

GENESIS 1–2 IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES

EDWIN REYNOLDS
Southern Adventist University, USA

Abstract

Many Bible scholars suggest that the creation account in Gen 1–2 is not a trustworthy account of the origin of life on earth. Some view it as just a poetic way of expressing the fact that God was the originator of life, but it is not a literal, historical account of how God created life on earth. Others view it as merely a mythological story that pre-scientific people believed, but it is not to be believed today. But the creation account has been validated not only elsewhere in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles clearly believed and taught the Genesis creation account to be a true account of the origin of life on planet Earth. This article reviews the New Testament evidence for their convictions about Gen 1–2.

Keywords: Creation, Gen 1–2, origin(s), teaching, hermeneutic, NT

1. Introduction

The key issue in the study of origins is hermeneutical. The more important and critical question for all parties, whether in science or in faith, is not “What are the data?” but “How should the data be interpreted?” This study deals with the biblical data and its interpretation for people of faith.

Too often, in the debate on origins, scholarly arguments revolve primarily around the issue of the account in Gen 1–2.¹ Much to-do is made over whether the Gen 1–2 account should be understood literally, metaphorically, or mythologically, even whether or not Gen 1 and 2 represent different accounts altogether. Much of this debate could be avoided simply by listening to and accepting the testimony of the balance of Scripture regarding the Gen 1–2 account. How is this account understood by those subsequent biblical writers who refer to it or utilize aspects of the account for theological purposes? Is not consistent subsequent use by the canonical writers indicative of how we should read and understand the account today? Certainly, their use and understanding should be instructive regarding how we ought to interpret the passage today.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore the use of Gen 1 and 2 by Jesus and the apostles in the NT in order to establish a biblical hermeneutic for approaching the passage. If Jesus and the apostles read and understood the passage in a literal, historical way, we should have serious reservations about trying to read and understand it differently today. If Scripture is its own best interpreter, then the NT use of Gen 1 and 2 should provide a hermeneutic for our reading of it today.²

This paper not only intends to establish a biblical hermeneutic for interpreting Gen 1–2, but it also hopes to provide further evidence for the biblical teaching on origins that may not be found in Gen 1–2. It would be foolish to assume that the biblical teaching regarding origins would be limited to Gen 1–2, so it should be fair to ask the question, how does the rest of Scripture expound the Gen 1–2 account? Or even, if the account in Gen 1–2 were lacking, what would we know about origins from the rest of Scripture?³ This paper does not intend to address the rest of the OT evidence, but we will consider what Jesus and the NT writers teach about origins that may

¹ Ron Minton, "Apostolic Witness to Genesis Creation and the Flood," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 347–48, points out that both old-earth creationists and those creationists who espouse Intelligent Design "have generally neglected the witness of the Apostles" in their discussions of the issue of origins.

² This principle applies to the whole disputed passage of Gen 1–11, but it is not possible to include more than Gen 1–2 in a study of this limited extent.

³ Lambert Dolphin, "New Testament Scriptures and the Creation," <http://www.ldolphin.org/ntcreat.html>, argues that we cannot formulate a Christian view of Creation if we consider only the first three chapters of Genesis.

interpret and supplement the Gen 1–2 account. External limitations prevent an exhaustive survey, but this study will attempt to be representative of the NT teaching.⁴

2. The Teaching of Jesus in the Gospels

Jesus claimed to be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In the same context He stated (v. 10), “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” In v. 24 He added, “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” It is inconceivable, then, that the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels would be anything other than the truth from God. His interpretation of the Genesis creation account must be considered the truth about the question of origins. He sets the standard for our understanding of how to interpret Gen 1–2.

In Matt 19:4–5 Jesus quotes from Gen 1:27 and 2:24, respectively, in response to a theological question asked of Him by the Pharisees regarding the legality of divorce. He introduces His quotations by asking, “Haven’t you read ... ?”⁵ showing that He was referring to the written Scriptures, namely, the Genesis account that they were familiar with. He further made explicit reference to the Creator (*ὁ κτίσας*) and to human origins when He asked, “Haven’t you read that the Creator from the beginning ‘made them male and female’?” In this way He demonstrated His belief in the literal account of the creation of Adam and Eve by God at the beginning of life on this earth as recorded in Gen 1:27, where “God created man in his own image” on the sixth day of creation. Jesus went on to quote further from Gen 2:24 the very words of the Creator Himself, indicated by the phrase, “and [the Creator] said,” followed by the dictum: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” Clearly, Jesus understood this account to be a literal, historical account and part of the same account of the human creation recorded in Gen 1:27. He drew from this passage a theological conclusion: “So they

⁴ The Faith and Science Council of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists lists forty-four NT passages as “unambiguous references to the act of creation or the creation story” (Faith and Science Council, “The Creation Bible,” 2014, <https://grisd.org/the-creation-bible.pdf>). We cannot survey all of these passages here. Only twenty-four of these passages, along with several other probable allusions to Gen 1–2, are discussed in this brief paper.

⁵ Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). The theological conclusion reflects a literal understanding of the Gen 1–2 account, including the formation of man, the creation of woman from his rib, and the union of the man and woman by God in the marriage relation. There is nothing in these words of Jesus that can possibly be construed as not taking seriously the literal, historical account of the creation of man and woman and their union in marriage by God at that time.

Mark 10:6–9 records the same account of Jesus' teaching using similar wording but clarifying in v. 6 that "at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'" The beginning is not just the beginning of Adam and Eve but the beginning of creation.⁶ In other words, God created Adam and Eve during the creation week as recorded in Gen 1–2, which describes the beginning of life on this planet. It was not millions of years after the creation of life-forms on earth that God chose to make Adam and Eve, but it was at the beginning of God's creative activity, during the initial creation week, after which Gen 2:1 declares, "Thus the heavens⁷ and the earth were completed in all their vast array."

In Mark 2:27 Jesus declared, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In this statement Jesus pointed out the sequence of the creation account in Gen 1–2, that man was made first, on the sixth day of creation, prior to the establishment of the Sabbath on the seventh day. Although the Genesis account does not explicitly state that the Sabbath was made for man, the inference can certainly be drawn from the fact that it was only after the creation of man that God established the Sabbath as a sacred weekly twenty-four-hour day of rest. It was not for God that the weekly rest was created, but for mankind,⁸ as the fourth commandment of the Decalogue makes explicit by forbidding mankind to work on the seventh day

⁶ Terry Mortensen, "Jesus' View of the Age of the Earth," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortensen and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 321–22.

⁷ The "heavens" here seem to refer not to the starry heavens of the universe but to the sky or atmospheric heavens that were created on the second day (Gen 1:6–8) as a part of preparing for life on earth beginning on the third day. Genesis 2:1 is a summary of what happened on the six days.

⁸ Ekkehardt Mueller, "Creation in the New Testament," <http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/documents.htm#science>, points out that by saying that the Sabbath was made for man, Jesus assumes that God created not only the Sabbath but also humanity; further, by saying that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, He is laying claim to being the Creator of humankind and of the Sabbath.

in honor of God's creative work. Thus, Jesus affirmed the Genesis account as a literal, historical account to be understood as a delineation of events that took place in a literal week of seven twenty-four-hour days ending with the Sabbath day as a day of rest for mankind in honor of the work completed during the previous six days.

In Mark 13:19 Jesus announced that there would be a time of "distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world." Jesus is clearly referring to the creation account in Gen 1, which begins, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." His reference tells only that "the beginning" is defined as "when God created the world," but we can see that Jesus takes the creation account for granted, that "the beginning" involved the seven days during which God created the world, according to Gen 1.

3. The Teaching of the Apostle John in His Gospel

John, in the prologue to his Gospel, informs us that Christ, the Word, was the active agent in the creation of all things: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3; cf. v. 10). This information is not given in the creation account of Gen 1–2, but it is in harmony with widespread NT teaching (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:2,10), as will be shown further below. In this regard, John contributes additional information to the Genesis creation account. John's manner of expression, however, confirms the Genesis record of how things came into being, since "the Word was God" (John 1:1), the One who created the heavens and the earth in Gen 1:1. John adds that nothing was made without Him. In other words, there is no room in John's theology for any creative activity apart from the personal creative activity of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who spoke all things into existence by His creative word.

4. The Testimony of the Book of Acts

In Acts 4:24, Luke records that when Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin after their arrest for preaching Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, the believers prayed to God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." Then, as evidence of God's power to accomplish what He had willed and prophesied, they cited a prophecy from Psalm 2 about the rejection of the Messiah and its fulfillment in the life of Jesus (vv. 25–28), and they asked God to stretch out His hand "to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders" through

the name of Jesus (v. 30). These believers were convinced of the sovereign power of God to create all things according to His will, as recorded in the creation account in Genesis and in subsequent authentication of that account by the OT prophets, and to accomplish whatever else His will should ordain. On that basis they could request His power to accomplish His continuing will to restore the creation damaged by sin through the powerful and holy name of Jesus, which had so recently restored the lame man at the temple gate (3:1–10; 4:22). They believed that the same word which spoke in the creation of the world and in OT prophecy was also powerful to recreate the lame, the sick, the deaf, and the blind in the time of the early Christian church. They did not doubt the literal truth of the Genesis account.

Most of the other major testimonies from the book of Acts come from the teaching of Paul, so it will be treated in the next section.⁹

5. The Teaching of the Apostle Paul

Paul is the major theologian of the NT, and most of the NT references to Gen 1–2 come from his teaching. We begin to survey Paul’s teaching from Luke’s record of his preaching in the book of Acts. When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra on their first missionary journey, Paul healed a lame man, and the crowd began to acclaim Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus, respectively (Acts 14:8–12). When the priest of Zeus prepared to offer sacrifices to them, Paul and Barnabas began appealing to the crowd to stop, since they were only men. Paul, “the chief speaker” (v. 12), argued that they were just bringing them good news, telling them “to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them” (v. 15). He went on to justify this statement by saying that God “has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (v. 17). Paul argued that God’s gifts of rain, crops, food, and joy are testimony to the fact that He is a living God and is the Creator of all things. While the expression, “God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them,” an almost exact parallel to Acts 4:24, may be closer to the actual text of Exod 20:11¹⁰

⁹ There are other passages throughout the NT, like Acts 7:50, that refer to God’s creative work without any apparent allusion to Gen 1–2. These are not considered in this study.

¹⁰ Minton, “Apostolic Witness,” 350, states that the wording in Acts 14:15 “is identical to the wording of the Greek translation of Exodus 20:11 found in the Septuagint....

than to the Gen 1–2 account, Exod 20:11 is still a clear attempt to summarize the main points of the Gen 1 account. So, everything ultimately goes back to an understanding of the Genesis account which takes it at face value as the way things happened in the creation of the world. There is no attempt to explain it in any other way.

In Acts 17, Paul addressed the Greek philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens. He referred to “the Lord of heaven and earth” as “the God who made the world and everything in it” (v. 24), equating “the world and everything in it” with “heaven and earth.”¹¹ In v. 25 Paul described God as the One who “himself gives all men life and breath and everything else,” probably an allusion to Gen 2:7, in which “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Then Paul announced that “from one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth” (v. 26), referring to the creation of Adam in Gen 1–2 and to the command to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” Although few details are given from the creation account, it is clear that Paul clearly understood the creation account as a factual record of the origin of mankind from one man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, as they became the progenitors of the human race, as recorded in Gen 1 and 2.

5.1 The Epistle to the Romans

In Paul’s epistles, there are many quotations from and allusions to the Genesis account of origins. In Rom 1:20 Paul alludes to the creation account in an important passage discussing the rejection of God’s revealed truth about Himself. He states first that God’s wrath “is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them” (vv. 18–19). Then he explains how God has made it plain to them: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood by what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” (vv. 20–21). Paul makes clear that it is a rejection of

That exact wording is used nowhere else in the OT. So, Paul was clearly quoting from that verse.”

¹¹ Minton, “Apostolic Witness,” 351.

what may be known about God's power and deity through a study of His created works that leads to the condemnation of men who would rather suppress the truth than honor the Creator. God has revealed Himself in His creation sufficiently that there is no excuse for anyone to be condemned to suffer the wrath of God who is willing to learn the truth He has revealed.¹²

Paul's reference to "the creation of the world" in Rom 1:20 is to the Genesis account, not to some other account of creation.¹³ He accepts the creation account as factual and does not permit any deviance from what God has therein revealed about Himself. He distinguishes clearly in vv. 23 and 25 between "the glory of the immortal God," "the Creator," and "mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles," the "created things." And he contrasts the sexual behavior of those "fools" who have rejected their knowledge of God along with the original plan for sexuality as revealed in Gen 2. He says, "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (v. 24). Further, "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (vv. 26–27). In other words, Paul presents a clear contrast between this perverted form of sexuality based on lust and the Gen 1–2 account of God's plan for human sexuality based on a loving male-female union that results in progeny (1:28). One would be hard pressed not to see in these teachings a firm support for the Genesis account of origins and a stern warning against the dangers of not taking the Genesis account seriously.

In Rom 5:12–19 Paul seems to allude to the story of the Fall in Gen 3, but it could be that he is alluding also to Gen 2:17, where God first warned man of the consequence of disobedience: "But you must not eat from the tree of

¹² Eugene F. Klug, "Creation in the New Testament" (paper presented at the Bible Science Seminar, Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, IL, 10 June 1969), available from Concordia Theological Seminary Library on p. 3, observes that Paul here "seems to indicate that there is some cogency to" the argument and thrusts of the rational proofs for God's existence, though our knowledge of God and His creation is finally dependent on His special revelation, Scripture.

¹³ Minton, "Apostolic Witness," 352, points out that Paul's wording here—"since the creation of the world"—"indicates that man is as old as the creation itself, and that people have been able to observe God's witness to himself in creation right from the very beginning of creation."

the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” This verse is an important link between the story of creation in Gen 1–2 and the story of the Fall in Gen 3. Paul treats the entire account as a factual record of the origin of sin and death on this earth. In Rom 5 he repeats seven times the fact that sin with its consequences came into the world through one man, namely, Adam (v. 14), by his trespass¹⁴ of God’s explicit command, given in Gen 2:17. That one act of disobedience left the world under the pale of sin, condemnation, and death, requiring God’s intervention with the plan of salvation. Apart from the Genesis account of creation and the Fall, the record of God’s acts in history as revealed in the rest of Scripture would not be comprehensible. It is Gen 1–3, taken literally as an accurate record of real events, that gives meaning to everything else since that time until the final consummation, when the heavens and the earth will be re-created and sin and its consequences will be eradicated forever—in other words, to the essential gospel message.¹⁵ In Rom 5 Paul attempts to explain the plan of salvation in light of the events of Gen 1–3: “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (v. 17).

In Rom 7:2 Paul states that “by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.” The same principle is mentioned again in 1 Cor 7:29, but without reference to the law. When Paul refers to “the law of marriage,” or, literally, “the law of her husband,” he is most likely referring to the command of God in Gen 2:24 that a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and “they will become one flesh.”¹⁶ Jesus interpreted this statement to mean that the union was permanent: “So they are no

¹⁴ Greek *παράπτωμα*, “a falling aside, stepping aside, deviation, transgression, or violation,” whether intentional or unintentional (vv. 16, 17, 18, 20). Paul also refers to Adam’s sin in v. 14 as *παράβασις* (“going aside, transgression, deviation,” somewhat synonymous with *παράπτωμα*) and in v. 19 as *παρακοή* (“turning aside the hearing, refusal to heed, disobedience, disloyalty”).

¹⁵ Russell Grigg, “What Does the New Testament Say about Creation? Special Creation, Theistic Evolution, or Progressive Creation?” <http://creation.com/new-testament-creation>, states: “This Gospel has its foundation in the literal, historical truth of Genesis. Christians who tamper with this foundation undermine and sabotage the very Gospel itself.”

¹⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 240, says, “The law assumed to be known is surely the written law of the Old Testament, particularly the Mosaic law.”

longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:6). The Mosaic law contains no clearer statement regarding the permanence of the marriage relationship, so it is reasonable to assume that Paul is citing the original command of God rather than a later Mosaic command which is not as clear. This seems to be supported by Paul's statement in 1 Cor 7:10–11, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.... And a husband must not divorce his wife." By ascribing this command to the Lord, Paul may be alluding to the Gen 2 command. Again, we see that Paul takes the Gen 2 account of the creation of Adam and Eve and their marriage as an authentic account that constitutes "the law" for marriage.

5.2 The Corinthian Correspondence

In 1 Cor 8:6, as pointed out above, Paul credits Jesus with the creation of all things, a concept not found explicitly in the Genesis account but not out of harmony with it either. In the first part of v. 6, God the Father is the one "from whom all things came," while in the second half of the same verse, the Lord Jesus Christ is the one "through whom all things came and through whom we live."¹⁷ In other words, both the Father and the Son were involved in the creation, but with slightly different roles (cf. John 1:3; Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:2; Rev 4:11). There is a hint to this effect in Gen 1:26, where God said, using the first-person plural, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." Paul will elaborate more fully elsewhere on Christ's special role in creation.

In 1 Cor 11:7–9 Paul cites the facts of creation as a theological rationale¹⁸ for his argument regarding head coverings in worship, which he introduced in v. 3 with the discussion of role relationships within the Godhead, between the Godhead and humans, and within humanity. He then turns to his discussion of women covering the head as a sign of submission in the presence of God and men. His rationale reads, "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory

¹⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 268, avers, "In Greek, the words *all things* signify the totality of things without any exclusion; God has made everything in all his creation.... Thus, God the Father has created all things through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ."

¹⁸ Kistemaker, *Exposition of First Epistle*, 373, states that "the first word, the causal conjunction *for*, connotes that the entire present passage is an explanation of the preceding verses (vv. 5–6) that alludes to the creation account (Gen 1:26–27; 2:18–24)."

of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” Without entering into the issue of gender roles, one can see that Paul takes the creation story of Gen 1–2 literally. His reference to man being the image and glory of God comes no doubt from Gen 1:26–27, where God decides to make man in Their own image, which would imply that man will also reveal some of God’s glory. Although Gen 1:27 includes both male and female as being made in the image of God, Paul also draws on Gen 2 to point out that it was the man that was first formed in God’s image. Because Adam was alone, without a suitable mate (2:20), God declared in 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” So, God made the woman for man, from a rib from Adam’s side (2:22). Thus, the woman was made for the man, to be a helper for him, for his glory, as Paul expresses it. Paul takes the Gen 1–2 account seriously and draws a theological argument from it that became a rationale for contemporary practice in the church (1 Cor 11:16) as it related to the principle of role relationships.

In 1 Cor 15:45–47 Paul again refers explicitly to the creation of Adam, citing the Genesis account with the words, “So it is written....” Then he paraphrases from Gen 2:7: “The first man Adam became a living being.” In v. 47 he adds, also from Gen 2:7, “The first man was of the dust of the earth.” There can be little question but that Paul accepted the Genesis account of creation as an authentic account of the origin of man, and he uses it here to make a theological point about the contrast between the natural, earthly body, which goes into the grave as dust, or minerals from the soil, and the spiritual, heavenly body, which comes forth changed, immortal and incorruptible, at the resurrection (1 Cor 15:35, 42–44, 48–53).

In 1 Cor 6:16 and Eph 5:31 Paul, like Jesus, quotes from Gen 2:24, God’s statement of the unity that is to exist in marriage between man and woman.¹⁹ In 1 Cor 6:16 the context is sexual immorality. Paul says that the Christian should maintain his or her body sexually pure. A Christian should not be joined with a prostitute because the two, when joined, become one flesh, as the Scripture says, and the Christian belongs to Christ and should be one with Christ in spirit (v. 17), not one in flesh with a prostitute. In Eph 5:31 the context is the way in which the love relationship bet-

¹⁹ Carl P. Cosaert, Hyunsok John Doh, and Rubén Muñoz-Larrondo, “First Corinthians,” *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light. Depth. Truth. New Testament*, ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), 1627, assert that Paul “connected the present life with the creative intention of God by referring to the marriage of Adam and Eve.”

ween a husband and wife should model the relationship between Christ and His church, represented as His body. Paul quotes Gen 2:24 in this context to show the closeness of the relationship that should exist between Christ and the church: they should be united in love. Paul's use of Gen 2:24 in both passages suggests that he takes the text literally and uses it to teach a theological truth. Were there not a literal reality behind the Gen 2 account, Paul would not be able to draw upon the account as a concrete historical basis for teaching a profound lesson for practical application by the church. His argument in v. 28, "He who loves his wife loves himself," is shown to be valid because God declared that when a man leaves his father and his mother and joins himself to his wife, the two become one flesh. And "no one ever hated his own flesh" (v. 29 ESV, NASB, NKJV), Paul hastens to add.

In 2 Cor 4:6, Paul paraphrases Gen 1:3, adding that God spoke the words, "'Let light shine out of darkness.'" He cites this incident as a parallel to the event of the coming of Jesus as a light into the world: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."²⁰ In this statement Paul indicates his belief in the Gen 1 account of a fiat creation, in which God spoke and things came into existence at His command. That reality is just as real as the work that He accomplishes in our hearts in the sending of His Son as a light into the world.

5.3 The Prison Epistles

Paul's paean to the Son of God in Col 1:15–20 is another source of NT teaching about the active involvement of Jesus Christ in the creation of the universe. Paul first affirms that "He is the image of the invisible God,"²¹ a reminder that God said in Gen 1:26, "Let us make man in our image," including more than one divine Person in what constitutes the Creator God. Secondly, Paul states that the Son is "the firstborn over all creation," a statement of rank, according to v. 18, where "firstborn" is used again to show Christ's supremacy over all things. As "firstborn over all creation," the Son

²⁰ Cf. John 1:9, 14: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.... We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

²¹ This seems to be parallel to the statements in 1:19 and 2:9, respectively, that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" and that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

of God is implied to be the Creator, which is made explicit in the very next verse. Continuing with the creation theme in vv. 16–17, Paul announces regarding the Son, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Thus, he agrees with John that “through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). And he affirms the creation of heaven and earth by One who is not only the very image of God but who is the Word of God and who is God (John 1:1).

Another reference to mankind’s creation is found in Col 3:10, where Paul speaks of putting on the new person, which is being renewed in knowledge “in the image of its Creator.” Here Paul clearly alludes to Gen 1:26–27, where the Godhead made the man and the woman in Their own image. Because of sin, this image had been marred and almost totally eclipsed, but God wants to renew mankind in His own image, if we will cooperate with Him. Thus, this text is a reminder not only of the original creation but also of the Fall and the promise of restoration through the gospel. Paul clearly takes seriously the history of creation and the Fall.

5.4 The Pastoral Epistles

Paul’s teaching in 1 Tim 2:13–14 parallels his teaching in 1 Cor 11 in part but goes beyond it. In arguing for the proper role of women in terms of teaching authority in the church (vv. 11–12), he appeals to the order of creation as given in Gen 2 as one rationale: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (v. 13).²² Then he adds a second rationale in v. 14: “And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” While the latter is from Gen 3 rather than Gen 1–2, it supports Paul’s literal, factual interpretation of the Genesis accounts. He is able to develop a theological argument from the detailed facts of biblical history as precedent for how believers in the church should relate to one another in their own first-century situation. This would not be feasible if the biblical account were not to be taken seriously as a real record of how things were from the beginning. Clearly, Paul believed that the accounts were true and constituted real precedent for later Christian teaching and conduct.

²² Félix Cortez, “1 Timothy,” *Andrews Bible Commentary: Light. Depth. Truth. New Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), 1791, states, “It is important to note that Paul is talking about what happened not after the fall but before.”

5.5 The Epistle to the Hebrews

There are at least three places in the Epistle to the Hebrews²³ where Gen 1–2 is either paraphrased or alluded to. The first is Heb 1:2,10. Verse 2 by itself is not a clear allusion, though it does identify the Son of God as the One through whom God made the universe, in agreement with John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; and Col 1:16. However, along with v. 10, it does seem that Paul had the Genesis creation account in mind. Verse 10 quotes God as saying of the Son, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” This is an almost exact quotation from Ps 102:25–27, but the psalmist is speaking there. By placing the saying in the mouth of God, Paul is making the psalmist God’s mouthpiece to express His thoughts. The allusion is ultimately to the Genesis 1–2 creation account, in which the Son of God was the LORD God (*Yahweh Elohim*) who made the heavens and the earth. Hebrews 1:3 describes the Son as “the exact representation” of God’s being or essence. Further, not only did He create the heavens and the earth, but 1:3 also says that He sustains all things by His powerful word. It seems apparent that, while crediting the creation to the Son of God as the active agent in the creation, Paul takes the creation story at face value, with no hint that it should be understood in any way other than as a literal, historical account.

The next place where Paul points to the Genesis creation account is Heb 4:4, which paraphrases Gen 2:2 after introducing it as a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures in defense of the statement in v. 3 that God’s “work has been finished since the creation of the world”: “For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’” Paul here reveals that he accepts the testimony of Scripture regarding the creation week, in which God created everything in six days and rested on the seventh day from all His work. He does not teach an ongoing, progressive creation but a creation that was complete, a finished work, after which God rested on the seventh day from all His work. The mention of the seventh day implies the six days of work which preceded it and from which He rested. There is nothing to suggest that Paul

²³ Although there is much discussion regarding the authorship of Hebrews, it was generally considered to be Pauline until modern criticism questioned its authorship because it is not internally attested and the style and content is different from the other Pauline epistles. Some have included it with the General Epistles, but increasingly evidence is being adduced for its Pauline authorship. It was always included as a part of the Pauline Corpus. I am treating it as such here, assuming Pauline authorship.

understood anything other than a literal week of six consecutive twenty-four-hour days just like the seventh.²⁴ In fact, he makes the point quite clear when he states subsequently in v. 7, “Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today,” in which God’s people were to enter into His rest by resting from their own work “as God did from his” (v. 10).²⁵ By saying that “God again set a certain day,” namely, “Today,” he invalidates any argument in favor of a day as a long era of time. “A certain day” cannot be a long age. “Again” signifies that the “certain day” is just like the seventh day of the creation week when God rested. “Today” is a 24-hour period in which there is an opportunity to make a decision to rest in God’s finished work for our salvation.²⁶

The third passage in Hebrews is very specific in its content. In 11:3 we are told, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” Here the author is clear not only that creation took place by God’s fiat, and that God was not dependent on pre-existing matter in the creation, but also that faith is a necessary condition for understanding creation, that we will never be able to prove scientifically how the universe came into existence.²⁷ Although there is no quotation or citation of the Gen 1–2 account, the allusion is obvious, parallel to the psalmist’s declaration, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.... For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps 33:6, 9). These Scriptures allude to the Gen 1 account, in which God repeatedly declared, “Let there be ...,” “Let the water ...,” “Let the land ...,” and so forth,

²⁴ Minton, “Apostolic Witness,” 359, noting that the Greek word for “rested” is *aorist*, concludes that God’s “act of creating for six days and resting one are not ongoing; the seventh day ‘rest’ was an historical event that lasted one 24-hour day like the other six.”

²⁵ This is another allusion to Gen 2:2. It is not a reference to another day of the week for rest and worship but to a day of opportunity (“Today”) in which to come to belief (3:12–13, 19; 4:2–3). Belief in God’s plan for our salvation through Christ permits us to rest from our own work and trust in His completed work for us, just as God rested from His completed work.

²⁶ Donald A. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews: An Exposition*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 74, observes, “Every day is a new ‘today’ offering the prospect of God’s rest.”

²⁷ Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews*, 144, points out that “the word” (NIV: “command”) of God here is from *rhēma*, signifying the spoken word, rather than from *logos*. “It was when God spoke, and not from anything that could be seen, that the creation came into existence (Gn 1:3; cf. Ps 33:6, 9).”

and what God commanded took place. The author of Hebrews takes the Genesis account very seriously and expects his readers to take it very seriously, for “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6). The same faith that accepts the reality of God’s existence without scientific proof and the reality of coming judgment and reward without proof is required to believe without scientific proof that God spoke the universe into existence, creating matter out of His pure energy by divine fiat, and with immediate results. Any other theory of origins is excluded by the author of Hebrews, no matter what scientists and philosophers may expound regarding their theories of origins.²⁸

6. Creation in the General Epistles

6.1 James

James 3:9 alludes to Gen 1:26–27, which records God’s decision to make man in His own image. James tells his readers that they use their tongues both to praise God and to “curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness.” James seems to believe that mankind was a unique creation, not descended from lower life forms but purposefully created in the image of God Himself. He believes that the creation story in Gen 1–2 describes a real, historical event, and that God’s purposeful creation of man in His image gives him a dignity which forbids being cursed.

6.2 Peter

Peter’s account of origins is perhaps one of the clearest in the NT. In 2 Pet 3, he directly ties the theory of origins to the prophecies concerning how the world will end. He begins by calling attention to the teaching of the OT prophets and of Jesus: “I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles” (v. 2). Then he begins to explain the skepticism that will prevail in the last days regarding the promise of Christ’s return: “First

²⁸ R. T. France, “Hebrews,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13: *Hebrews–Revelation*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 150, notes, “It is only ‘by faith’ that we, guided by the scriptural account, are able to see behind the scenes, to find in the visible world a testimony to ‘what we do not see,’ the God who made it. The point is important. When all the philosophical arguments have been rehearsed and refined, it remains in the end a matter of faith.”

of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’” (vv. 3–4). Next, he points out the crux of the matter: “But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed” (vv. 5–6). Finally, he draws a parallel regarding the final judgment, which they also scoff about: “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (v. 7).

Several things in this passage are noteworthy. First, those who scoff at the idea of the coming judgment are described as ungodly or impious (*ἀσεβῶν*) men who are following their own evil desires and so bring judgment upon themselves. Second, they adopt the theory of uniformitarianism,²⁹ essentially an application of the historical-critical principles of correlation and analogy, saying that there can be no coming cataclysmic judgment or new creation because there has been no precedent for it in history, since “everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (v. 4).³⁰ Third, this conclusion, Peter says, is a direct result of the fact that this truth willfully (*θέλοντας*) escapes their notice or is lost sight of by them (*λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοῦς*) that “long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water” (v. 5), and further, that “by these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed” (v. 6). The desire to deny or ignore these two great facts of history, which demonstrate God’s creative and juridical intervention in the past, results in forming an unbiblical theory that God has not intervened in the past and will not intervene in the future. This is done out of willful rejection of God’s revelation because of their own evil desires not to be accountable to God. Fourth, Peter affirms that the same powerful word that created the heavens and the earth and brought a flood of water to deluge and destroy the earth is keeping the

²⁹ Cf. Minton, “Apostolic Witness,” 365.

³⁰ This does not imply that they believe in the Genesis creation account, but that since the origin of the universe (perhaps in a “big bang”) there has been no cataclysmic destruction of the sort prophesied to occur at the “Day of the Lord” (cf. v. 10). The attempt is to deny personal accountability, as J. Daryl Charles, “2 Peter,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13: *Hebrews–Revelation*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 406, asserts. He adds, “Peter’s opponents, in essence, are denying any intervention in human affairs.”

present heavens and earth reserved for fire on the day of judgment and destruction of these ungodly persons. God's actions in the past provide the evidence that His promises of future judgment are also certain.³¹ Denying God's actions in the past may offer some assurance to those who are willingly ignorant that God will not call them to account in a future judgment, but this does not invalidate the facts of history or of prophecy.

Peter goes on to assure the reader that although God's promises may seem to have been delayed because of his desire to save as many as possible (2 Pet 3:8–9),³² yet "the day of the Lord will come like a thief" (v. 10)—unexpectedly, for those who are not watching and waiting (Matt 24:42–51)—and "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Pet 3:10). In other words, Peter affirms the need for faith in the reality of God's actions in the past as described in the Genesis accounts of creation (Gen 1–2) and the universal flood (Gen 6–9) in order to maintain faith in His promise to act in the future to put an end to sin and sinners and the old creation and to undertake a new creation. Peter goes on to describe this new creation in v. 13: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

It would be impossible to understand Peter in any other way than to affirm the literal, historical interpretation of these Genesis accounts as a necessary precedent for believing God's promises to intervene in earth's history in the future. One cannot merely reinterpret the Genesis record of creation without considering the warnings of Peter that those who attempt to do so are ungodly people following their own evil desires to scoff at the idea of coming judgment, by proposing a theory of uniformitarianism that

³¹ Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood," in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 88–89, argues that both the historicity of the flood as well as its universality are assumed in Peter's typology that points to an imminent end-time worldwide judgment by fire.

³² Against those who would use 2 Pet 3:8 to propose a day-age theory, Minton, "Apostolic Witness," 366, reminds the reader that close attention to the text reveals that it cannot be used in such a way. Rather than establishing a principle for interpreting the length of days at creation, Peter "is saying something about the timeless nature of God and that He does not work in the world according to our timetable of when events should occur." See also Dave Bush, "Non-Literal Days in Genesis 1:1–2:4: Exegetical or Hypothetical?" in *Creation According to the Scriptures: A Presuppositional Defense of Literal, Six-Day Creation*, ed. P. Andrew Sandlin (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon Foundation, 2001), 94–95.

denies God's dramatic actions in history in order to assure themselves that they will not be held accountable by God in a future judgment. While this scenario may apply more to the proponents of natural or materialistic evolution than to those who argue for theistic evolution or progressive creation, the reinterpretation of Gen 1–11 as either mythological or theological metaphor leaves the interpreter without the protection from such conclusions that a literal, historical reading offers. Peter solemnly warns the believer against interpreting the Genesis account in any way other than an accurate account of literal, historical events in the past. His conclusion in 3:17 is noteworthy: "Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position."

7. The Teaching of the Book of Revelation

In Rev 4:11 John describes a hymn of praise to God who sits on the throne, with the twenty-four elders laying their crowns before Him and saying, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." This hymn is not explicit about the manner of creation other than to say that the creation and existence of all things is attributable to the will of God. However, the implication is that the creation took place as the Bible consistently testifies, and it everywhere affirms the veracity of the Genesis account. In 10:6 the mighty Angel, who has the physical characteristics of the glorified Christ similar to those described in 1:14–16, "swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it." The One "who lives for ever and ever," according to 4:9–10, is God the Father, the One who sits on the throne. In 15:7 it is God from whom wrath issues from the heavenly temple. God the Father, who sits on the throne, is portrayed in Revelation as the One who created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. A similar reference in 14:7 calls for all who live on the earth to "Fear God and give him glory," and to "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." The language in both 10:6 and 14:7 is strongly allusive of the Fourth Commandment in Exod 20:11,³³

³³ Regarding the implications of the allusion in Rev 14:7 to Exod 20:11, see John T. Baldwin, "Revelation 14:7: An Angel's Worldview," in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood Is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 19–33.

which in turn comes, as noted above, from the Gen 1–2 account. These texts serve as evidence that the last book of the NT contains the same teaching regarding the creation as that found in Genesis and throughout the Scriptures, including the teaching of Jesus and the other apostles.

There is a very significant warning in Rev 22:19 that “if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” The tree of life that is “described in this book” is the one mentioned in 2:7 and 22:2, 14, but it is also an allusion to the one in Gen 2 and 3, and the threat of loss of the share in the tree of life is a clear reminder of the original loss by Adam and Eve because of their fall into sin (3:22) after having first been given access to eat of it in 2:9, 16. In Rev 2:7 and 22:14 the overcomer is promised the right to eat once again from this tree of life, which will be restored to the new earth as described in 22:2. The dire warning against adding to or subtracting from the words of God is parallel to similar warnings in Deut 4:2 and 12:32. Those who think to alter the straightforward meaning of the words of God, whether in the book of Revelation, in the Pentateuch, or anywhere else in Scripture, will incur the curse of God and will lose the right to the tree of life and to entering into the holy city of God in the new earth. It behooves the reader to take these warnings very seriously.

8. Conclusion

We have surveyed most of the major NT passages that address the matter of origins or that allude to Gen 1–2, and we have seen that there is a consistent understanding of the Genesis account of creation as a literal, real, historical account of how things came into existence. There is no hint or suggestion that either Jesus or the apostles, or even any NT believers, interpreted the Genesis account metaphorically, allegorically, mythologically, or in any way other than literally. If this is how Jesus and the apostles understood the Genesis account, it would be theologically hazardous to attempt to understand it in any other way. It would require that the teaching of Jesus and the apostles be rejected as theologically invalid. One cannot reinterpret the Gen 1–2 account of origins without considering the NT teaching reviewed above.

We have also seen that the NT adds something to the Genesis account, namely, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, functioned as the active agent in creation. Whereas God the Father was the authority who ordained the creation, He accomplished it through the active power of Christ, the divine

Word, who, according to Ps 33:9, “spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” The creation of the heavens and the earth are consistently understood by the Bible writers to be a fiat creation, ordered by the will of God and effected by His divine power in six literal days followed by a seventh day set apart as a weekly day of rest as a memorial of God’s creative work in the six preceding days.

One other conclusion derives more from what is not said than from what is said. There is no evidence for any discrimination between the account of Gen 1 and that of Gen 2. While many scholars attempt to draw distinctions between the accounts in Gen 1 and 2, Jesus and the NT writers did not seem to recognize any such distinctions. They show no awareness that there were two separate creation accounts or any conflicts between the Gen 1 account and that in Gen 2. They do not see one account as more authentic than the other or both accounts as merely traditional material with no revelational authority. They believe, as Paul states in 2 Tim 3:16–17, that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”