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Does Hebrews 1:5 Indicate Jesus Was Created?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether Hebrews 1:5 indicates Jesus was created and the difference between the sinful way of testing God (e.g. Matthew 4:5-7) and the right way of testing him (e.g., Psalm 34:8 and John 7:17).

* How should I respond to a Jehovah's Witness who points to Hebrews 1:5 ("I have become your father," in the New World Translation) as evidence Jesus was created?

* Matthew 4 says it's a sin to put God to the test, but isn't there another sense in which we're supposed to test him (e.g., Psalm 34:8 and John 7:17)? What's the difference between the two?

Transcript

(upbeat music) (bell dings) - I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Coco and you're listening to Stand to Reasons, #straskpodcast. Welcome, we're glad you're here. (laughs) All right, Greg, let's start with a question from Jim.

I was having a discussion with a Jehovah's Witness friend who pointed to Hebrews 1-5, which references Psalm 2-7, as evidence that Jesus is a created being. It says, "I have become your father," which would indicate that the father was not always a father, and therefore Jesus was not present at a certain time. Does this contradict the Trinity? - That reading, of course, would, and if he's reading, "I have become your father," obviously he's reading from the New World Translation.

Now, just as an aside, that's the Jehovah's Witness translation. That is a corrupt translation, I'm just saying. No other Greek scholars agree with their take on certain passages that are meant to deflect reference to the divinity of Christ.

Now, I'm reading the New American Standard, which is a very careful and precise literal translation, and some would say almost a wooden translation. They think it reads a little stiff because it's trying to be as precise as possible. And there it says, "For to which of the angels "did he ever say, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you.'" Now, the word

father isn't in there, all right? The word is monoconous, that means only, let's see.

Oh, actually I don't know what the word is in this particular case. Only begotten is monoconous, but in the Greek, that's one word, not two. So only isn't referring, modifying begotten, rather it's only begotten, it's one of a kind, is the point there, okay? So this may be different in this passage, but nanny then, let's just say, "You are my son, today I have become "a father to you." That means Jesus came into existence at some point in the past, and that would mean also then that Jesus is not divine, he is a created being, okay? That would be their point from this verse.

Part of the difficulty, even from the internal evidence of Hebrews chapter one is the rest of the passage. So let me just start at the beginning, all right? God after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets, in many portions, in many ways, in the last days has spoken to us in his son, okay? So far so good, J.W.'s, whom he appointed, the ear of all things, through whom also he made the world. Okay, Jesus was the one who made everything.

All right, I should say the word, made everything, Jesus is the word become flesh. And he, the word, verse three, is the radiance of his glory, and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power. Whoa, now that doesn't sound like a created being.

That's the introduction to this section. Then in verse five, you are my son, today I have begotten you. What does that mean? I'm not sure, okay? And in fact, I sometimes get tripped up with begotten language 'cause I don't know what to do with it always in a context.

But sometimes with hermeneutics, when you're studying scripture, carefully, you may not be able to determine what a word does mean, but from the context, you can eliminate options about what you can make, you could show what it doesn't mean by eliminating options, okay? So if we're saying this means Jesus was created and therefore he wasn't divine, then how is it that he could be the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature and uphold all things by the word of his power? How could that apply to a created being? Okay, but I continue. And he, for six, and he again brings the firstborn, monogoness, firstborn means preeminent one. It doesn't mean the first one born.

That's why in your English it's one word. Into the world he says, and let all the angels of God worship him. Really? The angels are supposed to worship the son? But of the son he says, verse eight, your throne, oh God, is forever and ever.

And the righteous scepter is the scepter of his kingdom. You have love righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore God, your God has anointed you.

So David is calling this one God, who is anointed by God, okay? You Lord, verse 10, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. So all of these sentences apart from just setting aside verse five, today I've forgotten you, or today I've become a father to you in the new world translation. All of them seem to point very powerfully towards the divinity of Jesus, or of the word who became Jesus, all right? And that he was the creator.

Now, I know what Jehovah's Witnesses are going to say. Yes, God first created the word, and then the word was the one through whom all else were created, all right? He was the vehicle, okay? Now you go back to, I think Isaiah 45, which has a bunch of verses there that are favorites of Jehovah's Witnesses. It says, I'm the one who created I and I alone, okay? Of Jehovah God, I can turn there.

Maybe, but instead I'm just gonna turn to John chapter one, because that is the prologue for the biography of Jesus. And John chapter one starts this way, in the beginning was the word. And the word, by the way, notice the similarity between the beginning of Jesus' life and the beginning of the story in Genesis one, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

That's what we got at the beginning of the story. Here's how Jesus' life is begun by John. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

Now, Jehovah's Witnesses wanna put an article there. He was a God, okay? Keep reading. He was in the beginning with God.

All verse three, all things came into being through him, and apart from him, nothing came into being. That has come into being. Now, that is completely univocal, meaning there's only one way to understand verse three.

You can fuss all you want about the Greek in verse one, God or a God. Verse three is not ambiguous, even in the New World translation. And apart from him, and clearly this means apart from his agency, apart from him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

In other words, the word is responsible for every single thing that exists. So when you look at the Hebrews passage, which includes two references to the word creating everything that was ever created, or creating everything in the world, in the heavens, et cetera, et cetera. Then you go back to John chapter one, verse three, and you realize it's not just that he created everything, but he created everything that was ever created.

Then you can't say, but he was first created by God. And he is a created being who created everything else. So that creates a conflict, their take of Hebrews, even if I can't make any sense of, all right, what does verse five mean? When it says, today I've begotten you, all the other things, the exact representation of his nature upholds all

things by the word of his power, the angels worship him, God, my God has, et cetera, and all that other stuff.

Then two references to creating everything. And then when you go back to John, it says this one also called the word, created everything that's ever been created. And you go back to Isaiah and he says, God says, I created all by myself.

This kind of cements the doctrine biblically that the word is the God of scripture. Even if I'm still a little bit ambiguous, or the passage is ambiguous to my understanding about having been begotten. So thoughts on that, Amy, I'm gonna turn to Isaiah 45 where you're sharing if you have something to offer.

- Well, I came across something and I'm not quite sure what to make of this yet, but this is what it says in Acts 13, 32, and 33, because it actually talks about today I have begotten you, and it puts in a certain context. Here's what it says, "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that he raised up Jesus as it is also written in the second Psalm, you are my son today, I have begotten you." So here in Acts, he's comparing this, you are my son today, I have begotten you to the idea that he raised up Jesus as a fulfillment of his promise. And so I think it could be basically the, simply the installation of Jesus as our king, kind of when he's the heir of all the promises of God after he completes what he's done and he's raised from the dead.

In fact, even if you go back to Psalm 27, starting in verse six, "But as for me, I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain, I will surely tell the decree of the Lord. He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you, ask of me and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance and the very ends of the earth as your possession.'" So even in that case, it doesn't sound like a creation moment. It sounds like he's talking about, he says, "I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain." And then he says, "Today I've begotten you and then ask of me and receive the inheritance." Even there, it sounds like he's talking about his installation as the heir of all the promises of God, which back in Acts, they say, has to do with his being raised from the dead.

So what do you think about that? - See, now that adds more clarity, I think. So my approach was to say, even if begotten is a mystery, it can't mean created. And here's the reasons why, even in the context of Hebrews 1, we have all of these kinds of references that indicate that this one being spoken of is God himself, which is why the angels worship him, why he's the creator of these different things and why he's characterized as having the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature.

Then going back to John chapter 1, you see in more clarity that the word was the one responsible for creating everything that was ever created, therefore the word is the uncreated creator. Now this wouldn't make any sense unless the word was God. But if

the word was God, then God is the creator, yes, to the medium of the second person who is also God.

And what you did is took at another step and say, well, we can find some more clarity about the begotten part by looking at the way the concept of begottenness, particularly out of Psalm 2, is referred to in other circumstances in scripture. So that flesh is out that way. So what we have here is a Jehovah's Witness standing, balancing on one verse, so to speak, with their translation, which is questionable, all right.

And even if we go with that, I became a father to you, they then read that as being created in time and therefore not being divine. And they're standing there with their blinders on regarding all the other verses in that passage and the other texts that help us to understand something about the nature of this one called the word and the nature of begottenness. The only way that the Jehovah's Witness can hang on to this as supporting Jesus being created, or should say the word being a created being, is to balance on that verse on their tippy toes and not fall into any other passages that relate to this issue and say, well, this is the way it is.

Our way of approaching this, and I've said this many times, solves the textual problem. The Trinity is a solution, it's not a problem. It's the only way of understanding all of these texts that both Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians hold to be inspired.

It's the only way of holding them all together so there is no contradiction. And the way they avoid contradiction is by changing the translation. I know that sounds like a harsh thing to say, but that's what they do.

They change the translation. Now, as it turns out, they can't change everything. And you can go through the New World translation even in John chapter one verse three and you can make the point that Jesus is the uncreated creator right from their own translation.

Now, we have a piece on our website regarding those first opening verses of John and Jesus' divinity, the words divinity, written a piece called the "Dee any of Christ" case closed. But I have included that material in the new book and that's "Street Swarts" coming out in June. So because I have two chapters on Jesus, challenges regarding Jesus and one of them is Jesus is that the divinity of Christ and that's challenged by Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses in a certain fashion from LDS and other groups that identify in some way with Christianity but are not Christian.

So this is a very good argument and I got it from the late Bob Passantino actually and it's an ancient argument, you know, and he passed it on to me and so I've leveraged it quite often to make this wonderful point that Jesus is God clearly stated by John identifying the word as the uncreated creator, which word then became flesh and dwelt among us. - And even if you don't go to John, as you've pointed out in Hebrews, you just have to look the context there of what he's talking about making the point that he's greater than all

of these other created beings. Okay, Greg, let's go to a question from Adam.

I know it's a sin to put God to the test, Matthew 4, but isn't there another sense in which we are supposed to? And then he quotes, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," Psalm 34, 8, and John 7, 17. "What is a good way to think about the difference?" - Well, I think the taste and see that the Lord is good is a appeal to embrace him and follow him and enjoy him. So I guess you could say that's a test quote unquote, like I'm testing the meal that someone else has.

Give me a bite of that. Maybe I'll like it and I'll order that too or something. I actually do this.

So I guess I don't want to order something I don't like. I guess you can call that a test. You're testing it in a certain fashion.

It's another thing though, to say, your friend is offering a meal. I said, "Wait, I'm gonna have a chemist tested to make sure you're not poisoning me." Okay, so there's a sense of test can be in either case, but it's very different, all right? The kind of test that was condemned by Jesus is that you throw yourself into a circumstance where God must act to rescue you. And that's what Jesus was being tempted to do, throw yourself down from the temple, okay? Some people say, "Well, I pray to God, and I'm going to do this act and pursue this course of action.

If God doesn't want me to pursue that, he's gonna have to stop me." I mean, it's kind of a little bit of a twisted way of kind of knowing the will of God. I'm not sure if it's this or this or this. So I'm just praying, God, if this is not what you want me to do, now this is presuming a model in which God is making the decisions for us largely, hinting at what those decisions are that he's made so that we can then follow along, and we call that following God's will, or discovering God's will for our life.

And we've talked about it many times, I think this is not a biblical approach at all. But one variation of that is in the uncertainty, okay, I'm gonna do this, and if you don't want me to do this, then you stop me. Well, God has no obligation to stop you from doing something, something stupid or even sinful.

And then to presume that if you do this and he doesn't stop you, it's what he wanted you to do. Now you're drawing a wrong kind of conclusion about God without good, no biblical justification. That would be an example of testing God in the inappropriate sense, okay? One could say that Moses tested God a number of times in the good sense, in that God was angry at the Hebrew people because of their idolatry there, while Moses was up in Mount Sinai, and God says, okay, I'm gonna destroy them all.

And Moses said, you can't do that. You gave your word. These are your people.

You can't destroy, he said, I'll raise up a nation out of you, Moses, no, you already gave

that promise to Abraham. So what Moses was doing was appropriately holding God to his word. Now, I don't, I think God knew what he was doing all along, you know, and so we have an anthropomorphism as his anger is being expressed there.

And he meant to keep his promise regarding Abraham. And this was an occasion for Moses to be a priest regarding the people and stand up between God and the people and commend the people to God and argue on their behalf. So I guess you might say that's testing God, that's holding God to his promise, but it's holding God to his promise in an appropriate fashion.

I think sometimes that might be a little bit tricky, but at least those are the extreme characterization. Sometimes it's certainly appropriate to take God as his word, but you don't throw yourself into a circumstance where you, where you, you, you force God to act because he's not obliged to act and he may just let you fall, you know, that's dumb. - It strikes me, well, when I think about, in the case of Jesus where he says, it's written, don't put the Lord, your God to the test, when Satan's saying throw yourself off here, 'cause here's what God says, that's a kind of manipulation of God, of using him for your own purposes, I guess, trying to trick him according to his word almost.

There's kind of a sense of manipulation or using in that sense. Whereas when you're saying taste and see that the Lord is good, what you're doing is inviting people to trust him and to see that he is faithful. So that seems like a, like, one is trying to see, well, are you really gonna do what you say and maybe you're trying to use it for your own purposes and the other one is, you know, you're trusting him.

You're living the way he wants you to live and you're finding out that there's beauty in that. So I think, I'm thinking about other ways that the Israelites tested God or times when they, for example, when they say, well, when I think about when they needed water, they said something like, well, now you're just gonna, you brought us here and now you're just gonna let us die of thirst. And there's kind of a sense of I'm gonna manipulate you by using what you said you were gonna do and using that against you so that you give me what I want.

Rather than saying, God, we have no water and I'm gonna trust you. I'm gonna trust the covenant that you've made with me and I will see that you are good. There's two different approaches to that.

I think that we can see both in the Bible, the way people respond to things like this. - What do you think, Greg? - Thank you, right. - Okay.

All right. Oh, wow, we are done. I didn't even realize.

All right, thank you for your questions. Jim and Adam, we appreciate hearing from you. Send us your questions on Twitter with the hashtag #STRask or you can go through our

website.

Just find the hashtag #STRask podcast page and you'll see a link there. And you can send us your question. We look forward to hearing from you.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason. (bell dings)

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