

CREATION THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT LOOKING GLASS

The New Testament testimony to Creation is no problem for today's followers of Christ.

Scripture deals with the most important human questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? While the New Testament preaches the good news about salvation and points to a wonderful future for those who choose to follow Christ, it also addresses the issue of Creation.

The Creation Theme in the New Testament

The New Testament refers to Creation quite frequently. All the larger New Testament books, namely the Gospels, Acts, Romans, the Cor-

inthian letters, Hebrews, and Revelation, in addition to a number of the smaller epistles, contain quotations or allusions relating to the Creation account in Genesis 1–2. The strongest emphasis on Creation is found in the letters to the Romans and to the Hebrews, as well as in the Book of Revelation.

In some cases, Creation and the Fall are connected. At other times,

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the Fall is referred to alone, yet the Creation context cannot be denied. This is so because Genesis 1–2 and Genesis 3 are closely linked. Furthermore, references to Cain's murder, the mention of several names listed in the genealogy of Genesis 5, and events found in Genesis 4–11 occur in the New Testament.

Genesis 1–2 are not the only Creation texts in the Old Testament. Other important passages on Creation are found in Job 38–42; Psalm 8; 19; 104; Isaiah 40:26–28, 65:17–66:2; Jeremiah 10:11–13; 27:5; 32:17; 51:15, 16; Amos 4:13, 5:8, 9; 9:5, 6; et cetera. All refer to Genesis 1–2. Therefore, Old Testament quotations in the New Testament dealing with Creation are basically taken from Genesis 1–2.

The quotations used in the Gospels are all part of Jesus' response when being questioned about divorce: Genesis 1:27; 2:2, 7, 24. Interestingly enough, these quotations refer to the creation of humankind and to the two divine institutions established at Creation: the Sabbath and marriage.

The Word Family *ktisis*, *ktisma*, *ktio*

Among the New Testament texts dealing with Creation, some use formulas such as “from the foundation of the world.” In addition, the word family *ktisis*, *ktisma*, *ktizo* appears 38 times in the New Testament and

stresses the importance of the concept of Creation in the New Testament.

The noun *ktisma* refers to “creatures” and “everything created.” The word describes what God created in the beginning (1 Tim. 4:4). God's creatures include also humans and animals throughout the past, the present, and the future (James 1:18; Rev. 8:9). Furthermore, Creation surpasses our world and is not limited to this Earth or Solar System. There are created beings in heaven whose creator is God (Rev. 5:13). Consequently, the New Testament teaches that God created the Earth, its atmosphere, and life on this Earth, but also extraterrestrial life forms that are not part of our Creation.

The term *ktisis*, “creation,” refers to “every human institution/creation” in one New Testament quotation (1 Peter 2:13). Usually, however, it describes God's work and initiative. The addition of the adjective *human* indicates that the normal understanding of the term, namely, as God's action and its results, does not apply in this case, but this does not affect any of the other usages of the term in the New Testament.

Ktisis is found in the phrase “the beginning of [the] creation” (Mark 10:6; 13:19; 2 Peter 3:4), which refers to Genesis 1–2. Creation here is God's creative act at the beginning of this world's and humankind's history. In Romans 8, not

only the children of God wait for the future, but the “whole creation groans” (vs. 22, NKJV) and wants to be “set free from its slavery to corruption” (vs. 21, NASB). In this passage, *creation* probably refers to all created beings and is not limited to humankind. In Mark 16:15 and Colossians 1:23, however, when the gospel is preached to “all creation” or “every creature,” the term describes humanity only throughout the centuries of the Christian era. In Romans 8:39 the context seems to suggest that the created beings again include extraterrestrial beings who are not part of our creation. “The first-born of all creation” (Col. 1:15, NASB) and “the Beginning [beginner] of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14, NKJV) is Jesus. Yet, in Christ, people, although creatures of God, can become “a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV; cf. Gal. 6:15). In this case, a spiritual meaning is added to the physical. Because Jesus is the Creator, He can bring about a new creation, people who are reconciled with God through Him and proclaim this reconciliation.

The verb *ktizo* describes God’s activity when He brought about creation, including humanity (Mark 13:19; cf., Matt 19:4; 1 Cor. 11:9; Rev. 10:6). He has created all things (Col. 1:16; Rom. 1:25; Eph. 3:9; Rev. 4:11). Again there is a spiritual dimension: “we are . . . created

in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10, NKJV). Jesus has also broken down the barrier between Israelite and Gentile. Those who believe in Him are one church. He has made (*ktizo*) “the two into one new man” (vs. 15, NASB). Christians are called to “put on the new self” (Eph. 4:24, NIV) which “has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (vs. 24, NASB; cf. Col 3:10). Thus, the term “to create” refers not only to the creation of this Earth and life upon it, but also to Christ’s church, consisting of individuals who form one body. This “spiritual creation” forms a smaller segment of the whole picture and cannot be used to reinterpret physical creation as known from Genesis 1–2 and other texts.

The New Testament contains numerous references to Creation, among them eight direct quotations from Genesis 1–2. The specific Creation language of the word family *ktiz-* describes God’s activity in all cases but one. Other vocabulary needs to be studied. Obviously, the New Testament texts assume that Creation is to be understood literally. God created the heavens and the Earth and various plants and beings. The concept of creation is not limited to that described in Genesis 1–2. Jesus has also created His church. People have become—and even today are becoming—a new creation in Jesus Christ. But this ongoing cre-

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ative activity of God does not challenge the idea of the specific creation of heavens and earth and life upon it at a specific point of time in the past. Rather, because God was able to do the first, He is able to do the other, also.

Jesus Christ and Creation

Jesus and Scripture. The issue of Creation is closely linked to the issue of Scripture as the Word of God. This is the crux in the current debate. If we were not Christians, it probably would be much easier to accept Creation or evolution—or other approaches such as theistic evolution or progressive creation. But we have Scripture, which plays a central role in the life of our faith community as well as in our private lives. Therefore, we must ask: Is Scripture the final authority in the Creation/evolution debate, even if in some cases it seems to contradict interpretation of data produced by science? Or should Scripture be reinterpreted to fit these scientific

models of origins?

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Some scholars have suggested that Jesus favored traditionalism and did not challenge wrong ideas. But the Jesus of the Gospels was willing to handle delicate and controversial issues. Wenham states that Jesus was “prepared to face the cross for defying current misconceptions. Surely he would have been prepared to explain clearly the mingling of divine truth and human error in the Bible, if he had known such to exist.”¹

So, what did Jesus think about Scripture?

1. Jesus believed in the inspira-

When Jesus pointed to the past, He did not do so exclusively to Genesis 1–2. In His speeches He referred to Abel, Noah, and the Flood, all occurring in Genesis 3–11. These passages give the clear impression that according to Jesus, Noah and Abel were real human persons, that Genesis 3–11 is historical narrative, and that a global flood actually happened.

tion of the human authors of the Bible of His time, the Old Testament. He saw all of Scripture as the Word of God through which God had spoken. He considered the prophets reliable mediators of God's Word (Matt. 15:4; 22:31, 32; Mark 12:36).

2. He accepted the historical reliability of Scripture, including all important events of Israel's and humankind's history. He referred to Abraham, Lot and his wife, Isaac, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jonah, and Daniel—and regarded them as historical persons. Scripture is interpreted literally and typologically (John 10:34–36; Matt. 12:42).

3. Divine interventions in human history, as in the form of miracles, were no problem for Jesus (Matt. 12:39–41).

4. He used Scripture as authority and as a weapon against temptation (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

5. He taught that God's will and His work can be recognized through Scripture. He asserted that biblical

doctrines are derived from Scripture, which is the standard by which all behavior and all Christian doctrines must be checked (Matt. 9:13; 19:4–6; 22:31, 32).

6. Jesus believed that Scripture contained genuine prophecy that has been or will be fulfilled. He regarded many of the predictions as fulfilled in Himself and in His ministry (Matt. 11:10; Luke 18:31).

7. Jesus was persuaded that Scripture was directed not only to the original hearers and readers, but also to His generation centuries later (Matt. 13:14; 15:3–8; 19:18, 19).

8. He commanded His followers to know, believe, and obey God's Word (Matt. 22:29; Luke 8:21; 11:28). When He interpreted Scripture, a change occurred in His disciples' lives (Luke 24:25–27, 32–35).

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clear impression that according to Jesus, Noah and Abel were real human persons, that Genesis 3–11 is historical narrative, and that a global flood actually happened. (The comparison between the Flood and Christ's worldwide Second Coming as well as the statement that the unbelievers were destroyed suggests that the Flood was a global event [Matt. 24:39].)

We should expect that Jesus would use the same approach to biblical interpretation when it comes to the Creation account, and this appears in the Gospels. Jesus' statements about Creation can be grouped as follows: (1) indirect references to Creation, (2) direct references to Creation, (3) quotations from Genesis 1–2.

1. *Indirect references to Creation.* Ten texts in the New Testament (KJV), for example, use "foundation of the world" terminology to identify the starting point for this world's history. Thus, the writers of the New Testament saw Creation week as a finite point in time that divided the time and events before it from those that took place after it. As Bible writers referred to Creation, it was not vague or nebulous, but historically specific.

The phrases do not allow us to talk about creation of humanity only and thereby separate it from the rest of creation, but rather the phrases "from/before the foundation of the

world" "refer to the beginning of the whole creation as described in Genesis 1."²

Jesus also referred to preaching the gospel to all Creation: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15, KJV), or "to all creation" (NIV). The proclamation of the gospel is directed to all human beings. The parallel text in Matthew 28:19 talks about "all nations" (KJV). The Book of Acts shows how that commission was carried out. "Creation" or "creature" is used in a restricted sense, referring to humans only. By calling people "creatures" or "creation," Jesus may have been reminding His audience that all human beings are created by God, have intrinsic value, and are God's property. As such they deserve to hear the gospel and be saved.

2. *Direct references to Creation.* Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV). This refers to the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8–11, where the Sabbath is linked with Creation. However, Creation is also present in Mark 2 itself. According to Jesus, the Sabbath is God's creation, as is humanity. The purpose of the Sabbath is to be a blessing to humankind. It is one of the great gifts of Paradise

that has reached us. This text also assumes that humanity was created by God.

Just as the Sabbath and the original Creation were linked in the Old Testament, they are also connected in the New Testament. Humans were already in existence when the Sabbath was made; therefore, the day evidently was made for their use and benefit. It is significant, however, that Adam was not made lord of the Sabbath. The “Son of man,” Jesus Christ, holds that title (Mark 2:28, NKJV).

The shift from verse 27 to verse 28 is abrupt: “Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” The term *therefore* or *so* (NIV) seems to make sense if the One who created humankind and Sabbath is the Son of Man. If this conclusion is correct, Mark 2 is a remarkable text in which Jesus Himself maintains an indirect claim of being the Creator of humankind and of the Sabbath. The New Testament stresses again and again that Jesus is Creator, but it seems that this claim is not found in Jesus’ own statements directly.

Jesus does use direct language, however, in Mark 13:19: “For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the Creation which God created, until now, and never shall” (NASB).

This text is part of the Synoptic Apocalypse. It is a strong statement connecting “to create” with “cre-

ation.” Although it is obvious that God is the creator, it is stressed anyway. The phrase “since the beginning of the creation” is shortened in a number of other statements by Jesus and His followers, but still refers to creation (Matt. 19:4, 8; 1 John 1:1; 2:13, 14). A similar phrase, “in the beginning” (John 1:1, 2; Heb. 1:10), is not just the beginning of humanity, but comprises the entire creation process.

3. *Quotations from Genesis 1–2.* Matthew 19:1–12 and Mark 10:1–12 are parallel texts dealing with the problem of divorce. Jesus was opposed to divorce, but whereas in Matthew, an exception clause is mentioned, such a provision is not made in Mark. In both cases, however, Jesus supported His position by pointing back to Creation and showing God’s intention when He instituted marriage.

Whereas Mark 2 deals with Creation and Sabbath, Mark 10 and Matthew 19 deal with Creation and marriage, the other institution left to us from Paradise. These texts are the clearest reference to the Genesis creation account found in Jesus’ teachings. He quoted Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.

By applying these texts to marriage, Jesus declared that they are foundational to Christians. Creation took place in the beginning. God created. He created the first couple, Adam and Eve. The distinction be-

Humans were created before the Sabbath. They are worthy to attain salvation and must be able to hear the gospel. In Mark 2, the Sabbath is a 24-hour day. This Sabbath refers back to the Creation Sabbath. Obviously, according to Jesus, the Creation days were literal 24-hour days. A literal and close reading of Genesis 1–2 seems to be the proper approach to Scripture.

tween genders was set by God. By quoting from Genesis 1–2, Jesus affirmed the Creation account and the mode of creation as described there. He understood Genesis 1–2 literally and took the two chapters at face value.

Thus the New Testament stresses that Jesus accepted the Bible of His time as the authoritative, trustworthy Word of God. Israel’s history traced back to the Creation account is reliable. All Old Testament characters were real beings who lived in time and space. A real Creation and a real Flood happened. Jesus did not utter any doubts about Scripture, but stressed that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, NKJV).

Jesus held that Creation took place. God created. Creation happened at a definite time. There was a beginning, Creation week, which included all of God’s creative activities described in Genesis 1–2 and the establishment of the Sabbath. Because Jesus mentioned major biblical characters throughout Israel’s history,

the beginning of humanity is not separated from the other creative acts of God in the Creation week.

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Jesus Christ as the Creator

The New Testament affirms repeatedly that Jesus is God, that He exists forever, and that He was incarnated as a human being “when the fullness of the time had come” (Gal. 4:4, NKJV). As such He lived among us, died a shameful and painful death in our place, then was raised from the dead and taken to heaven. He now serves as our High Priest and will come back as King of kings in order to take His people

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home. But in addition to all these functions, Jesus is described as the Creator and the Sustainer of all creation.

This is a unique contribution by the New Testament to the theology of Creation. Although the Old Testament points to Christ as the Creator in a somewhat hidden way (Gen. 1:26; Prov. 8:22), the New Testament clearly spells out that Jesus is the Creator. Though a number of texts emphasize that God has created all things (e.g., Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24, 26; Rom. 1:25), crucial passages stress that Jesus is the Creator. Jesus provides some hints that He is the Creator through proclamation and deeds. In the stilling of the storm, for example, it is left to His disciples to plainly tell us who Jesus is: the Creator-God (John 1:3; Col. 1:15, 16; Heb. 1:2, 10).

All these passages and their contexts show that Jesus is God. Since He is God, He is also Creator. Or vice versa: since He is Creator, “who is

the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15, KJV). These texts exclude Jesus from the realm of created beings. In fact, all things and all beings have been created through Him. The cosmic perspective that includes more than the creation, which we encounter, is spelled out most clearly in Colossians 1. In encountering Jesus, we encounter the Creator.

John 1:1–3 portrays Jesus as the Word, as God, the Creator, and life. Creation is expressed in several ways. This Word existed already “in the beginning” (vs. 1, KJV), a reminder of Genesis 1:1. The Old Testament background of the statement about the Word of God is at least partially found in Psalm 33:6: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (NKJV). Three verses later one reads: “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (NKJV). Jesus is this creative Word of God. And John tells us

explicitly that all things came into existence through Him.

Hebrews 1:10 applies a quotation, namely Psalm 102:25, to Jesus, although the Old Testament context talks about Yahweh as the Creator. The phrase “in the beginning” (KJV) takes us back to Genesis 1:1.

Colossians 1:15–20 is an extensive christological hymn. The first part, stressing Jesus as Creator (vss. 15, 16), corresponds with the last part (vss. 18b–20), in which Jesus is the Reconciler. The very same person who has created all things is able to reconcile all things through His blood shed on the cross.

Therefore, to claim Jesus as Savior but question Him as Creator does not make sense. To claim that He has saved us through His once-and-for-all death on the cross, a short event in history, but maintain that He has created us through an evolutionary process that takes millions of years, is inconsistent.

Furthermore, Jesus’ creative power is seen in the fact that His followers are spiritually re-created. Ephesians 2:10 talks about being “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (NKJV) and 2 Corinthians 5:17 about being a new creation or new creature in Christ. Ephesians 2:15 points to Christ creating one church, the new person, out of two groups, Jews and Gentiles (NLT). None of these creative processes that depend on Christ’s sacrifice on the

cross requires an evolutionary process taking billions of years.

On the other hand, if the biblical testimony is trustworthy, namely that Jesus is the Creator, He must know what creation is all about, and His words carry a weight that surpasses all human knowledge. If it is true that Jesus is the Creator, He should know by which process He has accomplished creation. To claim that creation occurred as described in Genesis—which is the picture presented in the Gospels—while having used an evolutionary process, is deceptive to say the least. Why should we trust Christ with regard to our salvation if we have to question the veracity of His statements on Creation?

Since Jesus is the Creator, we cannot talk about the topic of Creation and the problems related to faith and science without focusing on Him. As crucial as Genesis 1–11 is for the current debate, Jesus cannot be excluded from this discussion.

Jesus’ Disciples and Creation

Jesus’ disciples had much more to say about Creation.

Paul proclaimed “the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them” (Acts 14:15, NKJV), which probably alludes to the Sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:11). This God has “from one man . . . made every nation” (Acts 17:26, NIV). In Romans 5, he men-

tions Adam by name and discusses the consequences of his sin, but also the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. “In Adam all die, [but] in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22, NIV). The creation groans and suffers and longs to be set free “from its slavery to corruption” (Rom. 8:21, NASB) while Christians eagerly wait for the final salvation. Paul knows that Eve was deceived (2 Cor. 11:3) and that Adam was formed first and then Eve (1 Tim. 2:13). The catalogue of vices in Romans 1 is presented in the context of Creation.

Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 when he warns against sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:16) and when he dwells on the relationship between husband and wife, which becomes a symbol for the relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:31). In the context of his discussion of the first resurrection, Paul quotes part of Genesis 2:7, slightly embellished: “The first man Adam became a living being” (1 Cor. 15:45, NKJV).

In Hebrews 4:4, when the issue of rest is discussed, he quotes Genesis 2:2: “God rested on the seventh day from all His works” (NKJV). In Hebrews 11:3, he states: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (NKJV).

Paul bases his theology on a literal reading of the Creation account

and the story of the subsequent Fall. When he uses typology, he compares historical persons with other historical persons. He follows Christ’s approach to interpreting Genesis 1–11.

Like Paul, John is strong in pointing out that Jesus is the Creator. Allusions abound in the Book of Revelation. All things are created by God (Rev. 4:11). God “created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it” (10:6, NKJV). Humankind is called to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (14:7, NKJV). Both texts not only point to Creation, but may refer to the Fourth Commandment (Ex. 20:11). The tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 19), the springs of the water of life (21:6), as well as the serpent (12:9, 17; 20:2) remind us of the original paradise (Gen. 2:9, 10; 3:1, 3, 14, 22, 24). The trumpets and the bowls seem to be an undoing and a reversal of Creation; whereas the description of Revelation 21–22 points to the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and earth—a new Creation.

Again, John used the same understanding of Creation that Jesus and Paul employed. If at the end of the Millennium, God is able to create a new heaven and a new Earth without time spans of millions or billions of years, but brings

John used the same understanding of Creation that Jesus and Paul employed. If at the end of the Millennium, God is able to create a new heaven and a new Earth without time spans of millions or billions of years, but brings them about right after the Millennium, why should He not have used similar techniques right in the beginning?

them about right after the Millennium, why should He not have used similar techniques right in the beginning? We may not be able to understand precisely how He has done that, and there may be conflicting data or interpretations that do not yet fit the great puzzle, but obviously the New Testament confirms a literal reading of the Creation account, a Creation week of 24-hour days, and a short chronology.

Implications for the Current Debate

What are some of the implications for us? We are neither afraid of science nor opposed to it. We can hardly do without it. We appreciate both knowledge that can be gained through science and knowledge that comes through God’s Word. That does not mean that we accept all presuppositions, theories, and philosophical or scientific models on the market.

Thomas C. Oden suggests: “Classical Christian doctrines of Creation do not necessarily deny an evolu-

tion, or the possibility of a natural evolutionary development of nature and history. . . . One can posit a gradual evolutionary process that is not a denial of creation.”³ It seems that Jesus has not left us this choice.

Another author discusses antinomies in science and theology. “Antinomies are resorted to when one single model of reality does not do justice to all the data,” and apparently contradictory statements or laws are both believed to be true. He mentions the nature of light, Christ being totally God and totally human, the doctrine of the Trinity, and others and suggests “that we now stand before two great antinomies: special creation and theistic evolution. Both models can legitimately appeal to supporting sets of data, both scriptural and scientific. . . . Both models have serious problems. . . . As a procedural strategy we must embrace both models.”⁴

This scholar may have overlooked that, for instance, in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity, the

Bible itself furnishes two sets of data. However, this is not true when it comes to the issue of Creation. Jesus does not propose a literal reading of Genesis 1–2 and at the same time a symbolic reading. Second, although antinomies are found in Scripture, that does not mean that all biblical doctrines can be presented as such. In some cases it is an either-or, not a both-and. This author would probably reject a position claiming that we are both justified by grace and saved by works, and so would we. In the end, one must allow Scripture to speak for itself. If it presents antinomies, fine. If not, then we do not construct them.

Van Bemmelen reminds us that “Scripture not only focuses on Christ as Redeemer, but also as Creator, Lord of creation and of the whole history of the world since creation. Therefore, no area of knowledge is excluded from the authority of Christ and His Word, the Scriptures. Some claim that since the Bible is not a textbook of science or history, it should not be used as authoritative in these areas of knowledge. While this claim is true in a technical sense, it becomes a frontal attack on the authority of the Bible if the truthfulness of its clear record of the creation and its historical narratives is rejected or reinterpreted along lines of scientific theories or historical research. Neither Jesus nor any of the inspired

prophets and apostles ever questioned the historical truth of the Genesis record or of any other part of the Scriptures. Rather, they affirmed the truthfulness and divine authority of them all.”²⁵

The authors of the New Testament, disciples of Jesus Christ, followed the footsteps of their Master. They followed His method of interpreting Scripture. By accepting the name “Christian,” we acknowledge that we too intend to follow Christ in His understanding and interpretation of Scripture. The New Testament testimony to Creation is not only informative. It is also normative for today’s followers of Christ. And the message of Creation is part of God’s last message to this world: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). □

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