

JESUS IS THE PROTOTYPE AND AGENT OF GOD'S NEW CREATION

The first thing to hold in mind is that only Yahweh was the creator of the Physical universe as shown from the Scriptures in the previous study:

- “I Yahweh am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens alone, spreading forth the earth by myself” (**Isa. 44:24**).

There are another half dozen Scriptures that also state that only Yahweh was the creator of the universe and dozens more which imply the same. However, a number of Scriptures directly inform us that Jesus is the creator of ‘the new creation’ inasmuch as his sacrifice reconciles humans to God and the new creation is the point of focus in Isaiah 51:16 which the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Word Biblical Commentary, and the Fausset Commentary all recognize as applying, not to the Genesis creation, but to Messiah and the new heavens and earth:

- “My words in **your** mouth...in order **to plant** the heavens and **lay the foundation** of the earth and say to Zion ‘You are my people’” (**Isa. 51:16**).

With God’s words in his mouth Jesus, as Messiah, plants the New Heavens and lays the foundation of the New Earth by his ransom sacrifice. Additionally the focus of the Christian Greek Scriptures is forward looking, toward the reconciling of mankind to God through Jesus and not backward looking to the Genesis creation:

- “If anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**” (**2 Cor. 5:17**).
- “For in Christ Jesus...a **new creation**” (**Gal. 6:15**).
- “For we are the product of His work and were **created in Christ Jesus**” (**Eph. 2:10**).

The focus on a pre-existent Christ by Justin Martyr effectively removed Jesus from his status as the beginning, the first-born, pre-eminent one, and creator of the new creation.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-18

So when we come to Colossians 1:15-17 we get the same picture of Jesus as the agent/creator of ‘the new creation.’ This is because the NT looks forward to what is coming i.e. “the New Heavens and New Earth,” that is, a new order of society and which will be based on “the new creation” of godly people since Jesus’ sacrifice was made. This is why the surrounding context of Col. 1:15-17 focuses on reconciliation of man to God through Jesus.

STRUCTURE

James Dunn (*the leading christologist*) reminds us that this is a pre-Pauline hymn, with its language being poetical and not conceptual, made up of two strophes. He tells us that the context indicates that:

the two strophes were not dealing with two clearly distinct subjects (cosmology and soteriology).

The subject is, in fact, not that of the Genesis creation as Karl-Joseph Kuschel notes:

this text does not provide any encouragement for a hypostatization of Christ so that he becomes an independent ‘creator deity’.

TRANSLATION

This passage is most accurately examined from any of the following: an Interlinear Translation, Rotherham's Emphasized Bible, Young's Literal Translation or The New American Bible. The use of the *present tense* indicates that this is about **the exalted Christ**. The subject of these verses is the pre-eminence of Christ in *his post-resurrection glory*. This is not about pre-existence but concerns Jesus at the time of writing after his exaltation.

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Verse 15a:

“He is the **image** of the invisible God.

The present tense here indicates that Jesus is spoken of here as the “image of God” in his exalted status since his resurrection. So Jesus is only fully this image after his resurrection and having become immortal. (Heb. 1:3, 1 Cor. 15).

Verse 15b:

... the *firstborn* (pre-eminent one) of all *creation*.”

‘**firstborn**’:

- “...that he might be the *firstborn among many brothers*” (Rom. 8:29).
- “...He is **the beginning** the *firstborn from the dead*” (Col. 1:18).
- “...when He raised him *from the dead* and **seated him at His right hand** (*rank*) in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:20).

Although *firstborn* can be used of timing, the usage in Colossians 1:15 is contextually of pre-eminence. Jesus is elevated to become firstborn because of his personal worthiness which Adam lost. So Jesus is not firstborn in time but, as the second Adam, is firstborn in terms of rank and is therefore worthy of a double portion. As Jehovah says of the Messiah:

- “I myself **shall place** him as firstborn” (Ps. 89:27). *So this means that Jesus replaces the 1st Adam as firstborn.*

The Zondervan Encyclopaedia of the Bible p. 540 states:

Christ is the ‘firstborn’ of the Father having the **pre-eminent** position over others in relation to him ... above those related to him in the **new creation**.

Scholar Paul van Buren makes the point that:

There is no clear indication that the priority [of Jesus] was intended in a temporal sense. We may conclude that for the earliest Church, Jesus was accorded the priority in reality that the rabbis assigned to the Torah. If one were to make the claim of priority in a temporal sense, one would be claiming that Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, had *existed with God before the creation of the world*. **That claim would be worse than unintelligible**; it would destroy all coherence in the essential Christian claim that Jesus was truly a human being, that the Word became *flesh*...Jesus of Nazareth began his life, began to exist, at a definite time in history: the Word became *flesh*.

A Theology of Jewish Christian Reality, 1983, p. 82.

‘**creation**’: *The new creation of* “**thrones or lordships or governments or authorities**.”

The immediate *CONTEXT* shows that this passage applies to the New Creation:

Vs. 12: “...the **inheritance** of the holy ones.”

Vs. 13: “...transferred to the **kingdom**.”

Vs. 14: “...release by **ransom**”—*which brings about the Kingdom creation.*

Vs. 20: “...and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things by making peace through the blood he shed on the torture stake whether things **upon** earth or things **in** heaven.”

Also the parallel letter of Ephesians (Eph.1:9-23 and 2:10) speaks only of the New Creation and gives a precise doctrinal correlation with Colossians 1. This further demonstrates that Colossians 1 applies to the New Creation consisting of “*the Congregation of the firstborn*” (Heb. 12:23) and the newly created angelic thrones, lordships, governments and authorities. (*a new administration* in 1 Peter 3:22). Nothing here applies to the inception of the Genesis creation. (Please also note the parallel phrases: Col.1:12/Eph.1:11; Col.1:16, 17, 20/Eph. 1:10, 21, 22).

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Verse 16:

“Because **in** (κ_{IT}) *him* all things were *created*, *in* the heavens and *on* the earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or **lordships** or **governments** or **authorities**. All things have been created through him and for him.”

The creating of *an authority* is not the physical creating of people.

‘**in him**’: Meaning ‘in union (or connection) with’, ‘in association with’, or ‘by reason of Bauer’s lexicon. In context this verse does not mean ‘by’ or ‘by means of’ but rather:

- “...if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).
- “...**in him** all things hold together. He is the head of the *body*” (Col. 1:17).
- “...to head up all things **in Christ** things upon the heavens and things upon the earth; **in him, in whom** also we were assigned” (Eph. 1:10, 11 KIT).

‘**all things**’: (*in the normal limited sense*):

- “...whether **thrones** or **lordships** or **governments** or **authorities**....of the *body*, the **congregation**” (Col. 1:16, 18).

An important figure of speech used in Colossians 1:16 is called ‘encircling’. The Romans called it ‘inclusio’ (Gk *epanadiplosis*). When this figure of speech is used, it marks what is said as within a particular circle and so gives clear context. This means that in Colossians 1:16 the “*all things*” includes only “thrones or lordships or governments or authorities” and not all things absolutely—not the universe. A parallel account shows Jesus seated:

- “...far above every **government and authority and power and lordship**.....and subjected **all things** under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation” (Eph. 1:21, 22).

So at this stage of things there is no point for Paul to refer back to the Genesis creation of flowers, birds etc. Hence the “all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible” are thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities i.e. **the arranging or ordering of things** and not the physical making of things which was the work of only Jehovah in “stretching out the heavens **by myself**, laying out the earth. Who was with me?” (Isa. 44:24) or “who **alone** stretched out the heavens who spread out the earth **by myself**” according to most other translations.

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Verse 17:

“He **is** (or exists – not the past tense ‘was’) before (*above*) all things and in him (not ‘by’ or ‘by means of’) all things *hold together*.”

‘before (*above*)’ all things (Greek ‘*pro panton*’). *Pro* has 3 common uses:

- 1) in the sense of *place* i.e. in front of.
- 2) in the sense of *time* i.e. prior to.
- and 3) in the sense of *pre-eminence* i.e. above in importance.

Karl-Josef Kuschel notes concerning *pro panton*:

However this ‘before’ is **not** a speculative **temporal** category, but a confessional category, indicating **the status** of the one who is ‘the first born of all creation’.

In 1 Peter 4:8 and James 5:12 *pro panton* is translated as “Above all things.” In Colossians 1:17 neither place nor timing are involved contextually. Therefore *pro* has the sense of *above* e.g.:

- “...far **above** every government and authority and power and lordship...and subjected *all things* under his feet, and made him head over all things to the congregation” (Eph. 1:21, 22).

‘**hold together**’:

- “...the fullness of him **who fills up** all things in all” (Eph. 1:23).

This is a similar activity that the Christ performs toward the Congregation. This does not refer to any holding together of the Genesis creation.

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Verse 18:

“he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that he *might become* the one who is first in all things [pre-eminent].”

James Dunn notes that: “Christ only gained the status as ‘pre-eminent in all things’ as a consequence of his resurrection.”

The conclusion is that Colossians 1:15, 16 speaks of God’s New Creation made through Christ in providing the ransom by his shed blood to reconcile those who become God’s holy ones and are transferred into the kingdom. No Genesis creation is mentioned; not the creation of the earth or the heavens but things upon earth and things in heaven: thrones, lordships etc. This may mean that Jesus has now been given authority to restructure the arrangements of angels as well as being the agent for the creation of the congregation on earth.

REVELATION 3:14 KIT:

“...the beginning of **the creation** of (not ‘by’) God.”

The NLT makes this clear by rendering it as: “...the beginning of God’s new creation.”

Jesus is the same ‘beginning’ of the new creation as he is in Colossians and Romans:

- “...he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is *the beginning* **the firstborn** from the dead” (Col. 1:18).

- “...that he *might be* the *firstborn among many brothers*” (Rom. 8:29).

Revelation 3:14 is set in the context of the writings to the New Creation of the seven congregations. This creation began with Christ’s death and resurrection. Jesus is the beginning of this New Creation, he being the first to be resurrected to immortality and:

- “...the firstborn (pre-eminent one) of the dead” (Rev. 1:5, 18).
- “...the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18).

The CONTEXT being that of faithful Christians is further shown in:

vs 11: “hold fast what you have, that no one will take your crown.”

vs 12: “I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God...and I will write on him the name of my God, and...the **new** Jerusalem...and my **new** name.”

vs 21: “I will grant to him to sit down with me on my throne.”

Therefore, Revelation 3:14 refers to the creation which commenced with Christ’s death and resurrection. This New Creation, noted in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 will involve the ultimate regeneration of believers, rather than the Genesis Creation. The Greek word for “beginning” is *arche* which refers to pre-eminence as well as to time, according to the context as shown in the following translations:

“The Chief of the creation of God” Young’s Literal.

“The Ruler of God’s creation” NIV, NLT and Complete Jewish Bible.

Also, note that the context is in **the present tense** showing that the rulership is not a reference to the time of the Genesis creation. It refers to the creation which came into existence at the time of writing for:

- “...us to be a certain first fruits of his creatures” or “first fruits of his creation” REB (James 1:18).

This is just as firstborn of creation refers to the new creation rather than meaning that Christians were the first ever of creation.

HEBREWS 1:10-12

“You (*Jesus*), at the beginning **O Lord**, *laid the foundation of the earth* itself, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They themselves **will perish**, but you yourself are to remain continually; and just like an outer garment they all will grow old, and you will wrap them up just as a cloak, as an outer garment; and they **will be changed**, but you are the same, and Your years will never run out.”

Some 50 texts, including Isaiah 44:24 and Hebrews 4:4 show that only Jehovah produced the Genesis creation. So this text is speaking of a different and future “laying of the foundation of the earth.”

THE CONTEXT of the future earth in the Kingdom is found in the following statements in Hebrews:

- “God is your throne forever and ever and the sceptre of your **kingdom** ...” (Heb. 1:8).
- “...the inhabited **earth to come**, about which we are speaking” (Heb. 2:5).

The *Oxford Bible Commentary* notes that up to Hebrews 2:5 the subject is “the inhabited earth to come” and Hebrews 1:10 is included in that main theme:

The text at the center of Heb. 2:5ff. is Ps. 8:4-6 and it exhibits thematic connections to the scriptural catena of the first chapter ...Heb. 2:5 is an introductory comment continuing the contrast between the Son and angels. Its reference to the “world to come” reinforces the notions of imminent judgment and cosmic transformation intimated by Ps. 102, cited at 1:10-12.

QUOTED FROM PSALM 101:25-27 IN THE SEPTUAGINT

The writer of Hebrews 1:10-12 is quoting from Psalm 101 in the Greek Septuagint. This is 102 in the Hebrew Masoretic text and in which only *one person* is speaking throughout, namely the suppliant. However, in the Septuagint **two people** are shown to be speaking. The suppliant is speaking up to verse 22 after which God is seen to be addressing the suppliant as Lord (*but not His Lord*) as the one **laying the foundation of the future world**.

NOTE: The word *lord* was not in the Masoretic text, but in the Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated.

In the *New International Commentary* F.F. Bruce explains the situation in this Psalm:

In the Septuagint text the person to whom these words [*of old you laid the foundation of the earth*] are spoken is addressed explicitly as “Lord”;... and it is God who addresses him thus. Whereas in the Hebrew text the suppliant is the speaker from the beginning to the end of the psalm, in the Greek text his prayer comes to an end with v. 22, and the next words read as follows:

“He [**God**] **answered him** [*the suppliant*] in the way of his strength: ‘Declare to Me the shortness of My days: Bring Me not up in the midst of My days. Thy [*the suppliant’s*] years are throughout all generations. Thou, **lord** [*the suppliant, understood here as the Messiah in Hebrews*], in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth.’”

This is God’s answer to the suppliant; He bids him acknowledge the shortness of God’s set time (for the restoration of Jerusalem, as in v. 13) and not summon Him [**God**] to act when that set time has only half expired, while He [**God**] assures him [*the suppliant, called lord by God*] that he and his servants’ children will be preserved forever... But to whom (a Christian reader of the Septuagint might well ask) could God speak in words like these? And whom would God himself address as “Lord,” as the maker [or founder] of earth and heaven?

Footnote:

Bacon suggested that the Hebrew, as well as the Greek, text of this psalm formed a basis for messianic eschatology, especially its reference to the “shortness” of God’s days, i.e., of the period destined to elapse before the consummation of His purpose [*the arrival of the yet future Messianic Kingdom on earth*]; he found here the OT background of Matt. 24:22, Mark 13:20 and *Ep. Barn.* 4.3 (“as Enoch says, ‘For to this end the Master [God] has cut short the times and the days, that his Beloved [Jesus] should make haste and come to his inheritance’”). *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.62-63.

THE ROLES REVERSE – NOW GOD SPEAKS

Psalm 101:23 Septuagint Greek:

“He (*God*) **answered him** (*Messiah*) in the way of his strength.”

Psalm 102:23 NASB Masoretic Hebrew: “He **has weakened my** strength in the way.”

The Septuagint was translated from a different Hebrew manuscript where the vowel pointing over this phrase was different to that which was over the phrase in the Masoretic text. The author of Hebrews had before him the Septuagint reading of Psalm 101/102 when he quoted verses 25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12. Also in the article "*Heb. 1:10-12 and the Septuagint Rendering of Ps. 102:23*," B.W. Bacon explained that:

the whole passage down to the end of the psalm becomes *the answer* of Yahweh to the suppliant who accordingly appears to be addressed as *Kurie* and creator of heaven and earth...Instead of understanding the verse as a complaint of the psalmist at the shortness of his days which are cut off in the midst, *LXX and the Vulgate understand the utterance to be Yahweh's answer* to the psalmist's plea that he will **intervene to save Zion**, because "it is time to have pity on her, yea, the set time is come" (v. 13). He is bidden acknowledge (or prescribe?) **the shortness of Yahweh's set time**, and not to summon him when it is but half expired. On the other hand he [*the Messianic lord*] is promised that his own endurance shall **be perpetual with the children** of his servants. *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 3, 1902, p. 280-285.

THE SUPPLIANT SPEAKING ABOUT THE NEW CREATION

Psalm 101:13-22 Masoretic or Septuagint:

"You will arise, you will have **mercy on Zion**, for it is the season to be favorable to her, For the appointed time has come...For Jehovah will **build up Zion**; He must appear in his glory...written **for a future generation**; And **the people that is to be created**...to loosen those appointed to death...when the peoples are collected all together, and the kingdoms to serve Jehovah."

The scene is the time of the end after Jerusalem has been destroyed and then is to be rebuilt. Jehovah appears, as represented by Messiah, to gather the future generation of New Creation people, including resurrected ones. Then "*the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*" (Rev. 11:15).

MESSIAH AS AGENT OF THE NEW CREATION

"And I (*Jehovah*) shall put my words in your (*Messiah's*) mouth, and with the shadow of my hand I shall certainly cover you, in order to **plant the heavens** and **lay the foundation of the earth** and say to Zion, 'You are my **people**'" (Isa. 51:16).

With reference to Isaiah 51:16 *The Word Biblical Commentary* says:

Yahweh introduces Himself again, but this time in terms of His control of the raging sea. He addresses the one He is using to put His words into his mouth and protecting him very carefully. The purpose of this care is to allow him to plant heavens and earth. This makes no sense if it refers to the original (Genesis) Creation...In other instances God acts alone using no agent (Isa. 44:24). Here the one whom He has hidden in his hand is His agent. Heavens and Land here refers metaphorically to the totality of order in Palestine. Heaven means the broader overarching structure of the empire, while 'land' is the political order in Palestine itself.

The following Scriptures demonstrate that God, through Christ as agent, creates the body of Christians i.e. the new creation:

- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**" (2 Cor. 5:17).
- "For neither is circumcision anything...but a **new creation**" (Gal. 6:15).

- “For we are the product of His work and were **created** in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10).
- “when Christ came as high priest of **the good things that have come to pass** (or ‘the good things to come’), through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is **not of this creation...**” (Heb. 9:11).

Such **things** are evidently reflecting the agency of Jesus in the **New Creation** because of his sacrifice and High Priesthood. So Psalm 101/102, whether in the Septuagint or the Masoretic text, is entirely forward looking to the New Creation, as is Isaiah 51:16 and part of the first chapter of Hebrews.

The Psalm 101/Hebrews 1:10 statement “In the beginning” refers to the first of Jesus’ creative works in laying the foundation for the New Creation by his sacrifice. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews chapter 1 is comparing the superiority of Jesus over the angels. So by taking the Psalm 101 reapplied text in the Septuagint of a future creation, the writer shows that the Lord Messiah laid **the foundation of the New Creation for the Millennium**. Jesus is once again shown to be now superior to angels because he is agent of that New Creation — something that no angel can be.

THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM

This Millennial new creation “**perishes** rolled up like an old garment...they **will be changed**” as God’s plans move on to the next ‘*New Heavens and New Earth*’ (Revelation 20:11; 21:1, 2) as part of the developing ages noted in Hebrews 1:2 NJB, Rotherham, and Young’s Literal. So although on the surface Hebrews 1:10 appears to indicate that Jesus was the creator of the Genesis creation an examination of the background to this text reveals that the subject is the New Creation.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:6

“...there is to us one God the Father, **from** whom are *all things* and **we for Him**; there is one Lord Jesus Christ **through** whom are *all things* and **we (the New Creation) through him.**”

THEME: The One God has made new creatures by reconciling *us* to himself through the One *exalted* Lord who is also over all gods.

CONTEXT verse 4: “We know that an idol is nothing, and there is no God but one.”
So this is not about past creation but about the present worship of the one God of the Shema.

HUMANS RECONCILED TO GOD ARE ‘THE NEW CREATION’

- “If anyone is in union with Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old things passed away, look! ***New things*** (including **the new creation reconciled to God, life in the age to come, immortality and new heavens and earth**) have come into existence”
 (2 Cor. 5:17).
- “...through him **to reconcile** all things to himself by making peace through the blood of the torture stake whether things on the earth or the things in heavens” (Col. 1:20).

*All (new) things are **from God** because we are reconciled into Him, i.e. “**we for Him.**”
 All (new) things are **through Christ**, mediated **through him** because of his sacrifice.*

So Christ is the agent of the new creation. The “all things” (Gk *ta panta*) phrase is used in other contexts with no thought of the universe e.g. 1 Corinthians 11:12b: “All things are from God.”

THE CONCLUSIONS OF LEADING BIBLE SCHOLARS

Karl-Josef Kuschel:

Jesus Christ is certainly the mediator of God in establishing the new creation, but he is evidently not the divine mediator at creation, before time.' *Born Before all Time?* p. 291.

James Dunn Says:

Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God...There is no indication that Jesus **thought or spoke of himself** as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth. *Christology in the Making*, p. 254.

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