

The Son of God as “The Beginning” in Proverbs 8

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The earliest Christian pastors, apologists, and martyrs did not view the Son of God as modern Trinitarians do. The Son was neither co-equal nor co-eternal with the Father. God the Father alone was unbegotten, uncreated, without beginning or end, Sovereign over all. There were certain key passages from the Old Testament that these writers used, but none more important than Proverbs 8, which defines a being called “Wisdom” who was “begotten” by the Father at the beginning of the creation, and who was His assistant in creating all things. This Person was referred to as “The Beginning,” “Wisdom,” “Logos” (Word), “the Angel (Messenger) of YHVH,” and other titles.

The comments below are from Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with a Jew named Trypho, and reflect the consistent testimony of the earliest Christians immediately after the Apostles.

*“I shall give you another testimony, my friends,” said I, “from the Scriptures, that **God begat before all creatures a Beginning**, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Word; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father’s will, and since **He was begotten of the Father** by an act of will; The Word of Wisdom, who is Himself this God **begotten of the Father** of all things, and Word, and Wisdom, and Power, and the Glory of the Begetter, will bear evidence to me, ...”¹*

“And the same sentiment was expressed, my friends, by the word of God [written] by Moses, when it indicated to us, with regard to Him whom it has pointed out, that God speaks in the creation of man with the very same design, in the following words: ‘Let Us make man after our image and likeness. ... I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with someone who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being. These are the words: ‘And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of Us, to know good and evil.’ In saying, therefore, ‘as one of Us,’ [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of

¹ Justin, Dialogue, ch. lxi

angels. But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God,² who has also declared this same thing in the revelation made by Joshua the son of Nave (Nun)."³

In support of this concept, the earliest writers sometimes appealed to the words of Jesus Himself in John 8:42 which reads in the Greek: εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἦν ἠγαπᾶτε ἄν ἐμέ, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἦκω ("If God was your Father, you would love Me, for out of God I issued forth and have come"). The verb translated "issued forth" ἐξῆλθον is aorist indicative – referring to a specific historical event. The early Christians understood this statement as pointing to the Son's having been "begotten" out of the Father Himself at the beginning of day one of creation. Thus the Son was of the same "kind" (deity) as the Father since all things procreate after their "kind."⁴

The Old Testament passage most often referenced by these writers concerning when the Son was "begotten" by God was Proverbs 8:22-25 which describes a person called "Wisdom." The early Christians used the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as their Bible, in part because most of the quotes in the New Testament come from the Septuagint, particularly in Paul's writings. Many passages in the New Testament cannot be properly understood without the Septuagint as their base.

Proverbs 8:22-25 (LXX)

22 κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ

"The Lord made Me THE BEGINNING of His ways for His works."

23 πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ

"Before the age He established Me in the beginning."

24 πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὰς ἀβύσσους ποιῆσαι πρὸ τοῦ προελθεῖν τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων

"Before the creating of the land, and before the creating of the deep, before the fountains of water came forth"

25 πρὸ τοῦ ὄρη ἐδρασθῆναι πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾶ με

"before the mountains were settled, before all hills, HE BEGETS ME."

² Prov. 8:22-31

³ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxii

⁴ Gen. 1:21,24,25 etc. The words "after its kind" κατὰ γένος (LXX), literally "according to generation," and refers to procreation from the original pair.

In vs. 22, the clause “made Me the Beginning” is not “made Me IN the beginning.” That would require that “the beginning” be the object of the preposition “in,” which does not appear in the text. If the preposition “in” was implied, “beginning” would have to be in the dative case since “ἐν” (in) always takes a dative case object. (Compare verse 23 which has “in the beginning” ἐν ἀρχῇ). However, there is no preposition in verse 22, and “THE BEGINNING” is in the accusative case. It is the direct object of the verb “made.” Therefore, the sense is that God made Him “THE BEGINNING” – the one who is called “Wisdom.” The name or title “The Beginning” points to the beginning of God's works of creation in this context, the beginning of time itself as defined by the six days.

All of verses 23-25 reference the things God created within the six days. Before creating these things, God “beget” an offspring. And this offspring is called “the Beginning” specifically because His begetting was prior to all created things. The passage goes on to show that this “begotten” one was co-creator with God, working as His protégé .

27 ἡνίκα ἠτοίμαζεν τὸν οὐρανὸν συμπαρήμην αὐτῷ καὶ ὅτε ἀφώριζεν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θρόνον ἐπ’ ἀνέμων

“When He was preparing the heaven, I was together with Him. And when He set apart His throne upon the winds”

28 ἡνίκα ἰσχυρὰ ἐποίει τὰ ἄνω νέφη καὶ ὡς ἀσφαλεῖς ἐτίθει πηγὰς τῆς ὑπ’ οὐρανὸν

“and when He was making the clouds above strong, and as He was setting the established fountains beneath the sky”

29 καὶ ἰσχυρὰ ἐποίει τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς

“and making the foundations of the land strong”

30 ἦμην παρ’ αὐτῷ ἀρμόζουσα ἐγὼ ἦμην ἣ προσέχαιρεν καθ’ ἡμέραν δὲ εὐφραινόμενην ἐν προσώπῳ αὐτοῦ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ

“I was beside Him, fine-crafting. I was His delight, and according to each day I was rejoicing in his presence in each appointed time.”

The early Christians were correct in referring to Jesus by the title, “The Beginning,” and deriving this title from Proverbs 8 (LXX). Jesus Himself made this claim, but it is incorrectly translated in most English versions.⁵

⁵ The Douay Rheims version actually translated this verse correctly. However, most English versions translate Τὴν ἀρχὴν (The Beginning) as “from the beginning,” making this a prepositional phrase modifying the verb λαλῶ (saying, speaking). However, Τὴν ἀρχὴν (The Beginning) is in the accusative case because it is the direct answer to the question, “Who are You?” That is, it is the direct object of the implied “I am ...”. If Τὴν ἀρχὴν was intended as a prepositional phrase with the preposition “from” implied, then it would have to be in the genitive case as in the prepositional phrase, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (“he was a murder from the beginning”) in verse 44.

John 8:20-25 LGV

20 These sayings Jesus spoke in the treasury, teaching on the Temple [grounds], and no one arrested Him because His hour had not yet arrived. 21 Then Jesus said to them again, *“I am leaving and you will search for Me, and you will die in your sins. Where I am going you are powerless to come.”* 22 Then the Judeans said, *“Will he kill himself since he says, ‘Where I am going you are powerless to come?’”* 23 And He said to them, *“You are out from what is below; I am out from what is above. You are out from this world; I am not out from this world. 24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins. For unless you should believe that I am [this], you will die in your sins.”* 25 Then they said to Him, *“Who are you?”* And Jesus said to them, *“The Beginning, and that which I am saying to you.”*

The Douay Rheims version actually translated verse 25 correctly, *“They said therefore to him: Who art thou? Jesus said to them: The beginning, who also speak unto you.”* However, most English versions translate Τὴν ἀρχὴν (The Beginning) as *“from the beginning,”* making it a prepositional phrase modifying the verb λαλῶ (saying, speaking) by adding the preposition *“from.”* However, Τὴν ἀρχὴν (The Beginning) is in the accusative case here because it is the direct answer to the question, *“Who are You?”* That is, it is the direct object of the implied *“I am ...”*. If Τὴν ἀρχὴν was intended as a prepositional phrase with the preposition *“from”* implied, then it would have to be in the genitive case as in the prepositional phrase, ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς (*“he was a murder from the beginning”*) in verse 44. Unfortunately, due to translator bias, our English Bibles are corrupted here, giving cover to wrong doctrine.

A few verses later, Jesus explained His true origin, which is derived from the last clause in Proverbs 8:25, γεννᾶ με (*“He begets Me”*).

42 Jesus said to them, *“If God was your Father, you were loving Me, for I issued forth out of God,⁶ and am come. For I have not come from Myself, but He sent Me.”*

⁶ ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον (*“For I out of God issued forth”*). The use of the aorist tense indicates a historical event in the past, but not a present state as the perfect tense would indicate. The Son of God was *“with God”* and *“was God”* to Adam at the time referred to as *“in the beginning”* (John 1:1). As *“the only-begotten of the Father,”* the Son of God was literally *“begotten”* out of God Himself as a distinct Person (Son) at a specific point in time, referred to in Psalm 2:7 as *“Today.”* This does not refer to the incarnation, since in no sense could that event be spoken of as the Person of the Son issuing forth out of God Himself (the true essence of *“begetting”*). Rather, that event is spoken of by the Son Himself as *“a body you have prepared for Me”* (Psalm 40:6-8 LXX; Heb. 9:4). John 8:42 defines what Jesus meant by calling God His *“Father”* and acknowledging His title as *“The Beginning”* (vs. 25).

Paul also applied the title from Proverbs 8 “The Beginning” to Jesus, and did so while referring to the context of Proverbs 8, the creation of all things through the Son.

Colossians 1:15-18 LGV

15 He is the image of the God who is unseen, first-produced of all creation, 16 because through Him everything was created, what is in the heavens and what is on the land, the seen and the unseen (including thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities). Everything has been created through Him and for Him. 17 And **He is before everyone**, and everything has stood together in Him. 18 And He is the head of the Body (the assembly), **who is The Beginning**, first-produced out from among the dead, so that in everything He should become the prototype.

There is simply no question that Paul was referencing Proverbs 8, and that he understood it to refer to the Son of God. His use of this unique title for the Son of God, “**The Beginning**” is a direct quote of Proverbs 8:22 LXX. Paul’s emphasizing the Son’s participation in creating all things, including the angelic realm, is derived directly from Proverbs 8:27-30 as well as his statement “*He is before everyone*,” pointing back to all of the “before” statements in Prov. 8:23-25. The title “First-produced of all creation” places the origin of the Son before any of God’s creatures. The Son was “begotten” BEFORE all of the things listed in those verses were created. Colossians 1:15-18 is a commentary on Proverbs 8:22-30, applying it all to the Son of God.

In the book of Revelation, we have Jesus referring to Himself by the same title, drawn from Proverbs 8:22.

Revelation 3:14 (LGV)

14 “And to the messenger for the assembly in Laodicea write, ‘The Amen, The Faithful and True Witness, **The Beginning of God’s creation**, says this:

Solomon himself understood that the one described in Proverbs 8 as having been “begotten” by God, who was God’s agent in creation, was the “Son” of God.

Proverbs 30:4 (NKJV)

4 Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?

Who has gathered the wind in His fists?

Who has bound the waters in a garment?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, If you know?

John knew what most modern Christians (both Trinitarian and Unitarian) do not know, that Proverbs 8 refers to Christ.

John 3:13 (LGV)

13 And no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, the one being in the heaven.

This is a reference to the “Son” of God in Proverbs 30:4, which is itself an explanation of “Wisdom” in Proverbs 8:22-30. No wonder John wrote:

John 1:1-3 (LGV)

1 In the beginning was Logos, and Logos was with God, and Logos was God.

2 This one was in the beginning with God. 3 Everything originated through Him, and without Him nothing originated which has originated.

Jesus Himself indicated that He was “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8.

Luke 11:49 NRSV

49 Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’

Matthew 23:34 NKJV

34 “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city,

The statement, “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said,” are Luke’s words as the writer and narrator. Since it is clear in both Luke and Matthew that Jesus spoke these words, Luke was referring to Jesus by the proper name “Wisdom.” Luke says, “the Wisdom of God (Jesus) said, ...”

Luke was Paul’s companion, and wrote his Gospel for the benefit of the local assemblies that Paul established. The idea that Jesus was “Wisdom” from Proverbs 8 can be seen in Paul’s own writings.

1 Cor. 1:22-31 NKJV

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the [P]ower⁷ of God and the [W]isdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us [W]isdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption –

31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Paul then explains that all this was a "hidden mystery" in the Old Testament for a very good reason.

1 Cor. 2:6-8

6 However, we speak [W]isdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

7 But we speak the [W]isdom of God in a mystery, the hidden [W]isdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁷ See our article, "The 'Son of God' in the Gospels,"
<http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/God/Synoptics.pdf>