

Creation in the New Testament

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Scripture deals with the most important questions humans are asking: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where will we be going? Why are we here? Although the NT 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.

In this paper we will take a look at the NT references to creation, discuss the contribution of Jesus and his disciples to the theology of creation, and draw some conclusions for our present situation.

I. New Testament References to Creation

1. The Distribution of the Creation Theme in the NT

The NT refers to creation quite frequently. There are only a few NT books that do not contain a quotation from or a direct allusion to the Genesis 1 and 2 creation account. Typically, these are the shorter letters of the NT.¹ All the larger NT books, namely the Gospels, Acts, Romans, the Corinthian letters, Hebrews, and Revelation, in addition to a number of the smaller epistles, contain quotations or allusions to creation. 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 the fall is referred to alone, yet the creation context cannot be denied. This is so because Genesis 1–2 and Genesis 3 are very 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 NT. The following list does not claim to be comprehensive, but points to a number of important creation texts in

¹ They are Galatians, Philippians, the Thessalonian correspondence, 2Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and the Johannine letters.

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the NT. It also contains references to Genesis 3–11 found in various NT passages.

NT Book	References to Genesis 1–2 and to Creation in General	References to Genesis 3–11
Matthew	13:35; 19:4, 5; 25:34	4:1–11; 10:16; 23:35; 24:37–39
Mark	2:27; 10:6, 7–8; 13:19; 16:15	—
Luke	3:38; 11:50	3:36–38; 17:26–27
John	1:1–3; 17:24	—
Acts	4:24; 10:12; 11:6; 14:15; 17:24, 26	—
Romans	1:20, 23, 25–27; 4:17; 5:12, 14; 8:19–22, 39; 11:36	5:17–19
1 Corinthians	6:16; 8:6; 11:8–9; 15:45	15:22
2 Corinthians	5:17	11:3
Galatians	—	—
Ephesians	1:4; 5:31	—
Philippians	—	—
Colossians	1:15, 16, 23	—
1 Thessalonians	—	—
2 Thessalonians	—	—
1 Timothy	2:13; 4:4	2:12, 14
2 Timothy	—	—
Titus	—	—
Philemon	—	—
Hebrews	1:2, 10; 4:4, 10, 13; 6:7–8; 9:26; 11:3; 12:27	11:4, 5, 7; 12:24
James	1:18; 3:19	—
1 Peter	1:20; 4:19	3:20
2 Peter	3:4, 5	2:5; 3:6
1 John	—	3:12
2 John	—	—
3 John	—	—
Jude	1:14	1:11, 14
Revelation	2:7; 3:14; 4:11; 5:13; 8–9; 10:6; 13:8; 14:7; 16; 17:8; 20:1, 3, 11; 21–22	12:9, 17; 20:2

2. Quotations from Genesis 1–2

Genesis 1 and 2 are not the only creation texts in the OT. Other important passages on creation are found in Job 38–42; Ps 8, 19, and 104; Isa 40:26–28, 65–66; Jer 10:11–13; 27:5; 32:17; 51:15–16; Amos 4:13, 5:8–9; 9:5–6; etc.² However, they refer back to Genesis 1 and 2. Therefore, OT quotations in the

² Cf. William Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 419–436.

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NT dealing with creation are basically taken from Genesis 1 and 2. In addition to numerous allusions we find about eight such quotations included in the list above, two each in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and four in the Pauline writings.³ The quotations used in the Gospels are all part of Jesus' response to the Pharisees when being questioned on the problem of divorce.

The texts or parts thereof that are quoted are Gen 1:27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them;" Gen 2:2: "By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done;" Gen 2:7: "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being;" and Gen 2:24: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

Interestingly enough, these quotations refer to the creation of humankind and to the two divine institutions established at creation, namely the Sabbath and marriage.

3. The Word Family *ktisis*, *ktisma*, *ktizō*

Among the NT texts dealing with creation, we find a number that use formulas such as "from the foundation of the world." In addition, the word family *ktisis*, *ktisma*, *ktizō* is used frequently. The noun *ktisis* "creation," "what is created," or "creature," is used nineteen times in the NT,⁴ the noun *ktisma* "what is created," "creature," four times,⁵ and the verb *ktizō* "to create," "to make," fifteen times.⁶ In other words, this word family is used 38 times in the NT and stresses the importance of the concept of creation in the NT.

The noun *ktisma* refers to "creatures" and "everything created." The word describes what God has created in the beginning (1Tim 4:4). God's creatures include also humans and animals throughout the past, the present, and the future (Jam 1:18; Rev 8:9).⁷ Furthermore, creation surpasses our world and is not limited to this earth or solar system. There are created beings in heaven whose creator God is (Rev 5:13). Consequently, the NT teaches that God created the earth, its atmosphere, and life on this earth, but also extraterrestrial life forms that are not part of the creation we encounter and to which we belong.

³ Gen 1:27 is quoted in Matt 19:4 and Mark 10:6; Gen 2:2 is used in Heb 4:4; Gen 2:7 is found in 1Cor 15:45; and Gen 2:24 is quoted in Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; 1Cor 6:16; and Eph 5:31.

⁴ Mark 10:6; 13:19; 16:15; Rom 1:20, 25; 8:19, 20, 21, 22, 39; 2Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Col 1:15, 23; Heb 4:13; 9:11; 1Pet 2:13; 2Pet 3:4; Rev 3:14.

⁵ 1Tim 4:4; Jam 1:8; Rev 5:13; 8:9.

⁶ Matt 19:4; Mark 13:19; Rom 1:25; 1Cor 11:9; Eph 2:10,15; 3:9; 4:24; Col 1:16, 16; 3:10; 1Tim 4:3; Rev 4:11; 10:6.

⁷ Although God does not create today in the way he did in Genesis 1-2, humans are still and will remain God's creatures.

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The term *ktisis*, “creation,” refers to “every human institution/creation” once (1Pet 2:13). Usually, however, it describes God’s work and initiative.⁸ The addition of the adjective “human” indicates that the normal understanding of the term, namely as God’s action and its results, is abandoned in this case, but this does not affect any of the other usages of the term in the NT. *Ktisis* is found in the phrase “the beginning of creation” (Mark 10:6; 13:19; 2Pet 3:4), which takes us back to Genesis 1 and 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” and wants to be “set free from its slavery to corruption” (Rom 8:18–22). In this passage “creation” probably refers to all created beings and is not limited to humankind. In Mark 16:15 and Col 1:23, however, when the gospel is preached to “all creation,” the term describes humanity only, throughout the centuries of the Christian era. In Rom 8:39 the context seems to suggest that the created beings again include extraterrestrial beings, that is, beings who are not part of our creation. God has also established the heavenly sanctuary, which “is not of this creation” (Heb 9:11). “The firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15) and “the beginning/beginner of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14) is Jesus. Yet, in Christ, people, although creatures of God, can become “a new creature” (2Cor 5:17; cf., Gal 6:15). In this case, a spiritual meaning is added to the literal and physical understanding. Both correspond. Because Jesus is the creator, he can bring about a new creation, that is, people who are reconciled with God through him and proclaim the message of reconciliation.

The verb *ktizō* describes God’s creative activity when he brought about creation, including humanity (Mark 13:19; cf., Matt 19:4; 1Cor 11:9; Rev 10:6). He is the creator who has created all things (Col 1:16; Rom 1:25; Eph 3:9; Rev 4:11). Again there is a spiritual dimension, because “we are . . . created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10). Jesus has also broken down the barrier between Israel and the Gentiles. Since then those who believe in him are one church. He has made (*ktizō*) “the two into one new man.” Christians are called to “put on the new self,” which “has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:24; cf., Col 3:10). Thus, in addition to its original meaning, the term “to create” has an ecclesiological dimension. It not only refers to the creation of this earth and life upon it, but also to the creation of Christ’s church, consisting of individuals who together 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 and 2 and other texts.

4. Summary

The NT contains numerous references to creation. Among them are eight direct quotations from Genesis 1 and 2. The specific creation language of the

⁸ Eighteen out of the nineteen times when it is used in the NT, it describes God’s creation.

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word family *ktiz-* describes God's activity in all cases but one. Other vocabulary needs to be studied.⁹ Obviously, the NT texts assume that creation has to be understood literally. God created the heavens and the earth and various plants and beings. The concept of creation is not limited to the creation described in Genesis 1 and 2. It encompasses much more, although in a different sense. Jesus has created his church. People have become and even today are becoming a new creation in Jesus Christ. But this ongoing creative activity of God does not question 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.

II. Jesus Christ and Creation

1. Jesus and Scripture

The issue of creation is closely linked to the issue of Scripture as the Word of God. This is also the crux in the current debate. If we were not Christians, it probably would be much easier to vote for either creation or evolution or for other approaches such as theistic evolution or progressive creation. But we have Scripture, which plays an important role in the life of our faith community as well as in our private lives. Therefore, we must ask: Does Scripture have the final say in the creation/evolution debate, even if in some cases it seems to contradict the interpretation of data produced by science, or does it not constitute a final authority? Should Scripture be reinterpreted in order to fit these scientific models of origins, or should it not?

As we now turn to Jesus and his understanding of the creation issue, we will briefly summarize his position on the OT, the Scripture of his time, in order to have a starting point for a discussion of his view of creation. What we know about Jesus is basically what the Gospels and some other parts of Scripture tell us about him. This information can be taken at face value or can be questioned. But even if we would choose a critical approach and would claim that many texts of the NT ascribed to Jesus were not authentic but were productions of the early church, probably the outcome would still remain quite similar.

Some scholars have suggested that Jesus favored traditionalism and was not ready to challenge wrong ideas. But the Jesus of the Gospels was willing to handle hot potatoes and address delicate and controversial issues. Wenham states: "He [Jesus] is 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."¹⁰

So, what did Jesus think and teach about Scripture?

⁹ E.g., *poieō*, "to make," is also used to describe the creation process. In this case, the context must determine whether or not it is referring to creation.

¹⁰ John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, third rev. ed. (Grand Rapids; Baker, 1994), 27.

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(1) Jesus believed in the inspiration of the human authors of the Bible of his time (OT). All of Scripture is the Word of God through which God has spoken. He considered the prophets reliable mediators of God's Word (Matt 15:4; 22:31–32; Mark 12:36).¹¹

(2) He accepted the historical reliability of Scripture, including all important events of Israel's and humankind's history.¹² Scripture is interpreted literally and typologically (John 10:34–36; Matt 12:42).

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

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

(5) God's will and his work can be recognized through Scripture. 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 contains genuine prophecy that has been or will be fulfilled. Many of the predictions Jesus regarded as fulfilled in himself and in his ministry (Matt 11:10; 24:15; 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) Jesus expects his followers to know, believe, and obey God's Word (Matt 22:29; Luke 8:21; 11:28). When he interpreted Scripture, his disciples' hearts were burning, and a change occurred in their lives (Luke 24:25–27, 32–35).

2. Jesus and Creation

The words of Jesus, as recorded in the four canonical Gospels, contain ten references to creation.¹³ Matthew, Luke, and John have added explanations that contain additional creation statements. But this is not our concern here.

Jesus has not only pointed back to Genesis 1 and 2. In his speeches we also find persons—Abel (Matt 23:35) and Noah (Matt 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27)—and events—the Flood (Matt 24:39)—that occur in Genesis 3–11.

¹¹ Cf., E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 126: "Jesus' use of the Old Testament rest on his conviction that these writings were the revelation of God through faithful prophets . . ." Peter van Bemmelen, "The Authority of Scripture" (unpub. MS), 12, writes: "The Gospel narratives give evidence that Jesus not only had an unparalleled knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, but that He accepted all of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. Following the resurrection He gently chided two of His disciples for their slowness of heart to believe in 'all that the prophets have spoken' (Luke 24:25)."

¹² For instance, he referred to Abraham (Matt 8:11), Lot and his wife (Luke 17:28–29, 32), Isaac (Luke 13:28), Moses (Matt 19, 8), David (Matt 22:43, 45), Isaiah (Matt 13:14), Jonah (Matt 12:39–41), and Daniel (Matt 24:15) and regarded them as historical persons.

¹³ Matt 19:4, 5; 25:34; Mark 2:27; 10:6, 7–8; 13:19; 16:15; Luke 11:50, and John 17:24.

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When we read these short passages we get the clear impression that according to Jesus, Noah and Abel were not mythological figures but real human persons, that Genesis 3–11 is historical narrative which should not be understood symbolically, and that a global flood actually happened (Gen 6–8).¹⁴ We should expect that Jesus would use the same approach to biblical interpretation when it comes to the creation account. This is precisely what we find in the Gospels. Jesus' statements about creation can be grouped as follows: (1) references to creation in passing, (2) direct references to creation, (3) the use of quotations from Genesis 1 and 2.

a. References to Creation in Passing

(1) *The Foundation of the World.*

Matt 25:34: "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

Luke 11:50: "so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation."

John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

The phrase "from the foundation [*katabolē*] of the world" (Matt 25:34; Luke 11:50) and the related phrase "before the foundation [*katabolē*] of the world" (John 17:24) used by Jesus occur also in other places in the NT.¹⁵ The word *katabolē* can be translated as "foundation," "beginning," and to some extent as "creation." The phrase "from the foundation of the world," focuses on events which have taken place since creation. With the phrase "before the foundation of the world" events are described prior to the creation of the world.

Ten texts in the NT use "foundation of the world" terminology to identify the starting point for this world's history. Thus, the NT writers knew 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.¹⁶

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

¹⁴ The comparison between the flood and Christ's worldwide Second Coming as well as the statement that the unbelievers were destroyed seems to indicate that the flood was a global event (Matt 24:39).

¹⁵ "From the beginning of the world" is found six times in the NT (Matt 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Heb 4:3; 9:26; Rev 17:8) and "before the beginning of the world" four times (John 17:24; Eph 1:4; 1Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8).

¹⁶ Shea, 437.

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the foundation of the world” “refer to the beginning of the whole creation as described in Genesis 1.”¹⁷

(2) *Preaching the Gospel to all Creation.*

Mark 16:15: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation/every creature.’”

The proclamation of the Gospel is directed to all human beings. The parallel text in Matt 28:19 talks about “all nations.” 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 reminded his audience that all human beings are created by God, have an intrinsic value, and are God’s property. As such they deserve to hear the Gospel and be saved.

b. Direct References to Creation

(1) *The Sabbath Made for Man.*

Mark 2:27–28: “Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’”

This text refers back to the fourth commandment in Exod 20:8–11, where the Sabbath is linked with creation. However, creation is also visible in Mark 2 itself. According to Jesus, the Sabbath is a creation by God, 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 humanity was created by God. It was not created for the sake of the Sabbath, but it was created.

Just as the Sabbath and the original creation were linked in the OT, so also these two elements are connected in the NT. Human beings were made on the sixth day, the Sabbath on the seventh. Humans were already in existence when the Sabbath was made; therefore, the day evidently was made for their use and benefit. Surprisingly, however, Adam was not made lord of the Sabbath. The “Son of man,” Jesus Christ, holds that title.¹⁸

¹⁷ Terry Mortenson, “Jesus, Evangelical Scholars and the Age of the Earth,” (unpublished paper, presented Nov 19, 2003, at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta), 5. He also states: “In the absence of any contextual clues before or after *apo katabolēs kosmou* in Matt. 13:35; Matt. 25:34; Rev. 13:8; and Rev 17:8, which might restrict the meaning of the phrase to “foundation or beginning of the human race,” we must assume that the phrase in these verses also is referring to the very beginning of creation . . . In Jn 17:24 Jesus clearly meant by this phrase the beginning of all creation, for the Father surely loved the Son eternally before the creation (not merely before the creation of man).”

¹⁸ Shea, 438. Francis D. Nichol (ed.), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1978), 5:588, notes: “God did not create man because He had a Sabbath and needed someone to keep it. Rather, an Allwise Creator knew that man, the creature of His hand, needed opportunity for moral and spiritual growth, for character development. He needed time in which his own interests and pursuits should be subordinated to a study of the character and will of God as revealed in nature, and later, in revelation.”

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The shift from verse 27 to verse 28 is abrupt: "Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." The term "therefore/so" seems to make sense if the one who has 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 a hidden claim of being the creator of humankind and of the Sabbath. The NT stresses again and again that Jesus is creator, but it seems that this claim is not found in Jesus' own statements directly.

(2) *Since the beginning of the Creation which God Created.*

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 will."

This text is part of the Synoptic Apocalypse. It is a strong statement connecting the verb "to create" with the noun "creation." Although it is obvious that God is the creator, it is stressed anyway. The phrase "from the beginning of the creation" is shortened in a number of other statements by Jesus and his followers, but is still referring to creation.¹⁹ A similar phrase is "in the beginning."²⁰ This beginning is not just the beginning of humanity, but comprises the entire creation process. Mortenson concludes:

Hebrews 1:10 says that "in the beginning" God laid the "foundation of the world," and Heb. 4:3 says God's creation works were finished from the foundation of the world. That unequivocally means that the seventh day (when God finished creating, Gen 2:1-3) was at the foundation. So, the foundation does not refer to simply the first moment or first day of creation. . . neither "from the beginning of creation" nor "from the foundation of the earth (nor any related phrase) is referring to the beginning of the human race. Rather they refer to the beginning of the whole creation as described in Genesis 1. . . Jesus believed that man was there at the beginning and therefore (along with his other statements affirming the literal truth of Gen 1-11) Jesus was a YEC [Young Earth Creationist].²¹

c. The Use of Quotations from Genesis 1 and 2

Matt 19:4-6: "And He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female', and said, 'for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Mark 10:6-8: "But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 'What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'"

¹⁹ E.g., Matt 19:4,8; 1John 1:1; 2:13-14.

²⁰ See, John 1:1-2 (*en arch_*) and Heb 1:10 (*kat' archas*).

²¹ Mortenson, 5.

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Matt 19:1–12 and Mark 10:1–12 are parallel texts dealing with the problem of divorce with which Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees. Jesus is opposed to divorce, but whereas in Matthew an exception clause is mentioned, such a provision is not made in Mark. But in both cases Jesus supports his position by pointing back to creation and showing God's intention when he instituted marriage.

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

By using these texts and applying them to marriage, Jesus declares that they are foundational to Christians. Creation has taken place in the beginning. God created. He created the first couple, Adam and Eve. The distinction between genders was set by God. By quoting from Genesis 1 and 2 Jesus affirms the creation account and the mode of creation as described there. He understands Genesis 1 and 2 literally and takes the two chapters at face value. Two human beings, male and female, were directly created by God and subsequently became one flesh in marriage, which he instituted. Unity is emphasized, but a unity consisting of one husband and one wife. In the Hebrew text the term "two" is missing. It is found in the LXX. By stressing that only two beings and beings of the opposite sex become one, Jesus rejects polygamy²² as well as homosexuality. Obviously, for Jesus the creation account was not only descriptive but prescriptive and determines ethical and moral behavior. Moloney suggests that the words "from the beginning of creation" "reflect both the beginning of creation and time, and the book of Genesis."²³

3. Summary

The NT stresses that Jesus accepted the Bible of his times as the Word of God, which is authoritative and can be trusted. Israel's history traced back to the creation account is reliable. All OT 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). He would rely on Scripture even in the most challenging times of his life.

Jesus held that creation took place. God created. Creation happened at a definite time. There was a beginning, and this is creation week, which includes all of God's creative activities described in Genesis 1 and 2 and the establishment of the Sabbath. Because Jesus mentioned major biblical characters, starting by name with Abel, although Adam and Eve are referred to indirectly, and in his

²² Cf., Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 183–184.

²³ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 194.

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speeches touches all periods of Israel's history, a short chronology is in view. The beginning of humanity is not separated from the other creative acts of God in the creation week.

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

III. Jesus Christ as the Creator

The NT affirms repeatedly that Jesus is God, that he exists forever, and that he was incarnated as human being "when the fullness of the time came" (Gal 4:4). 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 home his people. But in addition to all these functions Jesus is described as the creator and the sustainer of the entire creation.

This is a unique contribution to the theology of creation by the NT. Although the OT points to Christ as the Creator in a somewhat hidden way,²⁴ it is the NT which clearly spells out that Jesus is the Creator. Although a number of texts emphasize that God has created all things,²⁵ crucial passages stress that Jesus is the Creator. Although Jesus provides some hints that he is the creator and does this by his proclamation and his deeds, for instance, the stilling of the storm, it is left to his disciples to plainly tell us who Jesus is, namely the Creator-God.

John 1:3: "All things came into being through Him [the *Logos* who is God], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Col 1:15-16: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."

Heb 1:2, 10: "In these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." "And, you, Lord [referring to Jesus], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands."²⁶

²⁴ E.g., the plural in Gen 1:26 and wisdom in Prov 8.

²⁵ E.g., Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24, 26; Rom 1:25; 1Pet 4:19.

²⁶ See also Rev 3:14. "Beginning" (*archē*) must be understood in the active sense of originator. In Rev 21:6 the same term is applied to God the Father. He is "the beginning and the end." In Rev 22:13 Jesus is "the beginning and the end." *Archē* is also found in Col 1:18, referring to Christ.

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All of these passages and their contexts show that Jesus is God.²⁷ Since he is God, he is also Creator. Or vice versa: since he is Creator, "He is the image of the invisible God." 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 which 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. (1) This Word existed already "in the beginning," a reminder of Gen 1:1. (2) The OT background of the statement about the Word of God is at least partially found in Ps 33:6: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host." Three verses later one reads: "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Jesus is this creative Word of God. (3) John tells us explicitly that all things came into existence through him.

Hebrews 1:10 applies a quotation, namely Ps 102:25, to Jesus, although the OT context talks about Yahweh as the Creator. The phrase "in the beginning" takes us back to Gen 1:1.

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|--------------|--|
| A | (1) the image of the invisible God, |
| He is | (2) the firstborn of all creation. |
| | <i>For in Him</i> all things were created . . . |
| | <u>all things have been created through Him</u> and for Him. |
| | |
| B | And He is before all things |
| C | and in Him all things hold together |
| B' | And He is the head of the body, the church; |
| | |
| A' | (1) the beginning |
| He is | (2) the firstborn from the dead . . . |
| | <i>For in Him</i> it was His Father's good pleasure for all the |
| | fullness to dwell, |
| | And <u>through Him</u> to reconcile <u>all things</u> to Himself . . . |

Colossians 1:15-20 is an extensive christological hymn with an interesting structure. The first part, stressing Jesus as creator (verses 15-16), corresponds with the last part (verses 18b-20), in which Jesus is the reconciler, "who has made peace through the blood of his cross." 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

²⁷ See, John 1:1-3; Col 2:9; Heb 1:5-12.

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the cross, a short event in history, but maintain that he has created us through an evolutionary process which takes millions of years, is inconsistent.

Furthermore, Jesus creative power is seen in the fact that his followers are spiritually re-created. Eph 2:10 talks about being “created in Christ Jesus for good works,” and 2Cor 5:17 about being a new creation or new creature in Christ. As seen above, Eph 2:15 points to Christ creating one church, the new person, out of two groups, Jews and Gentiles. None of these creative processes which 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 it has happened 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 him 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 Gen 1–11 is for the current debate, Jesus cannot be excluded from this discussion. Whatever we decide on protology, it has a direct impact on soteriology.

IV. Jesus’ Disciples and Creation

Jesus’ disciples have much more to say about creation. We will summarize some of their statements.

1. Paul and some Additional Statements on Creation

Paul proclaimed the “living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15), which probably alludes to the Sabbath Commandment (Exod 20:11). This God has “made from one man every nation” (Acts 17:26). In Romans 5 he mentions 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” (1Cor 15:22). The creation groans and suffers and longs to be set free “from its slavery to corruption” while Christians eagerly wait for the final salvation (Rom 8:18–23). Paul knows that Eve was deceived (2Cor 11:3), and that Adam was formed first and then Eve (1Tim 2:13). The catalogue of vices in Romans 1 is presented in the context of creation.²⁸

²⁸ While Rom 1:20 is set in the context of creation and mentions creation explicitly, the list of animals, the mention of humans, and the concept of “likeness”/“image” suggest that Rom 1:23 echoes Gen 1:24–26. Rom 1:25 points out that the Gentiles worshiped created things instead of the creator. Furthermore, Rom 1:16–27 seems to echo Gen 1:27 by concentrating on the same terms, namely “male” (*arsēn*) and “female” (*thēlu*), instead of using the terms “man” and “woman.” Peter

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Twice Paul quotes Gen 2:24: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh," once when he warns against sexual immorality (1Cor 6:16), and another time 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 Gen 2:7, slightly embellished: "The first man, Adam, became a living soul" (1Cor 15:45).

In Heb 4:4, when the issue of rest is discussed, Gen 2:2 is quoted: ". . . and He [God] rested on the seventh day from all His work." The author knows Abel (Heb 11:4; 12:24); Enoch (Heb 11:5), and Noah (Heb 11:7). In Heb 11:3 he states: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible."

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 Gen 1–11.

2. John and Some Additional Statements on Creation

Like Paul, John is strong in pointing out that Jesus is the Creator. In the Book of Revelation allusions to creation abound. All things are created by God (Rev 4:11). God "created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it" (Rev 10:6). Humankind is called to "worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (Rev 14:7). Both texts not only point to creation, but may refer to the Fourth Commandment (Exod 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 (Rev 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 Rev 21–22 points to the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and earth, a new creation.

Again, the same understanding of creation is used which 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? 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 NT confirms a literal reading of the creation account, a creation week of 24-hour days, and a short chronology.

Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 37, states: "With every indication of his loathing, the apostle now pictures how the Gentiles profane themselves (in a sinful reversal of Gen. 1:27f.) in lesbian love and sodomy. . . . What the Gentiles do is contrary to creation and characteristic of their fallen state of guilt."

V. Implications for the Current Debate

What are some of the implications for us? We are neither afraid of science nor opposed to it. We could 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 buy into all presuppositions, theories, and philosophical or scientific models that are on the market.

Thomas C. Oden suggests: "Classical Christian doctrines of creation do not necessarily deny an evolution, 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."²⁹ 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."³⁰

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 and 2 and at the same time a symbolic reading. Secondly, although antinomies are found in Scripture, that does not mean that all biblical doctrines can be presented as antinomies. In some cases it is an either-or and 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

²⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, Systematic Theology (Peabody: Prince, 1998), 1:265.

³⁰ Robert M. Johnston, "The Necessity and Utility of Antinomies," (unpub. paper, 2004), 1-2.

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Genesis record or of any other part of the Scriptures. Rather, they affirmed the truthfulness and divine authority of them all.”³¹

The authors of the NT, 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 NT testimony to creation is not only informative. It is 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 Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev 14:7).

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³¹ Van Bemmelen, 12–13.