

The Word and the Light

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

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“FAREWELL FRODO. I GIVE YOU THE LIGHT EÄRENDIL, our most beloved star. May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out.” So says Galadriel to the tiny Hobbit, as she hands him a glass jar which, when opened, shines forth a light of immense brilliance. Eventually, these words come back to Frodo’s mind at just the right time, enabling him to defeat the primeval dark spider Shelob. Galadriel is herself the ancient elf queen—Lady of Light. Eärendil was a great seafarer who carried a star across the sky. His name means lover of the sea.

But just what was that light? Where did it come from? Was it created? What gave it such power? These are interesting questions, especially when you look at the names J. R. R. Tolkien created for the actors in his story and when you notice the images of light and darkness, stars and sky, sea and ancient monsters of great evil. It has an almost irresistible pull, beckoning the reader or viewer to think about their own origins, particularly as told in the Bible, which Tolkien both knew and believed.

THE WORD OF GOD. THE LIGHT. These are the two great themes of Genesis 1:3. Together, they complete a picture of the Holy Trinity in this, the third verse of the Bible. The verse reads, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” It is a very famous verse and it has been commented on since the days of the prophets of Israel. This is the first verse in the Bible where there is no real problem in translating. It is a complete thought, an independent clause. It stands by itself. It may be the first complete thought in the entire Bible. That’s my present view which

I hold according to the strictest interpretations of the Hebrew grammar. If so, it means this is the most important point of the first three verses, for this is the first thing that God is actually said to do. This is its focus. Let's break the verse down and begin to think about it.

And God Said

It begins “**And God said.**” This is two words in the Hebrew. As with **vs. 2**, it begins with a *waw* (“and” or “now”) **consecutive**. This links it to what came before. So, we find ourselves facing a heavens and earth which God created, but which are at this point in a prehistoric state of waste and void (*tohu wabohu*), like a desert or a flood,¹ functionally useless. In this case, the deep and darkness reign supreme, not as gods or enemies of God, merely as conditions which must be overcome. And they will be *easily* overcome.

Water is covering all. But the **Spirit** of God is hovering, and into this mess God says or God speaks. As in **vs. 1** and throughout Genesis 1, the word for God is *elohim*. It can mean “God” or “gods,” depending on the context. The verb “said” determines with absolute certainty that we are talking about God (it is a 3rd person, masculine, singular verb). It is not “gods said” but “God said.” It may not seem like much here, but this idea of **God speaking** takes on incredible significance in the rest of the Bible. So this is a very important idea. Let's start slowly.

First, think about this idea that God speaks. God speaks. What does this mean? He is a person. He is **not a force** like the wind. He uses words. People that use words are **alive**. God is alive. In fact, he is the source of all life. When you speak, you have breath. The breath is the power of the words you speak. This is similar to God. He has created us as analogies of himself. Though we are not him, we can understand something of him through these analogies. Thus the Psalm says, “**By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host**” (**Ps 33:6**). “Breath” here is the same word used in Genesis 1:2: *ruach*. It could mean “wind” or “breeze,” but here it means spirit. The difference between you and God is that his Word and his Breath or Spirit are also persons in a Godhead.

Second, the words that God speaks here are **divine speech**. Now, before we get to that, we must understand that **words carry a kind of power** in them. If you think depressing thoughts, chances are you will get depressed. If you tell someone they look ugly, chances are it will both hurt their feelings, and begin to make them

¹ I discovered this verse after last week's sermon, “**and he led them through the deep as through a desert**” (**Ps 106:9**).

question whether it is true. Words can also build up. Do you remember Al Franken's **Stewart Smalley** character from Saturday Night Live? Smalley had a self-help show called "Daily Affirmation With Stewart Smalley." His daily affirmation was, "I'm good enough. I'm smart enough. And doggone it, people like me." So maybe it isn't the best example, since he is actually mocking (often rightly) the psycho-babble of our age, but you get the point. If I say better words, it will begin to change me in a positive way.

There is no question that there is power in words. But there is also an ability we have to take this much too far, especially when we **confuse the creature with the Creator**. For example, cults such as **Unity**, **Christian Science**, and **New Thought** have all taught forms of the idea that sickness and suffering ultimately have their origin in incorrect thinking. Many television Evangelists such as Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Fred Price, Joel Osteen, and Denver's own Marilyn Hickey have taught very similar things in the so-called "Word of Faith" movement for a long time, and made a lot of money fleecing the flock while doing it.²

The root of such teaching comes from profoundly blurring the lines between God and man, Jesus and us. They'll say things like, "Every man who has been 'born again' is an Incarnation ... The believer is as much an Incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth."³ In a sermon titled, "The Power of 'I am,'" Osteen says that "two simple words will determine what kind of life you live." Those words are "I am." And how does he apply it? Not the way John does in his Gospel. But like this, "I am strong. I am healthy. Or I am unattractive. I am ugly." At the very least, this is a bait and switch. You go to church and see a sermon about I AM and you think you are going to hear about Jesus. But here the lines between Jesus and I are confused at best. It is like He-man who says, "I have the power," only worse. "I am the power." Me. Do you wonder that **Oprah** says this sermon changed the way she sees her life?⁴ It fits perfectly into her new age worldview.

At any rate, we don't have to abuse this idea, even though many do. The root that words have power comes from God himself, starting right here in **Genesis 1:3**. "And God said" starts the whole ball rolling, literally. But the power here is not just a brute word, as if words stand outside of God. Rather, the word of God is the

² For example, see Hank Hanegraaff, "What's Wrong with the Word Faith Movement? (Part One)," *Christian Research Journal* 15:3 (1993). <http://www.equip.org/articles/whats-wrong-with-the-word-faith-movement-part-one/>. LA 9-4-2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ **Joel Osteen**, "The Power of 'I Am,'" http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/Pastor-Joel-Osteens-Full-Sermon-on-The-Power-of-I-Am-Video_1, last accessed 6-9-2015.

power of God. He has made it so our words carry certain powers, but not omnipotently so, not unqualifyingly so, not however we wish it to be so. We are not God.

But look at what *God* does. Not us, but God. Out of darkness, he **speaks and there is light**. Throughout Genesis 1, God merely speaks a word and it is so. In fact, there is a pattern that we see in this brilliantly conceived chapter. **Ten different verses** (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 22, 24, 26) have a “let” formula. “Let there be ...” or “Let the _____” or “Let us ...” This is followed by **six “it was so”** phrases, one for each creative day. The point for now is that God’s word was simple and effectual and we need to learn that, so it is repeated. Truly, we are like babies and God talks baby talk to us so that we will learn to master the most basic things. Every time he sent it out it accomplished exactly what he purposed it to do.

This leads to a **third** point about this divine speech. **What was it doing here?** I want to introduce a familiar topic to Reformed people at this point. It is the topic of **covenant**. **Michael Horton** says, “According to the biblical pattern, divine speech is limited to the activity within the divine covenant.”⁵ A covenant is exactly what is being initiated here in **Genesis 1:3ff**. It is a covenant created through God’s word.

Over and over again the Scripture uses “word” as a **synonym** for “covenant.” “He has remembered his **covenant** forever, the **word** which he commanded for a thousand generations” (Ps 105:8; cf. 1 Chron 16:15). “For they observed your **word** and kept your **covenant**” (Deut 33:9). “I will not violate my **covenant** or alter the **word** that went forth from my lips” (Ps 89:34). “Jesus, the mediator of a new **covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better **word** than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:24).

What is the covenant God is establishing here? Jeremiah calls it, “The covenant with the day and the night ... the fixed order of heaven and earth” (Jer 33:20, 25). It was initiated here in Genesis 1. Then God reestablishes it in **Genesis 8:22**, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (cf. Gen 9:9; Isa 54:9-10; Ps 89:37; 104:19-23). Elsewhere it is called God’s “decree” (Jer 5:22) or his “ordinance and rule” (Job 38:33).

Ordinances and rules have a more common term: **Laws**. These are the laws of creation. These begin to unfold after our verse today when God names a thing and then gives it a purpose or function (the moon will rule the night, or the birds will rule the sky, etc.). Therefore, theologians have sometimes called this God’s

⁵ Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 132.

Covenant of Creation. It is the laws God made with all of his creation, be it the water, the birds, the angels, or mankind. All are governed by laws. In a different context in Genesis 2, this will be more easily identified as the **Covenant of Works**.

I want to show you something fascinating that will make this more concrete. We have already observed some patterns that will emerge in the way this chapter unfolds. Many of these patterns are found in formulas: “**let there be**” or “**God saw ... and it was good**” or “**evening and morning.**” The first of these formulas is “**And God said.**” This phrase occurs 10x in Genesis 1 (cf. vv 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). Every word of this story is deliberate and seems to have a lifetime of reflection put into it. This includes how many times phrases are used.

Ten is a very important number in Genesis and for Moses in general. There are ten “generations of.” This is the formula that divides the book. There are ten generations from Seth to Noah. There are ten generations from Shem to Abram. There are ten nations which are to be given to Abraham as his covenant possession (Gen 15:19). According to extremely old tradition, there are ten trials of Abraham.⁶ In the story of Isaac and Rebekah you have ten master’s camels (Gen 24:10), ten gold shekels (Gen 24:22), and staying ten days (24:55). Jacob tells Laban he changed his wages ten times (Gen 31:7). Ten of Joseph’s brothers go down to Egypt (Gen 42:3). Ten donkeys are loaded with good things (Gen 45:23). Moving into Exodus, there are ten plagues of Egypt, ten curtains for the tabernacle (Ex 26:1) made of ten curtain a frames (26:16). There are ten pillars and ten bases (Ex 27:12). And most important of all, there are Ten Commandments.

Some of these are literal. Some are probably figurative. All are representative and theologically charged. There is purpose in this number.⁷ As we have already seen hints of, Genesis 1 is about God building a temple. The number ten so often repeated in the temple is intentional. Let us remember in this regard that the Ten Commandments went inside the Most Holy Place of the temple. Let us also remember that these were also called “the ten words” (Ex 34:28 LXX).⁸ The number symbolizes the perfection of divine order.⁹

⁶ See Scott B. Noegel, Abraham’s Ten Trials and a Biblical Numerical Convention, *Jerish Bible Quarterly*, 31 (2003): 73-82. <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/PDFs/articles/Noegel%2037%20-%20JBO%202003.pdf>. For a different list see E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967), 244-45. Available at: <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/number14.htm>.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 175-176.

⁸ Literally: *tous deka logos*. Notice the “logos.”

⁹ As Bullinger puts it adding, “... commencing, as it does, an altogether new series of numbers. The first decade is the representative of the whole numeral system, and originates the system of calculation called ‘decimals.’”

Someone has called these ten “and God said” phrases, “**The announcement of the commandment**” (“Let there be”). **Ten speeches** of God. **Ten “God said.” Ten Words.** For these reasons, some have suggested that the ten-fold “God said” is analogous to the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments. Not that they are commandments to us, but that they are commandments to all of God’s creation, and other creation stories in the Bible tell us that they cannot transgress them. Rabbinic tradition went so far as to identify God creating the world by the Torah (Law).¹⁰ So it is a very old idea. **Genesis 1:4** is where God begins ordering (as in giving purpose) and ordering (as in commanding) his creation to do what he wants it to do.

The Word

So God is commanding with his word, and in doing so he is establishing a covenant with creation. Yet, this covenant is nothing but the first historical outworking of another prior covenant. This is what we call the **Covenant of Redemption**. The Covenant of Redemption has as a dual focus. First, there is the dealing with the legal implications of sin regarding all the children of Adam. Second, is the work of Christ on behalf of God’s elect to bring them to salvation. To have an elect, you must also have humanity. To have humanity, you must first have an earth that is suitable for them. So, all of God’s work, even at creation, even in the Covenant of Creation/Works is wrapped up in this Covenant of Redemption. As it says, “**Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God**” (**Rom 8:19**). Creation itself is part of this covenantal work of God.

The **Covenant of Redemption** was a **pretemporal covenant made in eternity past**. It has as its parties the persons of the Triune Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit entered into an agreement to redeem. This means they also must have entered into an agreement to create. Indeed, all three persons are here in **Genesis 1:1-3**. We will spend the rest of our time this morning thinking about this.

Let’s get very basic again. The fact that God uses words implies what has already been suggested by the presence of the Holy Spirit. **God is not a single person**, but more than one person. We watched a movie the other night where the man kept speaking to *himself*. Now, a little of this can be fine. But often times when people talk to themselves we call them crazy. In that movie, the man was insane.

because the whole system of numeration consists of so many *tens*, of which the first is a type of the whole. ... It implies that nothing is wanting; that the number and order are perfect; that the whole cycle is complete.”

¹⁰ “In the beginning by means of the Torah God created...” (*Gen. Rabbah* 1, 1.4).

Who are you speaking to? When God speaks, even when no one else is there, he is speaking to other persons. One God in three Persons.

Genesis 1:2 explains the **Holy Spirit**. We have seen him briefly this morning. Notice that he is called the “**Spirit of God**.” “Spirit” and “God” are separate. Yet, the Spirit belongs to God. It is his Spirit. In **Genesis 1:1** you have just God. God is creating. In the context, the Holy Spirit must both belong to this God and yet be distinct from him. **Genesis 1:3** is similar. And God said. The word of God is both distinct from God and yet it belongs to God.

Ordinarily, I might not make a big fuss over language like this. However, we know from many places that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person in the Godhead. Likewise, and more important for **vs. 3**, we know that the Word of God is also a distinct person in the Godhead. Since we are in **vs. 3** today, we will look at the Word of God as a person.

It is tempting to go to **John 1:1ff**, for it is an inspired commentary on Genesis 1. It literally reads, “**In [the]¹¹ beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in [the] beginning with God.**” John is speaking about Jesus Christ in this deliberate allusion to Genesis 1:1, for he says that the word became flesh and dwelt among us (**John 1:14**). John has a bit more to say about Jesus, which we will come to shortly. However, a question needs to be asked, where did he come up with this idea that Jesus is the Word?

Many think John is countering an ancient heresy called **Gnosticism**. Gnosticism was the idea that eternal, invisible reality is good, while physical temporary reality is evil. To a Gnostic, Jesus could not have become flesh if he was God, because that would mean God would become evil. It a fine idea to think that John 1 is countering Gnosticism, for surely it would do that. The problem is, there is no evidence that this was a problem at the time this book was written. To go in this direction is really to take the book as addressing Greek philosophy.

There is another answer to what is going on here. It is a Jewish answer. It is expressed in the ancient Aramaic Jewish translations of Genesis 1. These are called targums. **Targums** were originally spoken paraphrases, explanations, and expansions of the Old Testament that a Rabbi would give in the common language of the

¹¹ Like the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 and the LXX of Genesis 1:1, John 1:1 does not have the definite article. It is supplied by translations. Calling this to our attention, even in a footnote, is not for the purposes of somehow implying that the Word somehow had a beginning, because he was only with God at the beginning of whatever time Genesis 1 may have in mind. For, we know that the very same ideas of eternity that are given to God are also given to Jesus Christ. He is the alpha and omega, the first and the last. Indeed, he is called “**THE beginning and THE end**” (**Rev 21:6, 22:13**) where the article is used in those instances.

listeners. Listen to Targum Neofiti. “From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth ... And the Memra of the Lord said: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light according to the decree of his Memra.”¹² Memra is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek *logos*. It comes from the word *mmr*’ meaning, “to say.” It means “word.” However, it also became a kind of personification, indeed more than a personification, a kind of second person in a Godhead, at least to many Jews in Jesus’ day they saw it this way. This is where **John 1:1** gets it from.

It is strange, though, that they would see this in Genesis 1:1. It makes sense that they might see it from “**and God said**” in vs. 3. This is God’s speech, his divine word. So, while in the Hebrew the word is a verb, in the Targum it becomes a noun. That makes sense. But what about Genesis 1:1? Why might they see the Memra here too?

I discovered what I believe might be an answer to that. It comes from the very first word in the Bible: beginning. The word beginning in Hebrew can also mean “first” (see the BBE translation). So, you could translate it, “**At the first when God began to create** ...” But “first” is ambiguous. In both Hebrew and English, “first” can have more than one sense. I can say, “**He was the first in the class**,” by which I can mean either that he got to class before anyone else did or he has the best grade in the class. One refers to time, the other to rank. This is where things start to get very curious.

Colossians 1:15-18 is the Apostle Paul, the Jewish Pharisee, reflecting as a Christian upon creation and Genesis 1. He begins, “**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**” “God” seems to refer to the Father. The word “firstborn” is the word *prototokos*. It comes up again in **vs. 18** where it says, “**And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn (*prototokos*) from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.**” Paul has not given up his treatment of creation in between these two verses. For he says, “**For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones of dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together**” (**vv. 16-17**).

Do you hear the Genesis language? “**Created.**” “**Heaven and earth.**” “**Beginning.**” And who is it that Paul has said is doing this? He uses this language:

¹² Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., “Cathcart, Kevin; McNamara, Martin; Maher, Michael,” trans. Martin McNamara, *The Aramaic BibleA: Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 52.

“His beloved Son” (vs. 13). Guess what? Many church Fathers knew of translations of Genesis 1:1 that went this way, “In the beginning, God became a Son”¹³ or “In the beginning, God made for himself a Son.”¹⁴ Those are probably heretical ideas, depending on the exact Greek terms. But Jerome states the opinions of people this way, “Most people think that in the Hebrew is contained in the Son, God made heaven and earth.”¹⁵ This is certainly orthodox. Jerome and Tertullian did not think you could get this from Genesis 1:1. But others, like Origen believed it was possible. How could anyone ever get this idea?

They get it from the idea of *reshith*/beginning/first. What if the Hebrew was talking about first *as preeminence*? The word carries this meaning in places in the OT. “Amalek was the first (*reshith*) among the nations” (Num 24:20). “[Leviathan] is the first of the works of God” (Job 40:19). Sometimes the first-born was the *reshith* as in “Reuben, you are my first-born (*bekor*); My might and the beginning (*reshith*) of my strength” (Gen 49:3). Paul seems to be taking very Jewish ideas like this and applying them to Jesus at creation.¹⁶ So the idea is that In the First, that is in the Firstborn Son, God began creating. Fascinating!

Let There Be Light

So the NT, following the lead of the OT Targums and other books has Jesus as the Word, and even the Gospel of John sees the Word there in Genesis 1:1. But there is more in Genesis 1:3 that relates to Christ. What we want to look at now is the idea of light. It literally says, “... let there be light, and there was light.” This is the first thing God is said to actually do in the Bible. But what is he doing? There are two possibilities.

The first is that God is creating light. In other words, this is the first creative act. He creates light out of nothing. This interpretation is very old. Jubilees 2:2 speaks about seven creative acts of God here. He created the heavens, the earth, the waters, all the spirits (angels), the abyss, darkness, and light. God created the light. If

¹³ Jerome cites a now lost work of Aristo of Pella, *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*.

¹⁴ See Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 5.1.

¹⁵ Jerome, *Questions in Hebrew*, in Genesis ii. 507. Quoted in *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, trans. C. T. R. Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 30. http://books.google.com/books?id=TgCUWA-6-L4C&pg=PA100&lpg=PA100&dq=jerome+hebrew+questions+in+the+son+creation&source=bl&ots=SJcf2uQ uJh&sig=Nwd8DCIrFQHNY-H_uMsNmhlId1c&hl=en&sa=X&ei=X6UoUpfNGJDlyG-kICoDA&ved=0CCkQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=jerome%20hebrew%20questions%20in%20the%20son%20creation&f=false

¹⁶ The Jewish translation of the verse even has the same words as we find in the Reuben verse: *reshith* and *bekor*. And there are wordplays with *rosh* (head) and *ri-shon* (preeminent).

it is a created light source, what might it be? Some suggest that it was actually the sun, and that Genesis 1 is a literary framework where days 1-3 are repeated with a different perspective in days 4-6. Others suggest that it was simply a different created light source that we now know nothing about.

Certainly, light is created. **Isaiah 45:7** says as much, and may even be reflecting on this passage. “**I form the light and create darkness.**” Forming and creating overlap in meaning here, even as these same words do throughout Genesis 1-2. Certainly God did create the sun, and if this is a created light source different from the sun here, he created that too.

But it is just as possible that **God is not actually creating the light** in Genesis 1:3, as in creation *ex nihilo* from nothing. What do I mean, not creating light? Of course he is creating light. Is he? It merely says, “**Let there be light.**” It could be a creation out of nothing, or it could be **a kind of revealing** of what is already there. Here’s what I mean.

The idea here fits in line more with the way John seems to take the light. After saying that the Word was God, he says, “**In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it**” (**John 1:4-5**). Jesus, he will say throughout the rest of the book, is the **Light of God**. Isaiah says as much himself in a different place. In a Messianic prophecy, “**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light**” (**Isa 9:2**). This is fulfilled by Jesus, according to **Matthew 4:16**, when he first leaves Nazareth and goes into the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Another passage in Isaiah says, “**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you**” (**Isa 60:1**). Then, reflecting upon creation as he talks about the Day of the LORD (note: it is a day, not night), “**The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory**” (**Isa 60:19**). Revelation takes this verse and applies it this way, “**The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb**” (**Rev 21:23**).

The Jew Philo, who never converted to Christ, but has many ideas similar to the Gospel of John seems to be thinking in an analogous way that the light is not created. “**That invisible and intelligible light has come into being as image of the divine Logos which communicated its genesis.**” “**It is a star above the heavens, the source of those stars which are perceptible by the external senses, and if any one were to call it universal light he would not be very wrong; since it is from that the**

sun and the moon, and all the other planets and fixed stars derive their due light, in proportion as each has power given to it; that unmingled and pure light being obscured when it begins to change, according to the change from that which is perceptible only by the intellect, to that which is perceptible by the external senses; for none of those things which are perceptible to the external senses is pure” (*Creation, 31*). And so with all of these ideas circling around, the **Nicene Creed** says that Jesus is “Light of God, true God of true God, begotten not made.” Indeed, strictly speaking, the verb “to make” does not appear on day 1, but it does appear on day 2.¹⁷ By saying “let there be light” is could be talking about the revealing of Christ to the universe. Either idea is possible.

So was the light created or uncreated? I’m not sure. But I do know that Christ is likened in more than one place to the light of day one. Listen to the language of Hebrews. “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (**Heb 1:3**). Like Paul in Colossians, Jesus is not introduced to us by his name, but by his title: **Son**, which we have seen has a possible relationship to Genesis 1:1. “He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (**Heb 1:2**).

The word for radiance here is never used anywhere else in Scripture. It is used in **Wisdom 7:26** of Wisdom, “For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.” Philo also uses the word of objects in the sanctuary “as meaning a splendor emitted from holy objects” (**Philo, Noah’s Work as a Planter 50**). Without a doubt, it is a kind of light or ray. Hebrews applies this to Jesus.

Now, the Word and the Light come together in other places in the Scripture. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (**Ps 119:105**). “The unfolding of your words gives light” (**Ps 119:130**). “It is you who light my lamp;

¹⁷ There is a very interesting parallel between the Hebrew of Genesis 1:3 and Ex 7:8-10. In the parallel, the staff was not created out of nothing. It already existed. The serpent, however, appeared from the staff.

Gen 1:3	Ex 7:8-10
And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.	And the LORD said to Moses ... (Take your staff) that it may become a serpent ... and it became a serpent.
<i>Wayyomer elohim yubi or wayubi or.</i>	<i>Wayyomer yhwb ... yubi lutannin ... wayubi lutannin.</i>

the LORD my God lightens my darkness” (Ps 18:28). From what we have seen, this could refer to God’s words or his Word, to what God says or to the Son. Or, perhaps there is a kind of mysterious uniting of them so that both could be viewed together. This is what Genesis 1 begins with. This is the first activity of God.

One scholar summarized this idea by calling the story a “lightscape.” You can’t find this word in a dictionary. You do find “landscape.” In art, a [landscape](#) is a picture representing natural scenery. It is usually a very extensive vista, but it comes from a viewpoint. My aunt and uncle have a ranch on a hill west of Craig, CO. He designed his home so that the living room window directly faces Cedar Mountain, an ancient dormant volcano. Then he planted trees so that they would frame the view. Every time I go there, I marvel at this landscape, this living work of art. Yet, if you move just a few feet away, the trees block the view on either side.

Genesis 1:1-3, indeed, the entire section on creation may be viewed in this way through the lens of light. It is a [lightscape](#).

The divine light marks something of the divine presence in the world; it informs the moral vision of the world in Genesis 1 ... Genesis 1 is a textual “lightscape,” designed to affect those who “enter” it. “Lightscapes” have a purpose: “lightscapes are socially constructed to shed light for the world.”¹⁸ They may offer a sense of divine presence in the world that attracts people. In the case of Genesis 1, this divine “lightscape” expresses a deep sense of God’s presence in the world, and at the same time it also points to the ultimate unknowability of God. We may see God’s light, but it is also so dazzling that we cannot see God face to face.¹⁹

I would say this just about hits the nail on the head. For all that we think Genesis 1 is or may be, this is the proper framework to view it from. Move a little to either side, and you may miss it entirely. Don’t miss Christ. Scripture implores you not to miss him. The early Jews anticipated him in their Memra. But later Jews rejected him in favor only of Torah: Law. Law apart from Christ. I can’t think of a much more horrible burden than this.

The early Christians saw him as the Son of God right here at the beginning. Colossians, John, Hebrews and others direct our gaze at the radiant one who is covered in the Glory of God as the Spirit covers the deep. God is here. This is his

¹⁸ Here he cites Mikkel Bille and Tan Flohr Sorensen, “An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light,” *Journal of Material Culture* 12/3 (2007): 263-84 who seem to have coined the term.

¹⁹ [Mark S. Smith](#). *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*, Kindle edition.

creation. Creation for the Father. Creation through the Holy Spirit. Creation by the Son.

Imagine the idea of the Son being clothed by the Spirit and the Son being the visible display of the invisible God to all of creation and you begin to get the idea of the three working together. What is on display at creation? Creation, yes, but more than creation. It is the creation's God—the Creator. In one of the great creation stories in the Bible, the Psalm begins says, “You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent” (Ps 104:1-2). The word is central, as is light. “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb 11:3). The light makes the invisible, visible. The things unseen because of darkness become recognizable in the light. Therefore, see the Light of God in Jesus Christ and you will have discovered the beginnings of the great creation story. You will have discovered life. For in his light, there is life.