquiring these qualities with no mention of money. How can one acquire these qualities without money? With study, prayer and a respectful attitude toward the Provider of the highest type of knowledge and wisdom, Jehovah God.

These 11 verses and the eight quoted previously, show that the meaning of *qanah* is not “always “get” or “buy,” that is with money.”

¹² Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *WHY YOU SHOULD BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989, 60.

¹³ A 56-page consideration of Mr. Bowman, Jr.'s book was sent him. As of June 17, 2002, after six years, no reply has been received from him, although he did mention it on a radio broadcast some weeks after it was sent.

Let us suppose that the meaning of *qanah* at Proverbs 8:22 is, ‘to buy with money’. When did Jehovah buy His wisdom? From whom did He buy it? At what “market” did Jehovah buy His wisdom? With what type of money did Jehovah buy His wisdom?

The most in-depth study of *qanah*—to this researcher’s knowledge—is that conducted by C. F. Burney, the results of which were reported in the article “Christ As the [ARCHE, “beginning”] Of Creation (Proverbs viii 22, Col. i 15-18, Rev. iii 14)”.¹⁴

We quote Burney once more, this time more extensively:

[T]he verb *hn*q** kana always seems to possess the sense ‘get, acquire’ never the sense ‘possess, own’ simply, apart from the idea of possessing something which has been acquired in one way or another...In face of this evidence we must surely conclude that the ground-meaning of kana is that of acquiring something not previously possessed, which may be done by buying or making it, in the case of a child by begetting it, in the case of wisdom [the personal mental attribute] by accumulating it through mental application...The idea of *creation* is closely connected with the idea of acquisition as being one form of it; whereas the idea of possession without acquisition stands sharply apart, and cannot, as we have seen, be substantiated for a single occurrence of the verb. We are justified, therefore, in concluding that kana cannot rightly be rendered ‘possessed me’, but must have the meaning ‘gat me’ in some sense still to be determined...We arrive, then at the following rendering for the verse as a whole:—The Lord begat me as the beginning of His ways, the antecedent of His words, of old¹⁵

Jehovah begat—gave life to—His Son, the future Lord Jesus Christ; He did not give life to, nor buy, His personal attribute of wisdom. His personal wisdom is something which Jehovah had from all eternity; He did not have to acquire it.

A Consideration of the Septuagint’s Rendering

Why is a consideration of the rendering in the Greek *Septuagint* of importance? It was the first real translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, finished circa the first century B.C.E. It was based on Hebrew manuscripts older than any we possess today. It was made by Jewish scholars with a knowledge of both Hebrew and Koine Greek.

¹⁴ *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. XXVII, (1926), pp. 160-77.

¹⁵ *ibid.* pp. 160-2-5, 8.

At Proverbs 8:22 this version reads literally: “Kuriōs ektise me archen ho odon auto” (word for word English translation: “Lord made me beginning of works of him.”) The English column is rendered: “The Lord made me the beginning of his ways.”¹⁶

Our attention is drawn to the words “ektise me” (“made me”). In *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*,¹⁷ ektise is identified as a form of the word ktivzo (*ktizo*).¹⁸ Some of the definitions given of *ktizo* of this work are: “to call into being, to create, ...to call into individual existence”. The second word from the *Septuagint*, “me,” has the same meaning as the English “me.”

The wording of the *Septuagint* shows that Wisdom was a creation of the Father, Jehovah. Also, that this creation was the beginning (first of) God’s creations, or works. In addition, this Greek expression can never rightly be used in an attempt to show that the Father ‘bought His wisdom with money.’

Gender Aspects

The fact that the Hebrew and Greek words for wisdom, at Proverbs 8:22, ‘chokmah’ and ‘sophia,’ are in the feminine gender has caused some to deny that they could be applied to the Son of God. Such “objections” have taken this type of turn:

Wisdom. Jehovah’s Witnesses constantly carp on the fact that Jesus Christ is called the wisdom of God (1 Co 1[:24, Yes it is a *fact!*] and that in Proverbs 8 wisdom is said to have been created by Jehovah; [Yes, *it is* so stated in Proverbs 8!] therefore, Christ is a created being. This bit of word juggling falls flat when one observes that the same wisdom is called by the *female* [sic] gender. (Pr 8:1-3; 9:1-4), hardly applicable to a male Messiah.¹⁹

This type of “reasoning” on the “female” [should be “feminine”] gender would cause one to understand that Solomon was a female because he called himself by a word in the feminine gender ‘*goheleth*’ (“congregator”, or, “preacher”), and that the holy spirit is a female because the Hebrew word for spirit, ‘*ruach*’ is also in the feminine gender.²⁰

The above quoted statement by Martin and Klann shows a less-than-adequate knowledge of Hebrew. Of course, when the Son of God was described in Proverbs 8, he was neither male nor female, he was a spirit; spirits have no gender; they are neuter.

¹⁶ *Septuagint Version Greek & English* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1974.

¹⁷ Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 128, 242 respectively.

¹⁹ Walter R. Martin and Norman H. Klann, *JEHOVAH OF THE WATCHTOWER* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishing, 1981, p. 172.

²⁰ Brown, Driver and Briggs lexicon, p. 875 under *ruach*, p. 924 under *ruach*.

Reflecting on the Greek and gender, let this be noted:

In Greek, gender belongs to the word and not necessarily to what is indicated by the word; whereas of course in English we keep the ideas of masculine, feminine, and inanimate things respectively, (English, by the way is the only great modern language to do so).²¹

Examples of this in the Greek text are: the words ‘beginning’, ‘rock-mass,’ are both applied to the Lord Jesus Christ and are in the feminine gender, that does not make him a female. (See: *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 53 on αρχη (arche, “a beginning”)—the use of η (the Greek letter “eta,” the long Greek “e”) the with rough breathing (Ϸ) as the article to be used with this word—shows it is in the feminine gender since η is the feminine, nominative case, singular number form of the Greek article. ‘Rock-mass’ from πετρα (petra) in the same lexicon on page 323, is also shown to be feminine by the same method, the word has the feminine gender ending. (In Greek, the article and noun must be the same (must agree) in gender, number and case.)

Ancient Testimonies

Among the early church writers we find these declarations concerning Proverbs 8 as referring to the Son of God:

Justin Martyr, (110-165 C.E.):

The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God begotten [John 1:18, *NWT*; *NEB*] of the Father or all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the glory, of the Begetter, will evidence to me, when he speaks by Solomon the following... The Lord made me the beginning of His ways for His works. From everlasting He established me in the beginning, before He had made the earth, and before He made the deeps, before the springs of the waters issued forth, before the fountains had been established. Before all the hills He begets me.²²

Tertullian, (145-220 C.E.):

The Son likewise acknowledges the Father, speaking in His own person under the name of Wisdom: The Lord formed Me as the beginning of His ways, with a view to His own works; before all the hills, did He beget me.²³

²¹ Alfred Marshall, *The RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, Ninth printing, 1976), p. xi.

²² *Dialogue With Trypho*, chapter LXI; *ANF*, Vol. I, November, 1981, pp. 227-8.

²³ *Against Praxeas*, chapter VII; *ANF*, Vol. III, August, 1980, p. 602.

Let Hermogenes then confess that the very Wisdom of God is declared to be born and created, for the especial reason that we should not suppose that there is any other being than God alone who is unbegotten and uncreated.²⁴

Cyprian, (200-258 C.E.):

That Christ is the Firstborn, and that He is the Wisdom of God by whom all things were made. In Solomon, in the Proverbs: “Lord established me in the beginning of His ways, unto His works: before the world He founded me. In the beginning, before He made the earth...the Lord begot me...Also Paul to Colossians [1:15]: “Who is the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature”...That He also is both the wisdom and the power of God, Paul proves in his first Epistle to the Corinthians [1:24]....Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”²⁵

Origen, (185-230-254 C.E.):

And therefore we have first to ascertain what the first begotten Son of God is, seeing He is called by many different names, according to the circumstances and views of individuals. For He is termed Wisdom according to the expression of Solomon: ‘The Lord created me—the beginning of His ways, and among His works, before He made any other thing He formed me before the ages. In the beginning, before He formed the earth, before He brought forth the fountains of water...He is styled First-born, as the apostle has declared: “is the first-born of every creature.” [Colossians 1:15] The first-born, however, is not by nature a different person from the Wisdom, but one and the same. Finally, the Apostle Paul says, that “Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God.”²⁶ (1 Corinthians 1:24).

For Wisdom says in Solomon “God created me the beginning of His ways, for His works,”...“Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee” [Ps. 2:7] this is spoken to Him by God, with whom all time is to-day, for there is no evening with God, as I consider, and there is no morning, nothing but time that stretches out, along with His [the Father’s] unbeginning and unseen life. The day is to-day with Him in which the Son was begotten and thus the beginning of His birth is

²⁴ *Against Hermogenes*, chapter XVIII; *ANF*, Vol. III, *ibid.*, p. 487

²⁵ *The Treatises of Cyprian*, Second Book, first testimony, § I; *ANF*; Vol. V, December, 1981, pp. 515-6.

²⁶ *De Principiis*, Book I, chapter II, § I; *ANF*, Vol. IV, April, 1982, p. 246.

not found, as neither is the day of it... We must not, however, pass over in silence that He [Christ] is of right the wisdom of God, and hence is called by that name.²⁷

[T]here are certain creatures rational and divine, which are called powers; and of these Christ was the highest and best and is called not only, the wisdom of God but also His power.²⁸

Now, there was a beginning, in which the Word was,—and we saw from Proverbs that that beginning was wisdom,—and the Word was in existence, and in the Word life was made.²⁹

[J]ust as the Word was not made through any one which was in the beginning with the Father;—and as wisdom God created the beginning of His ways was not made through any one, so the truth also was not made through any one.³⁰

For the Son of God “the First-born of all creation,” although He seemed recently to have become incarnate, is not by any mans of that account recent. For the holy Scriptures know Him to be the most ancient of all the works of creation,³¹

Lactantius, (260-330):

Assuredly, He is the very Son of God, who by that most wise King Solomon, full of divine inspiration, spake these things which we have added: “God founded me in the beginning of His ways, in His works before the ages... He laid the strong foundations of the earth, I was with Him arranging all things”... He is endowed by God the Father with such wisdom and strength that God employed both His wisdom and hands in the creation of the world.³²

Observations on Fourth Century Understandings

In the *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch we find this report on various understandings of Proverbs 8:22, during the time of the controversy

²⁷ *Commentary on John*, Book I, chapters 21, 32, 39; *ANF*, Vol. X, August, 1980, pp. 307, 314, 317.

²⁸ *ibid.*, chapter 10; *ANF*, *ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

²⁹ *ibid.*, chapter 30; *ANF*, *ibid.*, pp. 344.

³⁰ *ibid.*, Book 6, chapter 3; *ANF*, *ibid.*, p. 353.

³¹ *Against Celsus*, Book V, chapter XXVI; *ANF*, Vol. IV, p. 560.

³² *The Divine Institutes*, chapter VI; *ANF*, Vol. VII, October, 1982, p. 105.

over the nature of Christ and his relationship to the Father, as related by F. Delitzsch we see:

Jave brought me forth as the beginning of His way, As the foremost of His works from of old...The Arians used the $\epsilon\lambda\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\epsilon\ \mu\epsilon$ ["made me"] as proof of their doctrine of the *filii non genitus, sed factus*, [= (the) son (was) not generated (not emitted, ejected, effused, nor extruded, from the substance, the body, of the Father) was made] *i.e.* of His existence before the world began indeed, but yet not from eternity, but originating in time; while, on the contrary, the orthodox preferred the translation $\epsilon\lambda\kappa\theta\upsilon\sigma\alpha\tau\omicron$ [from $\kappa\tau\alpha\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, "to get, procure, provide"³³], and understood it of the co-eternal existence of the Son with the Father, and agreed with the $\epsilon\lambda\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\epsilon$ of the LXX [the Septuagint]. By referring not of the actual existence, but to the position, place of the Son.³⁴

Both parties agreed that Proverbs 8:22 referred to the Son as Wisdom. They had different interpretations as to *how* it referred to him, but referred to him it did in their minds, as it had to the writers before them.

More Recent Analyses

John Patrick, D.D., Professor of Biblical Criticism and Biblical Antiquities, University of Edinburgh, related:

Clement [Titus Flavius Clemens, c.150-c.215 C.E] repeatedly identifies the Word with the Wisdom of God, and yet he refers to Wisdom as the first-created of God; while in one passage he attaches the epithet "First-created," and in another "First-begotten," to the Word. But this seems to be rather a question of language than a question of doctrine. At a later date a sharp distinction was drawn between "first-created" and "first-born" or "first-begotten" but no such distinction was drawn in the time of Clement, who with the Septuagint rendering of a passage in Proverbs before him could have had no misgiving as to the use of these terms [,] Zahn...points to the fact that Clement makes a sharp distinction between the Son and Word who was begotten or created before the rest of creation and the alone Unbegotten God and Father.³⁵

³³ Cf. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, pp.128, 242.

³⁴ *Volume VI Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980, p.183, first sequence.

³⁵ *Clement of Alexandria*, Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914) pp.103-4.

Harry Austryn Wolfson, Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy in Harvard University, wrote:

It is undoubtedly with reference to this “coming forth” of the Logos prior to the creation of the world that Clement speaks of the Logos as the “firstborn” (prwtovno) and of wisdom, which he identifies with the Logos, as the “firstcreated” (prwtovktisto)^{36]} [Theodore] Zahn casually remarks that Clement “always makes a sharp distinction between the only Unbegotten God the Father and the Son or Logos who was begotten before the rest of creation.”¹...¹ Cf. Th. Zahn, “Supplementum Clementinum,” in his *Forshungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Literature, III* (1884), 144.³⁷

Both Patrick and Wolfson make reference to the following statements of Clement to illustrate his use of the terms ‘first-created,’ ‘first-born,’ ‘first-begotten’ and ‘Wisdom,’ when writing about the Son of God:

Now the Stoics say that God, like the soul, is essentially body and spirit...Well, they say that God pervades all being; while we call Him solely Maker, and Maker by the Word. They were misled by what is said in the book of Wisdom: “He pervades and passes through all by reason of His purity;” since they did not understand that this was said of Wisdom, which was the first of the creation of God...And since the unoriginated Being is one, the Omnipotent Lord; one, too, is the First-begotten, “by whom all things were made, and with whom not one thing ever was made.” For one, in truth, is God, who formed the beginning of all things pointing out “the first-begotten Son,” Peter writes, accurately comprehending the statement, “In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.” And He is called Wisdom by all the prophets.³⁸

He also wrote:

And that He whom we call Saviour and Lord is the Son of God, the prophetic Scriptures explicitly prove...For He was the

³⁶ Greek: “Safia” th” prwtovktistov tw/ qew/.” (“Wisdom the firstcreation of the God.”)—Reinholdus Klotz, *Titi Flavi Clementis Alexandrini Opera Omnia*, Lipsiae [Lipzig]: Suptibus E.B. Schwickenti, 1832, Vol. 3, 64. The addition of the “u” at the end of prwtov-ktistov does not change the translation of the word, it is the genitive case ending; the correct translation is still “firstcreated of.”

³⁷ *THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CHURCH FATHERS*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1964, pp.204-9.

³⁸ *Stromata* (or, *Miscellanlies*) Book V, chapter XIV, Book VI, chapter VII; *ANF*, Vol. II, February, 1983, pp. 465, 493.

Wisdom “in which” the Sovereign God “delighted.” [Proverbs 8:30]
For the Son is the power of God, as being the Father’s most ancient
Word before the production of all things, and His Wisdom.³⁹

From notes on Proverbs 8:22 in various translations and other works:

[T]he New Testament writers looked upon Christ as the incarnate
Wisdom (cf. Jn 8:51 with Prov. 8:35, 36; Rom. 1:24-30.—*The
Harper Study Bible RSV*).

The following academic works make a connection between Proverbs 8:22 and
Revelation 3:14 which reads, quoting the Lord Jesus Christ, in the *RSV*: “And to the
church of Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the
beginning of God’s creation.’ ” *The New Testament in the Original Greek* by Westcott
and Hort, *Novum Testamentum Graece* by Eberhard Nestle, *The Greek New Testament*,
United Bible Societies, 1975, all show that Revelation 3:14 is a “quotation” of—or at
least a reference to—Proverbs 8:22.

Christ identifies himself as, “the beginning of God’s creation” at Revelation 3:14.
(*RSV*) This phrase “the beginning of,” in Scripture, makes reference to the first in a
series of events. (Genesis 10:10; 49:3; Deuteronomy 21:17; Hosea 1:2; Matthew 24:8;
Mark 1:1; John 2:11; Philippians 4:15) All these denote the start of activities, not the
starter of those activities. Of what activity does Christ say he is the beginning? “God’s
creation.” He is identified as the first of the creation brought about by his Father,
Jehovah. The Son of God had a beginning; he is not eternal with the Father.

Translation Review

“The Eternal formed me first of his creation, first of all his works in days of old.”
—*MO*.

“The LORD formed me as the first of his work the beginning of his deeds of old.”
—*AT*.

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.”—
RSV.

“The LORD created me first of all, the first of his works, long ago.”—*TEV-GN*.

“The Lord formed me in the beginning, before he created anything else.”—*LB*.

“Yahweh had constituted me the beginning of his way, Before his works At the
commencement of that time.”—*RO*.

“*ADONAI* made me as the beginning of his way first of his ancient works.”—
Complete Jewish Bible, 1998.

“The LORD created me at the beginning of His course As the first of His works of
old.”—*Tanakh The Holy Scriptures*, 1985.

³⁹ *ibid.*, Book VII, chapter II; *ibid.*, pp.252-5.

“Jehovah framed me first in line, foremost of his works in the past.”—*Byington*.

“The Lord formed and brought me (Wisdom) forth at the beginning of His way before His acts of old.”—*Amplified Bible*.

“The LORD made me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old.”, margin, “His way of creation”—*Modern Language Bible*.

“The Lord made me as the start of his way, the first of his works in the past.”—*Bible in Basic English*.

“The LORD created me the beginning of his works, before all else that he made, long ago.”—*NEB*.

“The Lord created me as the beginning of his way, the first of his works from the commencement.”—*Jewish Publication Society*, 1955.

“I was created in the very beginning, even before the world began.”—*New Century Version*, 1993.

“The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old.”—*LXX*, Brenton.

“Jehovah created me first of his ways, before his works from long ago” (translating the Latin: “Jova me creavit primitas viae suae, ante opera sua inde a longo tempore”)—Fredrick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum*, 1964.

“The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works”—*NIV*, 1984, printing of April 1986. Significant change from its first rendering, 1978: “the LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work.”

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.” margin: “or, *me as the beginning*” —*New Revised English Version*.

“The LORD created me the first of his works, long ago. Before all else that he made.”—*Revised English Version*.

“The LORD formed me from the beginning, before he created anything else.”—*New Living Translation*.

“Jehovah himself produced me as the beginning of his way, the earliest of his achievements of long ago.”—*New World Translation*.

Further Corroborating Evidence

Jesus is called God’s “first-born”, His “only-begotten.” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:6; John 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) Anyone called these in Scripture, had a beginning of life; the Lord Jesus Christ is no exception.

In addition to the above, there is more in the Word of God that teaches the fact of the Son of God having a beginning of life.

Micah 5:2: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel. Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”—*NIV*.

Translation Review

“[O]rigin is of old, of long decent.”—*MO*.

“[O]rigin is of old from ancient times.”—*NAB*.

“[O]rigin goes back to the distant past, to the days of old.”—*JB*.

“[O]rigin is from ancient age, from the days of old.—George R. Noyes, *A New Translation of the Hebrew Prophets, Volume I...Second Edition* (Boston: James Munroe And Company, 1843.)

“Whence comes he? From the first beginning, from ages untold!”—*Knox*.

“[O]rigin is from of old, from ancient days.”—*RSV*.

“[O]rigin is from of old, from ancient days.” —*NRSV*.

“[O]rigins are from of old, From ancient days.”—*AT*.

“[O]rigin is from early times, from the days of time indefinite.”—*NWT*.

“[O]rigins being from of old, from ancient days.”—*Byington*.

“[O]rigins are from of old, from ancient times.”—*NIV*.

“[O]rigins are from the distant past.”—*NLT*.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *The NASV* renders Micah 5:2: “His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”, in the main text. The alternative reading in the margin is: “His appearances are from long ago, from days of old.” In a letter responding to the question as to the scholarly authority for the wording “His appearances” from this reviewer, a Lockman Foundation (the sponsor of the *NASV*) staff member wrote on November 20, 1979: “As for Micah 5:2, I was unable to locate a lexicon here that actually listed “appearances” as an alternative translation for the Hebrew *motsaothayw*, but this is suggested in Keil and Delitzsch's commentary on the Old Testament (vol. 10, *Minor Prophets*, pp. 479-81). Keil says here that “appearances” is included in the idea of the noun, and that the appearances of the Angel of Jehovah in Old Testament history are implied. It is not the concern of the translators to take a side in a situation like this, but they offer a marginal note to inform the reader of other possibilities. In many instances commentaries provide more (and often more up-to-date) information about a word than is available in the standard lexicons, and this additional information has to be taken into account.”

The *Commentary* says on this: “Consequently we must not restrict *wyt*ax*um* (His goings forth) to the appearance of the Messiah as the Angel of Jehovah even in the patriarchal age, but must so interpret it that it at least affirms His origin as well...the words affirm both the origin of the Messiah before all worlds and His appearances in the olden time...*wytaxwm* [the vowel points were omitted in the *Commentary* here] can only affirm the going forth from God at the creation of the world, and in the revelations of the olden and primeval times.”, pp. 480-81. In order to utilize what is intimated as being “more (and often more up-to-date) information” found in the *Commentary*, both “appearances” and “origin” *should have been used* in the translation! The “Author's Preface” in the *Commentary* is dated 1872. The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon (1958) and the *Lexicon in Verteris Testamenti Libros*, by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner (1953), both define *wyt*ax*um* as “origin”, pp. 426 and 505 respectively. Which then is the “most (and often more up-to-date) information,” that should be taken into consideration?

The one to come forth out of Bethlehem—the future Christ—had an origin of life before he was born here on Earth. One who had an origin of life is not equal to the eternal God. The Son had an origin of life at his creation in the spirit realm, and at a future time from that event, he was born as a human in Bethlehem.

As Lactantius wrote:

For we especially testify that He was twice born, first in the spirit, and afterwards in the flesh...For though He was the Son of God from [not before] the beginning He was born again a second time according to the flesh.⁴¹

The expression “beginning of” in Scripture, signifies the start of something, the first of a series, not the starter of an event or events. Note this in the Greek and English of Genesis 10:10; 49:3; Deuteronomy 21:17; Hosea (Osee) 1:2; Proverbs 8:22; Matthew 24:8; Mark 1:1; John 2:11; Philippians 4:15. Can anyone find any scripture in which “the first of” has any other meaning?

Albert Barnes has written on this:

The word [arche, “beginning”] properly refers to the commencement of a thing, not its authorship, and denotes properly primacy in time, and primacy in rank, not primacy in the sense of causing anything to exist...If it were demonstrated from other sources that the Christ was in fact a created being, and the first that God had made, it cannot be denied that this language would appropriately express that fact.⁴²

Comment [NAHJ1]:

“Firstborn of” — a Title, Or a Description?

As noted above, the *NJB* made a connection of Proverbs 8:22 with Colossians 1:15. Why was such made?

Proverbs 8:22 speaks of God's first creation, Wisdom. Colossians 1:15 speaks of the “first-born of all creation.” Are Wisdom and the “firstborn of all creation” the same person? That such is the case is implied or even stated positively by many of the quotations we have already read. What is the meaning of the phrase “firstborn of all creation”? Is that phrase a title or a description? What do the Scriptures show?

In the *NWT*, Colossians 1:15-18 reads:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; because by means of him all (other) things were created in the heavens

⁴¹ *The Divine Institutes*, Book IV, chapter VIII; *ANF*, Vol. VII, October, 1982, p.106.

⁴² *Notes On The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1980, one volume edition, p. 1569.

and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All (other) things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all (other) things and by means of him all (other) things were made to exist, and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become the one who is first in all things.

The claim is made by some, that: ‘The phrase “the firstborn of all creation” teaches that Christ is over all creation; the ruler of all creation, and that he is apart from the class of created things.’

The phrase: “the firstborn of” occurs 36 times according to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance Of The Bible*. They are found at: Genesis 25:13; Exodus 6:4; 11:15 (thrice); 12:29 (thrice); 13:13, 15 (thrice); 22:29; 34:20; Numbers 3:13, 40, 46, 50; 8:16, 17; 18:15; Joshua 17:1; 1 Chronicles 1:29; 2:3, 13, 25, 27, 50; 4:4; 5:1; 9:31; Nehemiah 10:36; Job 18:13; Psalms 135:8; Isaiah 14:30 and Colossians 1:15. Always we find common meanings; the one called “the firstborn of” is a part of the group mentioned (a partitive genitive), and **had a beginning of existence!**

In the first 35 occurrences of the phrase we find the same significance, i.e., one of the named group or class. In Exodus 11:5 we find: “the first-born of Pharaoh” is one of Pharaoh’s family. “The first-born of the salve girl”, is a child of the salve girl. “The first-born of the cattle”, is one of the cattle.

To the claim that “firstborn of” means ‘the ruler of’: When did the cattle (or, beasts) get together and elect one of the cattle “King” over the other cattle? Was “the firstborn of Pharaoh,” that died that night, the “ruler” over Pharaoh? Or was the “firstborn of Pharaoh,” Pharaoh’s oldest child?

The same is true in the other instances of this syntax. Then, when we find the same syntax at Colossians 1:15, “the firstborn of,” and “all creation,” is identified as the class or group to which the Son of God belongs; we can come to the same conclusion; the Son of God is part of creation, the first of it in time and importance.

Scholars have stated on this subject:

The first-born of every creature — He was begotten; first-born before the creation of all things. The pro, in protokos, first-born, governs the genitive ktiseos, creature. Time is an accident of the creature. Therefore the origin of the Son of God precedes all time.⁴³

Christ...is the first-born of every creature, that is, born before every creature—having come to personal existence, entered upon subsistent being, ere [before] anything created was extant...The genitive pases ktiseos [of all creation] moreover, is not the partitive genitive

⁴³ John Albert Bengal, *New Testament Word Studies*, Vol. 2, p. 454

(although de Wette still [also], with Usteri, Reuss, and Baur holds this to be indubitable) [that “first born of” is a partitive genitive]...‘the first-born in comparison with every creature’...that is, born earlier than every creature”⁴⁴

Both Bengal and Meyer show that the Son of God ‘was begotten’ had ‘origin’ was ‘born earlier’ and ‘came into personal existence’. While Meyer did not think Colossians 1:15 contains an example of the partitive genitive, yet he notes that the scholars, de Wette, Usteri, Rues and Baur did. Added to this, Grimm, in ‘Thayer’s’ lexicon, says: “firstborn of all creation” at Colossians 1:15 is a partitive genitive and that the Son was one “who came into being prior to the entire universe of created things.” Grimm also comments that Clement of Alexandria and Origen used the word ‘creature’ in reference to the Logos.⁴⁵

On the word ‘prototokos’ (firstborn) lexicons and translations inform

“[T]he first-born whether of man or of beast”—*Grimm–Thayer*, p. 555.

“[F]irstborn...Mt. 1:25; Lu. 2:7; He. 11:28”—*Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich*, p. 734.

“[P]rior in generation Col. 1:15”—*Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. 355.

The Cross-Reference Bible American Standard Version, translates Colossians 1:15:

“who is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation: and adds a marginal note making reference to Exodus 13:1 as an example of ‘firstborn’ it reads: “And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the first-born whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: It is mine.”

The firstborn was the one born first. Of course, the one born first came to have a special place of honor and privilege. Because of being the oldest of Jehovah’s family of sons, the Son of God has a special place of honor and authority.

Other translations read:

“He is the likeness of the unseen God, born first, before all the creation.”—*MO*.

“Christ was born before anything was created.—Frank C. Lubach.

“He is the image of the invisible God, born before and above everything created.”—William F. Beck

“Who is the image of the unseen God coming into existence before all living things.”—*BBE*. (Of course, the use of the phrase ‘all other living

⁴⁴ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand—Book to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon*, pp. 224-5.

⁴⁵ *Thayer’s Lexicon*...p. 556, under “prwtotokos”.

things' would make this statement accurate, unless the meaning that the Son of God came into existence before the Father and the Son himself, was intended!)

All the foregoing share one thought in common; the Son of God was 'born,' 'came into existence.' Anyone who was 'born' or 'came into existence,' no matter how long ago, millions or billions of years ago, is neither Jehovah, nor His equal in eternity.

Now to the question: Is the addition of "other" proper at Colossians 1:15-18? It is not an uncommon characteristic of the Koine ("Biblical") Greek that when one of a class or group is mentioned and then others, or one individual, of the same class or group are mentioned, neither the words 'other', 'rest' nor 'else' are always used, they are understood.

Examples:

Luke 21:29: 'Ye see the fig-tree and all the trees', Marshal *Interlinear*. (One might wonder if the 'fig-trees' somehow were not in the class of 'all the trees.')

The *NEB* and other translations add 'other.'

1 Corinthians 15:24: "whenever he [Christ] abolishes all rule and all authority and power', Marshal *Interlinear*. If it were left at that, we would come to the misconception, that Christ will abolish or destroy all rule, authority, and all power. How could that be? Will he destroy the Kingdom of God? We can see why various translations have added "other". (See *MO*; *Phillips*; *Wey*; *AT*; *Twentieth Century N.T.*; C.B. Williams; Wm F. Beck; Kleist and Lilly.)

Hebrews 13:32: "And what more may I say? will fail me for recounting the time concerning Gedeon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthae, David both and Samuel and the prophets", Marshall. Were not David and Samuel prophets? It would seem from this passage, as written that they were separated from being such. It is an aid to clarity to have in the *NWT*: "David Samuel and the (other) prophets.' (see also: Matthew 13:31, 32; Luke 13:2, 4; Ro. 8:32; 1 Corinthians 6:18 for other examples of the same 'omission' of 'other' in the Greek text.

These are instances of what Robert Young, in the section found in some editions of his *Analytical Concordance* called, "Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation," he wrote: "The WHOLE is frequently put for a PART" (item 29). That is, "all" here, stands for a part of created things not all of them.

If, we take 'all things' as absolute, then, the Son created his Father and himself. For even God Himself, is identified as one of the 'things' in the universe. At 1 Corinthians 15:27 we read: "Scripture says. He has put all things in subjection under his [Christ's] feet'. But in saying 'all things', it clearly means to exclude God who subordinates them." (*NEB*) God, then, is one of the category of 'things.' If He were not, Paul would have not explained that He is excluded from the "all things" which will be subordinated to the Christ. What is a 'thing?' Some have said: 'A thing is a creature.' Well, all creatures are things; but all things are not necessarily creatures. A dictionary definition of 'thing' is:

“that which is conceived, spoken of, or referred to as existing as an individual, distinguishable entity; specifically, any single entity distinguished from all others: as, [each thing in the universe].”⁴⁶

Surely, Jehovah God is “referred to as existing as an individual.” He is a “distinguishable entity”. (See *Awake*, April 8, 1979, p. 29.) Jehovah is the one ‘thing’ which will not be subordinated, be in subjection to, the Son.

We have seen that other scriptures *do* demonstrate that Christ was a created being.

The “Firstborn”— Not the One Born First—a Mere Title?

Some have referred to those scriptures which speak of a person who is called ‘first’ or ‘first born’ that is not (in their opinion) the actual firstborn.

First, it must be noted that ‘first’ and ‘firstborn’ do not have the same significance as ‘firstborn of’. Nonetheless, we shall consider the scriptures containing the words ‘first’ and ‘firstborn’ that have been proffered to this reviewer in an *attempt* to negate the proper meaning of ‘firstborn of’ at Colossians 1:15 and other verses.

Our attention is drawn to Exodus 4:22: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith Jehovah, Israel is my son, my first-born” (*ASV*) It has been said to this reviewer: “Israel was not the firstborn of God.” The one so saying, took this verse as having reference to the man Israel. However, of course, Jehovah was speaking of the *nation* of Israel, the first *nation* which He was to produce on earth. The *nation* of Israel had a beginning!

Next, we turn to 1 Chronicles 26:10: “Also Hosah, *one* of the sons of Meari had sons: Shimri the first (although he was not the first-born, his father made him first).” (*NASV*; “chief”, *KJV*; *ASV*; *RSV*; *NRSV*; *REB*; *NJB*; “the leader”, *NLT*; “head”, *NWT*).

‘Firstborn’ and ‘first’ are not from the same Hebrew word. ‘Firstborn’ is from $\exists\wedge+\square$ (bekowr), which is defined as: “*first-born*; hence *chief*: eldest (son) first-born (-ling).”⁴⁷ That which is rendered ‘chief’, ‘leader’, ‘head’ and ‘first’, finds its origin in $\exists=9$ (rosh). Its meaning is given as: “head...**a.** *head* = *chief* (man)...= *chief* (place, position)...*head* = *front*, leader's place”.⁴⁸ The firstborn of Meari, was not entrusted with the position of being the one with the highest position in the family. Shimri was made ‘leader’ (‘first’) in the family. This in no way, changes the fact that the firstborn was the one born first, and that the firstborn and Shimri both had a beginning of existence!

⁴⁶ *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1955.

⁴⁷ Strong's “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary” in his *Exhaustive Concordance*, word 1060.

⁴⁸ *Brown, Driver and Briggs Lexicon*, p. 910.

Now we turn to a consideration of Psalm 89:27, which reads in the *NASV*: “I shall also make him *My* first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth.” Some have claimed that here, someone who is not the firstborn is being made the firstborn. This is of no weight at all.

If this is understood as a reference to Christ (which we hold to be the correct view) or to King David, this one still had an origin of life. (Compare Ezekiel 34:23-24, where Christ is spoken of as “my servant David,” the context making it clear that this is really a reference to the Messiah.) He, Christ, the firstborn, would occupy the exalted position intended.

Why the Use Of *Prwtovtako*" (with the Genitive, at Colossians 1:15) Instead of *Prwtovtisto*"

Bruce M. Metzger in his above referenced article wrote:

Here [Colossians 1:15] he [the Son of God] is spoken of as “the first begotten of all creation,”⁴⁹ which is quite different from saying that he was made or created. If Paul had wished to express the latter idea, he had available a Greek word to do so, the word *prwtovtisto* [protoktistos] meaning “first created.” Actually, however, Paul uses the word *prwtovtako* [protokotos] meaning “first begotten,” which signifies something quite different.”⁵⁰

In more than one instance here, Metzger errs. First of all, *protokotos* means ‘first-born’, as noted in the lexicons.⁵¹

Why did the holy spirit direct Paul to use the word *protokotos* instead of *protoktistos*? *Protokotos*—with the genitive case—had been used for centuries to denote the oldest and/or the most important member of a category or group. It was most appropriate that the same word used with the same grammatical case, be used to convey the same thought it always had.

Metzger claims: “[Paul] had available a Greek word *prwtovtisto*” meaning “first created.” According to the information found in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*⁵² the *Greek*

⁴⁹ From the article referenced in fn. 3. Metzger does not make known which (if any) translation he here quotes as reading “first begotten”. Even in the *RSV*, of which he had a part, the wording is “first born of all creation”.

⁵⁰ The Greek for ‘begotten’, is *gennaō* (*gennaō*) not ‘*protokotos*.’ The latter is a combination of the words *prwtos* (protos, “first”) and *tiktō* (tikto, “born”). See: the *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, pp. 79, 355, 41, 404.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 355; *Thayer*, 555; *Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich*, 743.

⁵² G.W.H. Lampe, D.D., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1200. Lampe includes this interesting note: “*believer in Christ as prwtovtisto*”; nickname of Origenist sect. (Such belief based, no doubt, on the type of statements identified in ftns. 7, 27, 28, 31.)

*Lexicon Of The Roman And Byzantine Periods*⁵³, the *ΩΝΣΑΥΡΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΗΣ Thesaurus Graecae Linguae*⁵⁴, the *A Greek-English Lexicon*⁵⁵ and the *ANF*⁵⁶, the first use of *protoktistos* is found in the *Stromata* by Clement of Alexandria circa 200 C.E. When it was used, it had reference to the Wisdom–Logos as the first created!⁵⁷

It would have been strange for the holy spirit to inspire Paul to use words other than those used to express the thought of the one who is first in time in a category, and use a word which was not coined until some 150 years after Paul wrote. It would be tantamount to reading a description of the air in and over London in 1750 C.E., as: ‘corrupt, eye and lung irritating and foul smelling’ and wondering why the writer did not use the word, ‘smog’, when that word was not formulated until sometime close to 1900 C.E., (according to various dictionaries)!

The Word of God clearly teaches that the Son of God was *actually* a son before he came to Earth as a human. We are told at 1 John 4:9: “God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”—*DAR*. The one who was sent into to world by God, was already was His Son.

At Hebrews 1:1-2, we read: “In old times God spoke to our fathers by the prophets in many different ways; in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son; he appointed him the heir of all the world; he created the world through him;”—Charles Kingsley Williams, *THE NEW TESTAMENT A New Translation in Plain English* (London, S · P C · K AND LOGMANS, GREEN AND CO, 1963).

He was the Son of God when he was used by his Father to do the Father’s will in bringing about the rest of Creation.—Proverbs 8:30; 30:4, *NIV, NASV, NKJV*.

From the above facts it is undeniable that the Son of God was a creation of his God and Father, Jehovah, “the only true God.”—Romans 15:6; Micah 5:4; John 17:3.

⁵³ Evangelinus Apostollides Sophocles, New York, Fredrerick Unger Publishing.

⁵⁴ Henrico Stephano, 1829, Vol. VII, p. 2144.

⁵⁵ Henry George Liddell D.D. and Robert Scott D.D., Oxford, Clarendon Press, Vol. II, p. 1545.

⁵⁶ Vol. II, February, 1983, p.168.

⁵⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book V, chapter XIV; *ANF*, ibid. 465; Eusebius Pampilus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, chapter 2, Shorting translation.

(Contributed anonymously)

